

**The 'coming out' process for lesbians: a comparison of
lesbian and heterosexual perspectives.**

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ABSTRACT

'Coming out', defined in terms of identifying self as lesbian, as well as disclosure of this information to others, is seen as an issue only within a heterosexist society. Heterosexism serves to reflect and create social representations, containing inflexible conceptualizations of gender, and social identities, incorporating power inequalities.

The study was based on content analysis of individual semi-structured depth interviews, with forty lesbians on perceptions and experiences of coming out; thirty heterosexual women and men on attitudes to homosexuality; and twenty women on communication with family and friends. Lesbian and heterosexual interviews were supplemented with stereotype tasks, including the Bem Sex-Role Inventory and the Personal Attributes Questionnaire.

Coming out to self was shown to be based upon strong emotional feelings directed towards women, together with awareness of lesbianism as an option, and a level of emotional acceptance of homosexuality. Coming out to family, heterosexual friends etc. involved risks and benefits.

The study revealed a social context reflecting lesbian 'invisibility', heterosexuals' lack of interest and minimal contact with lesbians; perceptions of threat and abnormality; and a masculine, abnormal, aggressive, lesbian stereotype. Heterosexual subjects defined 'lesbian' in terms of sex only, and perceived lesbians as masculine. Lesbian subjects perceived lesbianism as more than sex, and lesbians as androgynous. Communication issues most similar to coming out concerned identity, relationships, or a different way of life; threat, loss or stigma; or reactions of others. Case studies analysed within Breakwell's threatened identity model suggested extension of the theory to include additional identity principles of authenticity/integrity and affiliation.

It is argued that changes, at the level of social representations, relating to gender conceptualization, and the consequent power inequalities, are necessary for aiding the coming out process.

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CHAPTER ONE

CONTEXT AND ISSUES

"... when I realized that I was sexually attracted to this particular woman, ..I felt absolutely terrible. I felt quite suicidal. I felt like walking into the sea...I felt panic stricken ...and I felt quite excited and relieved in a way"

(S25, Lesbian Group)

"...the concept of liking someone of the same sex in that respect - in a sexual respect - is very foreign to me ... it's a foreign land. I mean it's more foreign than going to a country you know nothing about..."

(S3, Heterosexual Group)

Lesbians exist, not in isolation, but within a predominantly heterosexual society. Heterosexual relations may be seen as a fundamental aspect of the structuring of societal notions of gender. Within our society, these notions of gender tend to reflect quite rigid division and power inequalities between women and men. 'Coming out', both in terms of coming to identify oneself as lesbian, and in terms of telling others about oneself, takes place within this social context.

Consideration of the heterosexual perspective of homosexuality in addition to lesbians' perceptions and experiences of coming out, is thought to be essential for understanding the coming out process. Heterosexuals' attitudes are a fundamental influence in shaping the social context within which coming out occurs.

This study is an attempt to investigate both 'coming out to self' and 'coming out to others'. Becoming aware of oneself as lesbian is a profound experience for the individual. Analysis of 'coming out', however, requires not just investigation at the individual, intra-psychic or interpersonal levels, but also an understanding of the issue at intergroup and societal levels.

A considerable amount of anecdotal material on coming out has been published in recent years. Research, however, has tended to focus on gay men rather than

lesbians, and has tended to be American rather than British. This study aims to provide a systematic investigation of the coming out process for lesbians, by a lesbian, from a social psychological perspective.

After looking at definitions, some issues and questions relating to coming out will be raised. This is followed by a summary of the background literature and theory for this study; and a brief look at methodological issues. Finally, in this chapter, an outline of the study is presented.

1.1 DEFINITIONS

Coming out

Coming out has been defined in a variety of ways in previous studies. The working definition used in this study covers both 'coming out to self' - becoming aware of oneself as lesbian; and 'coming out to others' - disclosing this information to other people.

Lesbian

The term 'lesbian' has its origins in the association of the Greek island of Lesbos with the poet Sappho (circa 600 B.C.). References to the use of the term 'lesbian' (in the sense of referring to female homosexuality) provided by the Oxford English Dictionary (1989) date back to the last part of the nineteenth century. The dictionary definition of lesbian refers to women's homosexuality: "Of a woman: homosexual, characterized by a sexual interest in other women. Also, of or pertaining to homosexual relations between women" (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989, vol.VIII, p.839).

This type of definition, focused only upon sex, provides a very limited view of lesbianism. Definition of the term 'lesbian' actually requires a broader, more complex basis, incorporating emotional, social and political aspects: issues that are to be developed and discussed within this study. For practical purposes,

lesbian women participating in the study were simply women who defined themselves as lesbian or gay.

Homosexual

The Oxford English Dictionary (1989) defines 'homosexual' in terms of having a sexual propensity for one's own sex, and gives references to usage of the word dating back to the 1890's by, for example, Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis.

Some people have used the term 'homosexual' for men only. However, 'homo-' is derived from the Greek *homos* meaning 'same', as opposed to 'hetero-', from the Greek *heteros* referring to 'other' (cf Collins English Dictionary, 1979). Within the text here, 'homosexual' is used to refer to both men and women, unless otherwise specified.

Gay

Popular use of the term 'gay' relating to homosexuality is relatively recent. It was associated in particular with Gay Liberation, a movement aimed at freeing homosexuals from discrimination, originating in the United States in the 1960's. The Gay Liberation Front began meeting in this country in London - at the London School of Economics - in 1970 (Weeks, 1977). As with the term 'homosexual', some use 'gay' to refer only to men. In this study, it is used to refer to both women and men, unless gender is specified.

Although differences in origin and detailed meaning of the terms homosexual, gay and lesbian are recognized by the author, the terms are used synonymously within this study when describing lesbians, unless otherwise specified. Where the terms gay and homosexual have been used in previous studies, or by subjects in this study, indication is given if usage was limited to males where possible.

1.2 THE COMING OUT PROCESS FOR LESBIANS: SOME ISSUES AND QUESTIONS

Why is coming out of importance?

Previous studies (e.g. Sophie, 1985; de Monteflores & Schultz, 1978; Moses, 1978; Brooks, 1981), anecdotal material on coming out (e.g. Stewart-Park & Cassidy, 1977; Stanley & Wolfe, 1980; Penelope & Wolfe, 1989; Holmes, 1988; Hall Carpenter Archives, Lesbian Oral History Group, 1989), and pilot study data (Markowe, 1985) have indicated that becoming aware of oneself as lesbian and/or disclosing this information to others often involves a complexity of dilemmas and issues to be resolved. It is rarely a simple, straightforward process. It may involve dealing with a variety of 'hazards' (Baetz, 1984), and may affect much of a gay person's everyday life (Durell, 1983). Reflecting the possibly problematic nature of coming out are studies that have found considerable levels of reported suicide attempts or suicidal thoughts (e.g. Trenchard & Warren, 1984). At the individual and interpersonal levels, issues of coming out profoundly affect women's perceptions of self and their relations with significant others. An understanding of the impact of coming to identify self as lesbian, and its effect on interpersonal relations would seem important in order to identify potential problems, to generate ideas for the reduction of any such difficulties, and hence, to facilitate the process of coming out. Taking a broader perspective, it will be argued that intra-psychic and interpersonal aspects of coming out may only be understood within the context of intergroup relations and the social/cultural context. From such a perspective, the issues of coming out may be seen as associated with, and as reflecting, fundamental aspects of notions of gender; relations between women and men in our society; and power inequalities.

What happens during the coming out process?

An initial look at the background literature and pilot work on the coming out process for lesbians has suggested that it is a complex process, that may broadly be divided into coming out to self, and coming out to others. Coming out to self, coming to define self as lesbian, has been considered in previous studies mainly from the perspective of stage theories (e.g. Cass, 1979; Sophie, 1985; Chapman & Brannock, 1987). The pilot study material raised questions of the appropriateness of viewing coming out to self in terms of linear stages. Positive and negative forces that may affect coming out to self and others were suggested.

When a woman has begun to think of herself as (possibly) lesbian, she may be in the position of considering making contact with other lesbians for the first time. She may also consider telling family and/or friends about herself. Decisions relating to coming out to others take place within the social context of a predominantly heterosexual society.

Importance of considering lesbian and heterosexual perspectives

Coming out needs to be interpreted at the societal and intergroup levels within the framework of the relationship of lesbianism to heterosexuality in our society; and at the interpersonal level, by examining relations between lesbians and heterosexual people. It is thought that coming out as lesbian is only an issue within the context of a heterosexist society: a society that is predominantly heterosexual and in which there is oppression of homosexuality. In the same way as it may be suggested that an investigation of women needs to be understood within the broader context of gender relations (e.g. Hollway, 1989), it is suggested here that issues of coming out as lesbian may only be meaningfully interpreted within the context of the relationship

between lesbianism and heterosexuality in our society. Thus, coming out needs to be investigated taking into account this social context, and examining the heterosexual perspective as well as that of lesbians.

Gender issues

Homosexuality and heterosexuality need to be viewed from the perspective of societal notions of gender. These reflect fundamental inequalities between women and men in our society. Early conceptualization of gender in terms of sex role may be seen as restricted. Later studies however have illuminated how gender may structure our thinking through cognitive schema (Bem, 1981a); and how gender may more usefully be thought of in terms of negotiable boundaries (Condor, 1987). Further, there may be different social representations of gender (Duveen & Lloyd, 1987). Rigid notions of gender division may be seen as serving to maintain the predominance of heterosexuality within our society. Coming out as lesbian needs to be understood within the context of gender inequalities; the function of heterosexuality in maintaining gender division; and differing conceptualizations of gender.

Comparison of coming out with other minority group/life experiences

Taking a broad perspective of the coming out process, there are other minority group experiences, or life experiences, that have some similarities with the coming out process for lesbians. An examination of similarities and differences between coming out and other minority group experiences or life events may serve to illuminate what is occurring during the coming out process. Notions of 'stigma' (Goffman, 1963; Jones, Farina, Hastorf, Markus, Miller & Scott, 1984) and coping with threatened identity (Breakwell, 1986) provide frameworks within which a variety of minority group or

life experiences may be understood. Examples of such experiences described within these frameworks have ranged, in the case of stigma, from the physically handicapped to ex-mental patients, alcoholics or religious minority members; and from unemployment to sexually atypical employment from the perspective of threatened identity.

What would facilitate coming out?

Attempts to answer this question require consideration of issues at all levels, from intra-psychic through interpersonal and intergroup levels, to the cultural/ideological level. While coping mechanisms suggested, for example, in the threatened identity model (Breakwell, 1986) may aid individuals at intra-psychic and interpersonal levels, and group support may play an important role, it may be that the crucial level for change is societal/cultural. Modifications in social representations to incorporate more flexible notions of gender may be essential for facilitation of the coming out process at intra-psychic and interpersonal levels.

1.3 BACKGROUND

Areas that need consideration as background to understanding the coming out process include lesbian identity; lesbian identity formation; the notion of coming out, heterosexuals' attitudes towards homosexuals and stereotyping. Examination of these issues raises fundamental questions of conceptualization of gender; and relations between women and men in our society. Social psychological perspectives of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981) and social representations (Moscovici, 1984), as well as the notion of threatened identity (Breakwell, 1986), contribute to an understanding of coming out.

Lesbian identity and coming out

Previous studies concerned with lesbian identity have suggested that lesbians may be seen as 'homoemotional' rather than 'homosexual' (Wolff, 1973), and that there may be more than one lesbian identity (Ettorre, 1980a; Kitzinger & Rogers, 1985). 'Lesbian existence' within the context of 'compulsory heterosexuality' has been suggested by Rich (1981). These studies suggest lesbian identities may be seen as socially constructed. Lesbian identity formation has generally been approached from the perspective of stage theories.

In coming out to others, anecdotal material and findings of studies (e.g. Ponse, 1978; de Monteflores & Schultz, 1978; Moses, 1978) indicate the importance of considering non-disclosure as well as disclosure; and possible differences in the coming out experiences of lesbians and gay men, and between younger and older gay people.

Coming out to family and coming out at work are two areas of particular importance, some gay people telling parents/siblings and/or coming out at work, and others taking the decision not to disclose their orientation (e.g. Trenchard & Warren, 1984; Taylor, 1986). Possible discrimination against the lesbian as a woman needs to be considered as well as that based on sexuality. In coming out at work, type of job or work environment are pertinent too.

Heterosexuals' attitudes and stereotyping

Attitudes of heterosexuals towards homosexuals need to be understood within the historical and cultural context. Religion, for example, may have played an important underlying role in attitude formation (Coleman, 1980). Many studies have attempted to construct scales to measure attitudes towards homosexuals (e.g. Millham, San Miguel & Kellogg, 1976; Hansen, 1982; Kite & Deaux,

1986). Conceptual and methodological problems of early studies have been highlighted by later studies (e.g. Plasek & Allard, 1984; Kitzinger, 1987; Kite, 1984; Herek, 1984b). Such problems have included failure to base scales on adequate qualitative investigation, or to take account of social context, or ideological framework; not differentiating between male and female subjects, or specifying sex of target; and inappropriate statistical analyses.

Examples of issues investigated have been possible variations in attitudes towards homosexuals with sex or sex role of subject, or sex of target (e.g. Weinberger & Millham, 1979; Laner & Laner, 1980; Black & Stevenson, 1984; Kite 1984); and possible variation in attitudes towards homosexuals with beliefs about homosexuality as physiologically based, or determined by learning and personal choice (Aguero, Bloch & Byrne, 1984). A question raised is the possibility of changing attitudes towards homosexuality.

Stereotyping is an important aspect to consider. Stereotypes may affect interpersonal behaviour through, for example, self-fulfilling prophecies (Zanna & Pack, 1975; Jones et al., 1984). Studies of stereotyping of homosexuals have focused on sex role (e.g. Taylor, 1983), finding that lesbians tended to be perceived as similar to (heterosexual) men, and gay men as similar to (heterosexual) women. Measures of sex role have included the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI: Bem, 1974) and the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ: Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1974, 1975).

Gender issues

The sex-role/androgyny/sex category perspective of gender is conceptually limited (Bem, 1981a; Condor, 1987). The role of gender issues in the coming out process for lesbians, however, requires investigation. The conceptualization of gender is fundamental; and power

inequalities between women and men need to be considered.

The notion of gender has been conceptualized in a variety of ways. Bem (1981a) suggested gender schema theory. Sex-related associations are seen as forming a cognitive schema, with sex-typed individuals (those who are masculine or feminine, rather than androgynous, undifferentiated or cross-sex-typed) being readier to process information using gender schema. In this way gender is seen as organizing perceptions, and the male-female dichotomy is given extensive relevance in almost every area of life. Condor (1987) suggested the usefulness of the gender boundary approach (of Gerson & Peiss, 1985) which is necessarily social, allowing negotiation of boundaries and meanings. The notion of 'gender identity', a sense of being female or male (based on the concept of Green, 1974), has been used by Spence and Sawin (1985). Differences between women and men, it has been suggested, may be reflected in different emphasis on connection (/affiliation/attachment) and separation (/autonomy), (Miller, 1986; Gilligan, 1982). An interactive model of gender-related behaviour, focusing on display of gender-linked behaviour, has been suggested by Deaux and Major (1987). Underlying general understandings of gender may be social representations of gender (Duveen & Lloyd, 1987).

Heterosexuality may be seen as a fundamental aspect of notions of gender. Thus, Bem (1981a) has described heterosexuality as a subschema of gender schematic processing; and Spence and Sawin (1985) have suggested heterosexuality may be generally perceived as a main outcome of 'appropriate gender identification'.

Power differences related to gender are essential to consider. Inequalities between women and men may be seen as affecting fundamental aspects of life within our society. Men and women may be seen in terms of dominance and subordination (Miller, 1986). Inequalities are reflected in language which may also contribute to

reproducing social values (Graddol & Swann, 1989). Characteristics associated with women have come to be seen as weaknesses instead of strengths (Miller, 1986). Women's position in society, relating to education and employment for example, is inferior to that of men (Wilson, 1991; Firth-Cozens & West, 1991). Heterosexuality may be seen as incorporating and maintaining power inequalities between women and men, and lesbianism as challenging this (Kitzinger, 1987; Jeffreys, 1990). Power inequalities between women and men may form the basis for an essential difference between coming out for lesbians, and coming out for gay men.

Psychological studies have often neglected women and issues of gender (Frieze et al., 1978; Unger, 1985; Wilkinson, 1986). Feminist approaches to social psychological research have been described by Wilkinson (1986) as emphasizing the social construction of meaning and women's situation in society; as scholarly investigation of women's knowledge and experience, including an analysis of the part played by power. Examples of attempts to include gender within social psychological theory are the incorporation of agency/communion into social identity theory by Williams (1984) and Skevington (1989); an analysis of social representations of gender by Duveen and Lloyd (1987); and the interactive model of gender-related behaviour of Deaux and Major (1987). In coming out, whether to self or others, the lesbian must be seen as a woman, with all the implications being female has within our society.

A social psychological perspective

A social psychological analysis of coming out needs to be understood within the framework of issues of gender. Doise (1978, cited in Doise, 1984) has suggested different levels of analysis. The coming out process requires examination on individual/interpersonal levels

as well as from intergroup and societal perspectives.

From the perspective of social identity theory, where social identity refers to the part of a person's self concept deriving from group membership (Tajfel, 1981), or self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987), coming out may be seen in terms of salience of social categories (Oakes, 1987). This perspective incorporates notions of 'personal' and 'social' identity (Turner, 1982). Social identity as lesbian may be seen as becoming salient during the coming out to self process. In coming out to others, social identity as lesbian is *made* salient.

Social representations may underlie lesbians' perceptions and experiences of coming out, and heterosexuals' attitudes towards homosexuals. Social representations have been defined by Moscovici and Hewstone (1983) in terms of cognitive matrices linking ideas, images etc., or as common-sense theories of aspects of society. Through social representations, scientific notions are transformed into common-sense knowledge. Social representations conventionalise and categorize persons or events, and are prescriptive (Moscovici, 1984). Attitudes may be considered as individual response dispositions based on collective representations (Jaspars & Fraser, 1984). Moscovici and Hewstone (1983) have suggested that social representations of human nature may underlie racialism. It is suggested here that such representations may underlie heterosexism. Social representations of gender (Duveen & Lloyd, 1987) may also be relevant to considering lesbians and coming out. Theories about the development of homosexuality, such as those based on a medical model, physiological explanations, or the psychoanalytic perspective, are likely to be reflected in relevant social representations, and may influence attitudes towards lesbians.

Attributions or 'common-sense explanations'

(Hewstone, 1983) may influence the coming out process on several different levels. Early studies on attribution were focussed on the individual (e.g. Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1967). Later studies have taken a social perspective and linked attribution with intergroup relations and social representations (e.g. Deschamps, 1983; Hewstone & Jaspars, 1982; Hewstone, 1983, 1989a). Behaviour may be attributed to disposition or situation; or to internal or external factors, but there are problems with these distinctions (cf Hewstone, 1989a). Causality may perhaps more usefully be perceived as multi-dimensional. For example, additional dimensions of controllability and stability have been suggested (Wong & Weiner, 1981). Biases in attribution include the 'fundamental attribution error' of a tendency to underestimate the effect of situational factors and overestimate the effect of dispositional factors (Ross, 1977). Also, while actors may attribute their actions to situation, observers may tend to attribute the actions to disposition (Jones & Nisbett, 1972). Such biases may occur when a lesbian tells a heterosexual person about herself.

Particularly pertinent to considering coming out is the notion of social attribution (e.g. Deschamps, 1983), with attribution perceived as influenced by group memberships and social representations. Contributing towards an understanding of coming out at an intergroup level of analysis may be the notion of social category memberships as dispositional attributions (Oakes, 1987); and a model of conflict maintenance and reduction (Hewstone, 1989a). Further relevant issues include sex possibly affecting attributions, with different explanations given for men's and women's behaviour (Hansen & O'Leary, 1985); and attributional analysis related to stigma (Weiner, Perry & Magnusson, 1988). The societal perspective of attribution provides opportunity to consider the historical-temporal dimension (Hewstone,

1989a), which is of particular relevance to considering coming out. Attributions are likely to affect both coming out to self, and coming out to others.

There may be some similarities (as well as differences) between coming out and other minority group or life experiences relating to self acceptance or self-disclosure. The notion of threat to identity (Breakwell, 1986) provides a general framework within which coming out and other experiences may be interpreted. Breakwell defined threat in terms of the identity processes of assimilation-accommodation and evaluation being unable to comply with the identity principles of continuity, distinctiveness and self-esteem. Threats may arise externally, or internally through conflict among the identity principles. Coping strategies may be at intrapsychic, interpersonal or intergroup levels. Choice of strategy is seen as determined by type of threat, social context, identity structure and cognitive resources.

Notions of self, self-presentation and self-disclosure all require consideration in an investigation of 'coming out'. Mead's (1934) conceptualization of the self as originating and developing through social interaction provides a useful basis. A further perspective for considering coming out is the dramaturgical framework of Goffman (1959). Studies of self-disclosure generally (e.g. Jourard, 1971; Chaikin & Derlega, 1976; Derlega & Berg, 1987) are relevant to understanding aspects of the coming out process. Issues include self-disclosure and mental health; effects of non-disclosure; 'appropriate' disclosure; and disclosure reciprocity (e.g. Jourard, 1971; Chaikin & Derlega, 1976), as well as self-disclosure in friendship formation (Miell & Duck, 1986); the role of the individual to whom the disclosure is made (Miller, Berg & Archer, 1983; Berg, 1987); and revealing of deviant information (Derlega, Harris & Chaikin, 1973). Self-disclosure within a goal-based model of personality has been

suggested by Miller and Read (1987).

1.4 METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Choice of methodology

Depth interviewing was chosen as the basic methodological approach for data collection in this study. It was thought to be the most appropriate method of investigation for a topic that was complex; of a sensitive nature; and likely to reflect a process, and changing perceptions over time. One focus of interest, stereotyping, was investigated using three approaches: interview questions; a short questionnaire of open-ended questions and sentence completion tasks; and sex-role inventories (the BSRI and the PAQ). Content analysis of qualitative material from interviews and questionnaire responses was carried out. Methodological questions are focussed on sampling; interview biases; and analysis of qualitative data:

The samples

None of the three samples may be seen as representative. Race, class and disability were not investigated. The lesbian sample was mainly from one London group. A small number were obtained by 'snowball' i.e. they were friends of those already interviewed. The heterosexual sample was partly student, and partly from snowball sampling outside the student population. The final sample of twenty women interviewed on communication with family and friends, were volunteers from the London School of Economics.

Interviewing

The study is mainly based on depth interviews. Biases may arise from the interview situation. The social nature of the interview needs taking into account (Farr, 1982). Sources of bias arise from interviewee, researcher, and the interaction between them (Plummer, 1983).

Qualitative material

Analysis of qualitative material is a further potential source of bias. In content analysis, there are issues of definition of coding units, reliability, validity, and interpretation (Weber, 1985; Krippendorff, 1980).

1.5 OUTLINE OF STUDY

The first part of this thesis examines background literature relating to lesbian identity/identities and lesbian identity formation, ending with a brief look at the older lesbian. Background literature related to coming out is then considered. In particular, coming out to family and coming out at work are focused upon. Thus, Chapter Two covers a literature review of lesbian identity and 'coming out'.

Heterosexuals' attitudes towards lesbians are considered fundamental to an analysis of coming out. Chapter Three looks at background literature concerned with attitudes towards homosexuality and stereotyping. Methodological problems of studies in this area are discussed. Literature has indicated that sex role is important in the stereotyping of homosexuals. Notions of sex role are examined. Measurement of sex role using the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI: Bem, 1974) and the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ: Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1974, 1975) is looked at. Possible implications of stereotyping are considered.

In Chapter Four, the pilot studies are described. These included individual depth interviews of twelve heterosexual men and women on attitudes towards lesbians and gay men; some supplementary interviews with lesbians on topics relevant to coming out (that had not been covered in Markowe, 1985); and a stereotype investigation based on a short questionnaire of sentence completion and open-ended questions, and use of the BSRI and PAQ. Finally, there was a pilot study based on individual

depth interviews of a small sample of women regarding self-disclosure and communication with family, friends and work colleagues.

In Chapter Five, there is a construction of an 'imaginary lesbian' based on the pilot material. This forms the basis for a reconceptualization of the coming out process, providing a framework for the analysis of the main study data. Major hypotheses put forward in this chapter are summarized below.

In coming out to self, it was hypothesized that identification as lesbian is based on strong emotional feelings directed towards women, together with awareness of lesbianism as an option, and a level of emotional acceptance of homosexuality. It was suggested that coming out to self is generally gradual; that feelings of 'differentness' may reach back to childhood; and that there may be re-interpretation of past experiences. In coming out to others, it was suggested that initial circumstances; approaches taken in coming out; telling the other person; reactions; and outcome, required investigation. Issues such as perceptions of people's attitudes towards homosexuality, perceived risks and possible gains may contribute towards decisions on whether or not to come out. Approaches taken in coming out, it was thought, would vary from telling a person in a direct manner to assuming the other person 'knows'. When the lesbian tells the other person, the situation may be influenced by, for example, understanding of what homosexuality means, stereotypes, and previous relationship with the other person. Reactions may change over time. Satisfaction with outcome would depend on perceived gains or losses. There may be historical time period differences affecting ease of coming out.

The social psychological framework for the study is presented in Chapter Six. This includes issues of gender; social identity theory; social representations; and attribution theory in the first section. The second

part focuses on self-disclosure, and counselling/therapy issues.

In Chapter Seven, the main study method, results and discussion are presented. This study was based on depth interviews of forty lesbians on their perceptions and experiences of 'coming out'; thirty interviews of heterosexual women and men on attitudes towards lesbians and gay men; and twenty interviews of women on communication with family and friends. Lesbian and heterosexual group subjects were also presented with stereotype tasks. The combined results and discussion section is based on content analysis of the qualitative material focusing on the social context; coming out to self; coming out to others; and finally, the interplay of influences in coming out. Chapter Eight contains ten case studies of lesbian subjects' coming out experiences analysed within the framework of Breakwell's (1986) model of coping with threatened identity. The ten cases were selected as most representative of groups of subjects defined in terms of background and age.

The final chapter presents a summary of the study; discusses implications of the findings; and draws some conclusions.

CHAPTER TWO

LESBIAN IDENTITY AND COMING OUT

2.1 LESBIAN IDENTITY

2.1.1 Some perspectives on lesbian identity

Lesbian identity may be looked at from a variety of different viewpoints, each contributing towards an overall understanding of what is meant by the term 'lesbian'. First of all, lesbian identity needs to be seen in the historical context, and the portrayal of lesbians in literature and the arts needs to be considered. However, it is psychological and sociological studies that will provide the main focus for attempting to understand what is meant by lesbian identity here. Further illumination on lesbian identity may be derived from consideration of specifically feminist perspectives. Viewing lesbians from some of these perspectives will provide an initial picture of what is meant by 'lesbian identity' before proceeding to consider lesbian identity formation in which the 'coming out' process may be seen as directly concerned.

Attempting to consider lesbians in history highlights fundamental questions of definition. What is a lesbian? Who may be described as lesbian? As will be seen, there are no simple answers to these questions. The Lesbian History Group (1989) indicate some of the problems arising in identification of women who lived in the past as lesbian: little explicit information available; suppression, omission or distortion of material, by historians or publishers, in order not to embarrass or alienate family or readers; and varying definitions of 'lesbian'.

Forms of lesbianism, however, have almost certainly existed throughout history, from the ancient civilizations of the past, to the lesbians of today (Cavin, 1985; Duberman, Vicinus & Chauncey, 1989). McIntosh (1968) suggested the homosexual role in England

emerged towards the end of the seventeenth century, while Faderman (1981) has suggested that lesbian identity may be traced back to the romantic friendships of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with origins in the Renaissance. Homoerotic friendships between girls or women in the boarding schools and colleges of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have been described by Vicinus (1984, 1985). Images of lesbians have been suggested in the fields of film, art and literature (Goldstein, 1982; Rule, 1975; Cook, 1979), and it is suggested by Kendall (1986) that a play by Catharine Trotter (1679-1749), performed in 1696, features probably the first lesbian heroine in English stage history. The lesbian of previous centuries and the lesbian portrayed in the arts may sometimes appear as rather different from the image of today's lesbian (eg. as described by Melville, 1982), whose picture will begin to emerge from the following studies.

A variety of different notions of lesbian identity have been suggested by empirical research. For example, the emotional bias is emphasised by Wolff (1973) who suggests that for lesbians, the term 'homoemotional' might replace that of 'homosexual', while Hopkins (1969, p.1435) suggests that "a good, descriptive generic term for the average lesbian would be 'independent'". Looking at the lesbian personality using Cattell's 16 P.F. test, Hopkins found her lesbian sample (n=24) to be significantly more independent than a heterosexual sample, matched for intelligence, age and professional or educational background. The lesbians were found to be more resilient, reserved, dominant, bohemian, self-sufficient and composed, and Hopkins suggests the 'neurotic' label traditionally applied to lesbians is not necessarily applicable.

The notion that there is more than one type of lesbian identity has been suggested in several different ways. One example is provided by Ettorre (1980a). She

suggested there are two types of social lesbian: the 'sick, but not sorry' group who tend to accept traditional lesbian images, and the 'sorry, but not sick' group who challenge traditional images. Two basic types of lesbian identity have also been suggested by Golden (1987), based on those of Ponse (1978). These are 'primary lesbians', who perceive themselves as having been different from an early age, without choice; and 'elective lesbians' who perceive their lesbian identity as a conscious choice. While some elective lesbians, Golden suggested, view their lesbianism as an essential aspect of their nature, others experience their sexuality as fluid/dynamic. Thus, a basic contrast emerges between notions of 'born' lesbians and 'self-chosen' lesbians.

Kitzinger and Rogers (1985) have suggested five lesbian identities derived from a Q-methodological study (n=41). These include the 'personal fulfilment', the 'special person', the 'individualistic', the 'radical feminist' and the 'traditional' identities. For the first identity, personal fulfilment due to lesbianism is emphasised. For the 'special person' identity, the person one is attracted to is seen as important rather than his or her gender, and interactions with males tend to be favourably regarded. Those described by the individualistic identity tend to see themselves as born lesbians, which they are happy about, but they prefer not to be defined in terms of sexual orientation. For those of the 'radical feminist' identity, lesbianism is integrated within the political context. Finally, those of 'traditional' identity, tend to feel unhappy about being a lesbian, not regarding it as something they would have chosen and possibly seeing it as a failing or immaturity. These identities, Kitzinger and Rogers point out, are not necessarily exhaustive, and further they caution against their reification. Kitzinger (1987) discusses how the first three of these lesbian identities correspond to liberal-humanistic accounts. She suggests

that such accounts divert attention away from radical feminism's political aims, towards individual or private solutions, and in this way support the ideologies of the dominant culture.

Social and societal aspects are very important to consider in attempting to understand lesbian identity. McIntosh (1968) in suggesting homosexuality must be seen as a social role rather than a condition, points out that anthropological evidence indicates that in some societies, the role does not exist, and in addition that the role may vary in different societies. Richardson (1981a) suggests considering identification as a lesbian in terms of an individual inherent quality is oversimplified and inadequate. She proposes instead that lesbian identities be viewed as socially constructed and maintained through social interaction. Further, Richardson points out that the meaning and significance lesbian identification will have for a woman will be influenced both by the wider social meanings she meets regarding lesbians and by responses of significant others. From theoretical analyses, fictional accounts and the media, Richardson suggests, four major images of lesbians emerge: the lesbian as a 'pseudo-male'; a negative view of lesbianism as a sorry state to be in; the lesbian as primarily a sexual being, and finally that of lesbianism as a permanent condition. Further to these images, are the meanings of lesbianism that have developed within the homosexual subculture, which include both similarities to, and differences from, those meanings within mainstream society. Richardson sees sexual identity as an ongoing developmental process, and not as something static. Meanings and significance for individuals may change.

Lesbianism may also be looked at in relation to social power (Ettorre, 1980b, 1980c). Thus three stages of lesbianism are suggested by Ettorre (1980b) with the lesbian in the first, traditional stage isolated from

society, followed by the emergence of lesbian group identity, and then the final stage where lesbians gain power and may confront society. Ettorre (1980c) presents the lesbian within the context of a patriarchal capitalist society. Lesbians, she suggests, challenge the position of men through seeking economic independence and through defying the dominant sexual ideology. Thus Ettorre (1980c, p.428) suggests "As a force, social lesbianism is a contradiction to sexuality in society and a potential threat to the basis of all social relationships in that society".

The relationship between lesbian identity and community is considered by Krieger (1982). She discusses how the individual lesbian's sense of self may be both affirmed and challenged in the lesbian community. Development of lesbian group identity, as illustrated by the American lesbian periodical 'The Ladder' between 1956 and 1972, has been investigated by Weitz (1984), taking Kitsuse's notion of tertiary deviance, in which there is rejection of negative identity, as a theoretical basis. Through content analysis, Weitz traces the development of lesbian group identity. From initial strong ties with the male homosexual community, reflection of the medical model, and attempts at integration into general society, there was development to tertiary deviance and active fighting against discrimination, that may have been influenced by the growing black civil rights movement. Finally, there was radical redefinition in the early 1970's and new ties with women's liberation.

Providing a feminist perspective, Rich (1981) is concerned with "The bias of compulsory heterosexuality, through which lesbian experience is perceived on a scale ranging from deviant to abhorrent, or simply rendered invisible...", (p.4). She points out that in literature, women have tended to be regarded as 'innately sexually oriented' towards men, while lesbians are seen as simply acting out their bitterness towards men. Rich suggests

the assumption of female heterosexuality is remarkable: "it is an enormous assumption to have glided so silently into the foundations of our thought", (Rich, 1981; p.9). Moreover, she suggests, there is a need to recognize and study heterosexuality as a political institution. Feminists may need to be concerned not simply with gender inequality, cultural domination by males and taboos regarding homosexuality, Rich suggests, but with enforcement of heterosexuality for women in order that men may have the right of physical, emotional and economical access.

Kitzinger (1987) also emphasises how from a radical feminist perspective both heterosexuality and lesbianism must be seen as political constructions. Thus, she suggests "The major impact of the radical feminist approach to lesbianism is in reasserting the political implications of lesbianism and replacing the so-called 'personal' back into the realm of the public and political", (Kitzinger, 1987; p.65).

Instead of 'lesbianism' which may be seen as clinical and limiting, Rich (1981) chooses to use the terms 'lesbian existence' and 'lesbian continuum'. For Rich, both the historical presence of lesbians and the continuing creation of the meaning of this existence are suggested by the term 'lesbian existence'. 'Lesbian continuum', she sees as including a range of women identified experiences - not just sexual aspects - which run through the life of each woman and throughout history. Rich also suggests that only a part of lesbian existence is shared with homosexual men, and equating the experiences denies female reality.

Radical feminist lesbians and more traditional lesbians perceive their lesbian identity differently. A political lesbian has been defined by The Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group in terms of a 'women-identified woman' who is not sexually available to men (Onlywomen Press, 1981). For some, a radical feminist

identity involves separatism (Hoagland & Penelope, 1988). The plurality of lesbian philosophies and cultures has been illustrated by Allen (1990). It has been found by Kristiansen (1990) that feminist lesbians perceived their own values as different to those of gay men, whereas gay movement lesbians and gay men did not differ in perceptions of value similarity.

In summary, it has been seen that lesbian identity may be considered from a number of different perspectives. Firstly, lesbian identity may be viewed within its historical context, and it may also be considered from the point of view of images portrayed in literature and the media. Secondly, and of central importance here, there have been a variety of psychological and sociological studies contributing towards an understanding of lesbian identity. Some previous studies have looked at personality variables, and it may be that lesbians have an emotional bias. However, it would seem likely that there is more than one type of lesbian identity, and it is possible that there are several different types. The social and societal context has been seen to be of particular importance. Lesbian identities may be viewed as socially constructed and maintained through social interaction. The part played by the lesbian community needs to be considered here too. Lesbianism may also be looked at in relation to social power. Further, it may be necessary to consider lesbianism in the light of heterosexuality being viewed as a political institution. Lesbian identity thus emerges as complex and multifaceted. The development of lesbian identity is of particular relevance to "coming out".

2.1.2 Lesbian identity formation

Lesbian identity formation directly concerns issues of coming out and in particular 'coming out to self'. Depending on definitions it may be seen as concerning

aspects of 'coming out to others' as well, although this latter area extends to a variety of issues which will be further discussed in later sections. 'Coming out to self' obviously has its fundamental basis in lesbian identity formation, although it too has further aspects that will be looked at later. Formation of lesbian identity has tended to be investigated from the perspective of attempting to discern and define the stages that constitute the process. Although this section is primarily concerned with formation of lesbian identity, it is perhaps useful to take a brief look at the findings of studies concerned with male homosexual identity formation too, since there may be common features, and differences or contrasts may serve to indicate important points for consideration.

The earliest studies concerning homosexual identity formation tend to have been focused on male homosexuality rather than lesbianism. Dank (1971) reports on a study of male homosexual identity based on interviews with 55 homosexuals, observation and conversation with hundreds of homosexuals, and data from a questionnaire completed by 182 homosexual subjects. He found on average first homosexual feelings tended to occur at about 13 years of age, while deciding one was homosexual did not occur until about six years later. He suggests "the development of a homosexual identity is dependent on the meanings that the actor attaches to the concepts of homosexual and homosexuality, and that these meanings are directly related to the meanings that are available in his immediate environment; and the meanings that are available in his immediate environment are related to the meanings that are allowed to circulate in the wider society", (Dank, 1971, p.195).

Four stages in becoming homosexual have been suggested by Plummer (1975) who takes an interactionist approach, and like Dank was concerned with male homosexuals. These stages are sensitization;

signification; 'coming out' and stabilization.

In a later study of male homosexuals, Troiden (1979) also suggests a four stage model. The study was based on interviews of 150 men. Like Plummer he suggests the first stage to be that of sensitization, where experiences are gained that may later serve as sources for interpretation of feelings as homosexual. Secondly, Troiden describes a stage of dissociation and signification, in which there is partitioning within consciousness of sexual feelings or activity from sexual identity. Coming out (to self) forms Troiden's third stage. It begins with the decision to label feelings as homosexual, and was found to occur at an average age of 21. The fourth stage, that of commitment, involves the taking of a lover, and adopting homosexuality as a way of life. Identity however, Troiden suggests, is never complete and always subject to modification.

The first model of homosexual identity formation looked at here that was designed to be specifically applicable to homosexuals of both sexes is that of Cass (1979). She suggests a six stage model developed from her clinical work. Interpersonal congruency theory forms the theoretical background with stages differentiated according to individual perception of own behaviour and actions arising in consequence. The individual is seen as taking an active role in identity formation, with identity foreclosure possible at any stage. The stages include identity confusion, after which, where it has been accepted by the person that s/he may be homosexual, there is a stage of identity comparison, which may develop towards stage 3, that of identity tolerance. This in turn may lead to the fourth stage of identity acceptance, which may lead to stage 5, identity pride, from which stage 6, identity synthesis may finally be reached. Cass points out the model is presented as a broad guideline, which may not be applicable to all, and further with modified societal attitudes and expectations

over time, changes to the model may become necessary.

A general stage theory of lesbian identity based on six theories of gay identity development is suggested by Sophie (1985). The theoretical base was formed through consideration of Cass (1979), Coleman (1982), Raphael (1974), Spaulding (1982), Plummer (1975) and McDonald (1982), and then examined by Sophie through interviews with 14 women. The subjects were volunteers in response to an article, and a campus newspaper advertisement asking for women confused about their sexuality or going through changes regarding sexuality. It was found that data was largely consistent with the general stage theory for the early developmental stages, but there were discrepancies and variation in order and timing of events. The general stages proposed by Sophie were first awareness; testing and exploration; identity acceptance, and finally, identity integration. She points out that a problem with specific stage theories is an underlying assumption of linearity. Finally, Sophie points out that lesbian identity development needs to be viewed within the social and historical context.

Developing a lesbian identity is investigated by Gramick (1984) particularly with regard to the first stage of identity formation, that of signification or sexual self-identification. The study is approached through an interactionist theoretical framework. Subjects were defined as homosexual according to indices of sexual feelings, fantasies and behaviour. Interview data were obtained from 97 out of 100 lesbians (interviewed by a team of six interviewers) and mean ages, in years, determined for eight factors as follows: "emotional attraction (14.5), feeling "different" (15.8), cognitive awareness (16), physical attraction (17.4), lesbian acquaintance (20.6), physical contact (20.7), lesbian relationship (23.2), and self-acknowledgment (23.8)", (Gramick, 1984, p.39). Discussing her findings, Gramick points out that lesbian signification was arrived

at on average three years before entry into gay/lesbian circles for over three-fifths of the sample, possibly indicating that the homosexual community is not significant in development of lesbian awareness. Further Gramick points out some of the contrasts between her findings and those of studies concerning gay men, for whom, for example, sexual activity may precede intellectual awareness of homosexuality. For women a greater degree of emotional involvement seems to be necessary.

The developmental phases a lesbian may go through in integrating a stable identity are described by Lewis (1984) who developed her model primarily to aid social workers in understanding lesbian clients. Importantly, Lewis considers lesbian identity development not only for those whose awareness of being different may have started at the age of four or five, followed by dissonance in adolescence, but also for those who may begin as heterosexual and much later, maybe in their twenties, thirties or forties, identifying strongly as feminists, begin to choose to identify themselves as lesbian. For some other women, the starting point may be a same-sex relationship that just seemed to happen without any of the prior feelings of difference. Thus Lewis (1984, p.468) notes "Although this process as described in this article has seemed linear, often it is not. Most women go through parts of the process more than once and in various orders".

Theory and research on lesbian identity formation is considered by Elliot (1985). She suggests a phenomenological definition of lesbian identity, and sees it as important to distinguish lesbian identification from lesbian erotic interests, behaviour and emotional attachments. Elliot finds agreement among writers that: the formation of lesbian identity involves a developmental process with large variations in time required; social interaction is important; and that it is

difficult to resolve the identity problem to the satisfaction of both society and the individual. Elliot (1985, p.64) points out "Acceptance of such an identity involves a number of changes in the ways that a woman comes to perceive, define, and evaluate both her "self" and society." There may be similarities in events but differences in weighting of factors in gay identity formation for women and men, and Elliot suggests identity formation might usefully be looked at in terms of a regression equation. Issues that need to be studied further, she suggests, include maintenance requirements, factors contributing to positive evaluation and to disclosure; factors important in political lesbianism, and identity changes in aging.

Recent examples of studies pertinent to lesbian identity formation have included a proposed model from Chapman and Brannock (1987); a sociological perspective from Troiden (1989); an anthropological view from Herdt (1989); and a study by Schneider (1989) focusing on coming out for lesbians in relationship to general adolescent development.

A 'Proposed Model of Lesbian Identity Awareness and Self-Labeling' was examined by Chapman and Brannock (1987) in a questionnaire study of 197 women (average age, 34 years). The model consists of five stages: (1) same sex orientation; (2) incongruence; (3) self-questioning/exploration; (4) self identification, and (5) choice of lifestyle. Data indicated an average age of 17 years for subjects first thinking they might be lesbian, and an average age of over 21 years for self-identification as lesbian. While 11% of the women reported that they had not always been lesbian, 82% reported having always been lesbian, with recollections, although lacking a label, going back to childhood. Chapman and Brannock suggest that lesbian identity is present before awareness of incongruence of one's own feelings with those of heterosexuals, and that self-

labelling arises through interaction with the non-homosexual environment.

Troiden (1989) presents a four stage model, similar to that of Troiden (1979), and applicable to the process of homosexual identification for both gay males and lesbians. He describes this process in terms of a 'horizontal spiral' rather than linear stages; and suggests homosexual identity should be seen as always open to further change. Stigma is seen by Troiden (1989) as having an important impact on identity formation and management. Herdt (1989) examines the coming out process for gay and lesbian youth in the light of four preconceptions: the assumption of heterosexuality; presumption of inversion; social stigma of homosexuality; and the assumption of homogeneity of young gay people. He takes the anthropological perspective of rites of passage which are seen as structuring life crisis events; and considers coming out in the United States and other countries. Schneider (1989) describes interviews carried out in Toronto on a sample of 25 lesbians, aged 15 to 20 years. She suggests adolescent development for lesbians is atypical.

Possible differences between lesbians and gay men in identity development is a fundamental issue to consider. Herdt (1989, p.26) notes that "Males tend more often to define themselves as gay in contexts of same-sex erotic contact, whereas females experience their lesbian feelings in situations of romantic love and emotional attachment". Cass (1990) describes how lesbian identity formation is more likely to have been stimulated by emotional or social events than sexual. Differences between men's and women's experiences, with the male emphasis on physical sex, and the female emphasis on emotion/love, may be seen as arising from differences in gender-role socialization and different societal expectations for women and men (Troiden, 1989; Cass, 1990; Blumstein & Schwartz, 1990).

A number of points that need consideration have emerged from the studies on lesbian identity development described above. Among these are the questions of linearity in formation of lesbian identity; of selection and definition of lesbian samples; and of comparison of lesbian identity formation with that of gay males. It can also be seen that it is crucial to consider social and societal aspects in identity formation. To complete this initial look at lesbian identity and its formation, the question of aging and the older lesbian will be considered briefly.

2.1.3 The older lesbian

Lesbian identity cannot be viewed as static. Apart from historical time variations in the notion of lesbian identity, there may be changes in lesbian identity during the aging process. Kimmel (1978) looked at gay adult development from the point of view of Levinson's developmental stages. He considered the relationship between developmental data and historical events, concluding differences between older and younger gay men did exist, but that their origins were unclear. The differences could have arisen from either aging itself or historical period differences.

It is suggested by Kayal (1984) that understanding of gay and lesbian aging may be distorted by heterosexism. Sociological studies of aging have tended to be from a heterosexual perspective. Heterosexual emphasis on family life is seen as colouring studies of gay and lesbian aging. Further, Kayal suggests, a problem with studying gay and lesbian aging is the assumption that sexual orientation is valid as an ontological concept and research category. He points out style of relating might be more usefully considered than sexual orientation.

A number of studies, however, provide a useful perspective on the older lesbian, and contribute towards

a greater understanding of gay/lesbian identity. The realities of gay and lesbian aging have been considered by Berger (1984) with an interview study of 18 men and women aged from 40 to 72. He found the stereotype of the isolated and depressed older homosexual to be inaccurate. Twenty lesbians aged from 50 to 73 were interviewed by Raphael and Robinson (1984) who were looking particularly at love relationships and friendship patterns. They found their dominant life pattern to involve serial monogamy with sexuality continuing to play an important part. The women tended to have fewer straight friends after coming out, and single lesbians tended to have more lesbian friends than those in couples. Self-esteem tended to be higher for those with strong friendship ties but weak sibling ties. Some were feminists and others not. All, Raphael and Robinson suggest, represent positive role models.

The image of the older lesbian is further illuminated by Kehoe (1986a, 1986b). Kehoe (1986a) reports on a questionnaire survey she carried out in which 50 lesbians aged 65 to 85 responded to questions concerning demographics, education, economic and occupational condition, health and psycho/social concerns. From the questionnaire responses, Kehoe suggests a profile of the 65+ lesbian:

"a woman who might be anyone's grandmother, except that she never married or had any children. She is overweight, overeducated, liberal, and feminist, has enough income for moderate comfort, does not smoke, drinks only socially, likes to go to concerts, enjoys gardening and reading. She is not a joiner of either social or religious groups, and, not by preference, lives alone. She is healthy, both mentally and physically, and likes herself even though she knows she should lose weight".

(Kehoe, 1986a, p.149)

Kehoe suggests the data indicates the older lesbian to be a survivor and a balanced personality, but points out the sample, recruited by a 'snowball' method, cannot be seen as generally representative. Kehoe (1986b) then provides

'a portrait of the older lesbian' with a description of the likely lifestyle of a lesbian over 60 in the United States.

Thus, in conclusion, when considering lesbian identity, it is important to take into account that there may be differences between older and younger lesbians, and that any differences may arise from either the aging process itself or historical period variations.

"Coming out" may be seen as intrinsically linked with lesbian identity formation and maintenance, and more generally with life as a lesbian.

2.2 COMING OUT

2.2.1 Definitions

'Coming out', firstly, in the sense of becoming aware of one's sexual orientation, and secondly, in the sense of disclosing this information to other people, is of fundamental importance to lesbian existence, as will become clear. Since the term 'coming out' has been defined and used in different ways in previous literature, it is important to consider these different definitions and to formulate a suitable initial definition for use here. Some of the definitions that have been suggested in previous studies will be looked at now.

A broad view of what may be meant by 'coming out' is provided by Baetz (1984, p.45):

"The term *coming out* can have many meanings: a woman's first sexual experience with another woman, a woman's self-realization of sexual feelings for another woman, a woman's acceptance of the label *lesbian*, a woman's declaration to anyone or everyone that she is a lesbian, or any combination of these possibilities".

Similarly, a definition that encompasses notions of both coming out to self and coming out to others has been put forward by Hodges and Hutter (1977, p.13) who suggest that "The phrase "coming out", as used by gay people, has three meanings: to acknowledge one's homosexuality to oneself; to reveal oneself as homosexual to other gay people; and lastly, to declare one's homosexuality to everyone and anyone". Another fairly broad definition is suggested by de Monteflores and Schultz (1978, p.59) who put forward the view that "'Coming out" is the developmental process through which gay people recognize their sexual preferences and choose to integrate this knowledge into their personal and social lives".

Some other definitions of 'coming out' have emphasised different aspects. For example, Dank (1971) limits the term to identification of self as homosexual, while similarly, Troiden (1979), after finding

disagreement on the meaning of 'coming out' among his male homosexual subjects, chose to use the definition agreed upon by approximately half of them, that of coming out referring to "the act of defining oneself to oneself as homosexual", (Troiden, 1979; p.367). The relationship between naming oneself and the coming out process is also pointed out by Stanley and Wolfe (1980) who quote Adrienne Rich's comment "When I think of the 'coming out process' I think of it as the beginning of naming, of memory, of making the connections between past and present and future that enable human beings to have an identity", (p.xviii). Rich (1979; in Foreword to Stanley and Wolfe, 1980) takes the notion of coming out further, connecting it with power. Weeks (1977), in contrast to more individual and personal definitions of coming out, chose to examine the issue from a historical perspective focusing upon reform movements/groupings.

Considering these few examples of the different ways that 'coming out' may be defined, it would seem that, for the present, a suitable working definition may include both the process leading to self-identification as homosexual, and also the revealing of oneself to others as homosexual. With this working definition, it is now appropriate to begin looking at something of the part 'coming out' plays in the lives of lesbians and gay men.

2.2.2 An Initial Picture of Coming Out

Something of what is involved in 'coming out to self', becoming aware of oneself as homosexual, and eventually identifying oneself as such, has already been seen in the section on lesbian identity formation. The studies of Gramick (1984) and Lewis (1984), in particular, covered important features of this area. A vivid, if rather negative, picture of the coming out to self process for a lesbian is provided by Baetz (1984, p.46):

"During the realization process, she may have to deal with a loss in self-confidence, self-hatred, physical illness, nervous breakdown, alcoholism, marriage attempts, realization of wasted years of trying to be someone she isn't, numerous therapy sessions, and suicide attempts. This is euphemistically called coming out to yourself".

Baetz suggests a more accurate description for this process might be in terms of a major battle against a culturally constructed, internal, invisible enemy.

An equally clear image of what 'coming out to others' may involve is provided by Stewart-Park and Cassidy (1977, p.1):

"When we come out of the closet - that is admit publicly that we are lesbians - it's rather like out of the frying pan into the fire. None of us enjoys living in the closet. It implies first that we are ashamed of our sexuality; secondly it isolates us from each other; and thirdly, it makes it difficult to have an honest relationship with anyone. Once we come out, we risk losing our jobs, our friends, the relationships we have with our families; and if we have children we risk losing them".

Different aspects of 'coming out to others' are described by Baetz (1984) in terms of crossroads with particular hazards. In this way, she looks at coming out to family, and coming out at school or work. Baetz suggests each decision-making crossroad a lesbian meets concerns not just a personal choice but involves culturally constructed impediments to pursuing a lesbian lifestyle.

Finally, in this initial picture of 'coming out', before beginning to look at the area in more detail, it is interesting to consider that this is an issue that affects not just a small part of life for gay people:

"People who identify as heterosexual have little idea how far identifying as gay affects our everyday lives. Every family gathering, every social occasion, every school outing, shop, office or factory tea-break, involves dodging or confronting questions about relationships or sexual conquests".

Durell (1983, p.14)

2.2.3 Some aspects of the coming out process

Issues involved in the coming out process are many and complex. Examination of some previous studies in this area indicate something of the range and nature of some of the many different aspects that need to be considered.

Looking at similarities and differences in coming out for lesbians and gay men, de Monteflores and Schultz (1978) suggest there are some experiences which are critical in the process of coming out. These experiences include "awareness of same-sex attractions, first homosexual experience, coming out in the gay world, labeling oneself as gay or homosexual, coming out to friends, family, and co-workers, and coming out publicly", (de Monteflores and Schultz, 1978, p.59). Identity formation is discussed by de Monteflores and Schultz in terms of cognitive transformation, reworking of past experiences, and self-labeling, and they consider Jourard's (1968, 1971) notion of self-disclosure and self validation. Concerning differences between gay men and lesbians, de Monteflores and Schultz consider sex-role factors and sex-role violations, as well as political and legal issues. They suggest that lesbians have been found to act on homosexual feelings on average five years later than gay men, and after intellectual understanding rather than before as the men tend to. Further, for lesbians, emotional attachment may tend to be emphasised over sexual behaviour. Importantly, de Monteflores and Schultz point out that the women's movement may facilitate coming out for lesbians, but for men there is no equivalent of this.

It is suggested by Troiden (1989) that disclosure to heterosexuals may be seen as a measure of commitment in formation of homosexual identity. One of the few studies that has directly considered disclosure of homosexual orientation to others generally is that of Wells and Kline (1987). Since their sample was small (23 gay men

and 17 lesbians) their results should be interpreted with caution. Using a questionnaire with open-ended questions, Wells and Kline found that the benefits of disclosing sexual orientation most frequently mentioned were honesty and openness. There was awareness of risk, and disclosure tended to be to selected persons. Lesbian subjects reported checking out the receiver, considering the disclosure situation, and preparing the receiver, more frequently than gay male subjects. Three quarters of the women checked out the receiver and made direct statements.

A fundamentally important aspect of the coming out issue is the situation where the gay person does not wish to be 'out'. The effects of secrecy on lesbian identity and on the relations between the lesbian subculture and the rest of society, as well as the relationship of disclosure to secrecy and identity, are discussed by Ponse (1978). In order to conceal their homosexuality, Ponse suggests lesbians may employ strategies of "passing" as heterosexual, restrict contact with heterosexuals, and separate the gay world from the outside (thus 'living a double life'). Ponse also points out that disclosure may be non-verbal as well as verbal, and may be seen as supporting lesbian identity. Similarly, viewing lesbian identity as an ongoing developmental process, Richardson (1981a) suggests that the processes of 'coming out' and 'passing' (as heterosexual) may be seen as playing a very important part in development and maintenance of lesbian identity.

Identity management is looked at by Moses (1978). She suggests the major determinant may be the extent of concern of identification as a lesbian when among heterosexuals. Thus, with greater concern, Moses suggests, situations are found more difficult and there is an increase in behaviour aimed at non-identification as a lesbian, and a decrease in risk-taking behaviour. Disclosure and non-disclosure in relation to stress

produced has been studied by Brooks (1981), considering various different situations. Brooks considers the meaning of disclosure varying with degree of need fulfilment provided by others. For example, socioemotional risk may decrease as interpersonal distance increases. At work, economic need fulfilment might be relevant to stress resulting from either disclosure or non-disclosure. Brooks points out that amount of change required is an important aspect. Ability to cope with potential consequences of disclosure depend on such factors as self-esteem and availability of intrinsic reward. Further, Brooks suggests, political meaning may need to be considered.

It can be seen that possible interaction of personality variables with the coming out process is one aspect that needs to be looked at. In a correlational study of gay men, it was found that those who informed others of their sexual preference were generally high in self concept, and low on trait anxiety, sensitization and depression (Schmitt and Kurdek, 1987). However, as the authors point out, a correlational study cannot indicate whether self-disclosure is the cause or consequence.

External and internal conflicts are discussed by E.J. Fisher (1984). Studying a sample of 30 women, Fisher found that they tended to experience conflicts while coming to terms with their lesbian identity, this process taking about five years. External conflict, Fisher suggests, arose from prejudice and perceived negative societal stereotyping, while internal pressures were concerned with internalized negative stereotypes of society, conflict between upbringing and present lifestyle, and questioning of identity. Further, Fisher suggests, selectivity in disclosure may arise from fear of rejection or hostility.

It is suggested by Spaulding (1982), who has looked at formation of lesbian identity during coming out, that four interpersonal strategies may be used during the

initial phases, with change in use of strategies occurring with concern for protection of others, and extent of coming out determined by assessment of its impact on significant others.

Discussing the experiences of young gay and lesbian people growing up, on the basis of three previous studies (including that of Trenchard & Warren, 1984), Plummer (1989) describes a context of assumptions of heterosexuality, and sexual stigma. He suggests the heterosexual assumption incorporates mechanisms including a 'hidden curriculum', absence of role models, peer group pressures, and homophobic responses. Problems that may arise for young lesbian and gay people, Plummer suggests, include negative self-image; secrecy and isolation; access to meeting other gay people; and suicidal thoughts/suicide attempts. He suggests that by the early 1980's, however, it was becoming easier for young people to come out with the growth of Gay Switchboard, and the emergence of gay youth organizations. Plummer emphasizes the varieties of gay youth experience.

There may be age differences in experiences of coming out. Lynch (1987) in a four year ethnographic study of 26 male homosexuals ranging in age from 20 to 59 (mean age, 32) found that generally the older subjects had had a more difficult time 'coming out' than younger subjects, and that they progressed through the different coming out stages at a slower pace. Another perspective on possible interaction between aging and coming out is provided by Lee (1987) who carried out a four year longitudinal study of 47 homosexual men, aged 50 to 80. In particular, Lee looked at happiness of subjects, and the question of whether weathering the coming out crisis successfully provided homosexual men with stamina that heterosexuals growing older would not have. However, findings indicated that happiness in old age was greater where subjects had avoided stressful events rather than having had to weather storms. Staying in the closet may

then be seen as one way of avoiding storms, and for Lee's sample staying in the closet appeared to be more likely to lead to a happy old age. However, Lee points out, with a changing society, this may not be true when today's younger homosexuals reach old age. Thompson, West and Woodhouse (1985) looking at whether their male subjects had let parents, close heterosexual friends, work colleagues and boss know of their homosexuality, found the younger subjects reported greater openness. Thompson et al. suggest there may be a real difference between the generations, with increased public awareness of homosexuality making concealment harder, but maybe not as necessary.

In summary, it has been seen that there may be both similarities and differences in the coming out process for gay men and lesbians. 'Passing' as heterosexual needs to be considered alongside 'coming out'. Identity management and stress associated with both disclosure and non-disclosure are important aspects. Political meaning as well as personality variables need to be taken into account. There may be external as well as internal conflicts, and different strategies may be employed concerning coming out with assessment of impact on significant others. Additionally there may be differences in coming out experiences for older and younger gay men and women. Thus it can be seen that the issues underlying the coming out process are complex, involving psychological, sociological and political aspects.

Coming out needs to be considered in the context of specific areas of everyday life as well as at the more general level. Family and work are major concerns for many people.

2.2.4 Coming out to family

Coming out, or not, to family, telling one's parents, brothers or sisters, and possibly husband and children, that one is a lesbian, or deciding not to, is likely to be among the most important and difficult coming out decisions that a lesbian experiences. In spite of the obvious importance of this area of 'coming out' for individual gay people, there seems to have been little study directly concerning it.

Durell (1983) has pointed out how every family gathering may involve dealing with questions about relationships. Parents are probably harder to deal with on this issue than siblings. As Baetz (1984, p.45) presents the problem: "How do you choose between possible disownment by your parents or a dwindling relationship riddled with half-truths, if those are your choices?" Gross (1978) mentions how some clients reported most of their energies being directed towards their parents not discovering their secret (i.e. that they were homosexual). The possible hazards of coming out to parents and siblings are listed by Baetz (1984, p.47):

- "Loss of choice: forced to lie or face consequences
- Living in fear that they may find out
- Destruction of honest relationship
- Forbidden to see lover (younger lesbians)
- Thrown out of house
- Disowned
- Beaten"

Trenchard and Warren (1984) in their study involving 400 gay and lesbian young people, under 21 years of age, in the London area, found that over 50% of the sample were out to all their family, while nearly 70% had come out to at least one member of the family. 40% of 79 female respondents classified their parents' initial reaction as good or reasonable, with the others perceiving parents' reactions as indifferent, mixed or negative. Chapman and Brannock (1987), in a study based in the United States, reported that 67% of their sample

of 197 women indicated that their families knew of their lesbianism, while 17% of the families did not know. A further 15% of subjects indicated that some of their family knew while others did not. Just under 30% of subjects reported their families accepting their lesbianism, while a similar percentage reported rejection.

A study looking at socio-legal problems of gay men in Britain by Thompson, West and Woodhouse (1985) also provides some data concerning coming out to the family. Data was gathered from questionnaires and interviews. Of the 443 males who returned usable questionnaires over half were under 35 years old, over 90% were born in the U.K. and over 40% lived in the London area. 100 of this sample were subsequently interviewed. Thompson et al. report that often the initial reactions of parents learning about their son's homosexuality was negative. Later, however, some became more accepting. Reports of attitudes of siblings tended to be more positive than those of parents' attitudes. Many subjects who had been open with peers had not felt able to be open with parents. Of those who had told parents, some then experienced rejection. "The theoretical tolerance of homosexuality to which intellectual liberals so often subscribe does not always extend to welcoming the phenomenon in one's own son", suggest Thompson et al. (1985, p.155).

Several studies have specifically focussed on issues related to parents (e.g. Cramer, 1985; Muller, 1987; Zitter, 1987; Robinson, Walters & Skeen, 1989; Savin-Williams, 1989).

Cramer (1985) carried out a questionnaire study of 93 self-identified gay males in the United States. His study was concerned with three main areas: differences between families of disclosers and non-disclosers; the relationship of perceived parental characteristics to acceptance or rejection of their son; and relationship

between coming out to parents, self-esteem, and acculturation in the gay community. About 60% of Cramer's sample had come out to parents.

Looking at perceived family make up, Cramer used the Family Environment Scale (FES) devised by Moos and Moos (1981). The scale as a whole was not found to discriminate well between those subjects who had come out, those who would like to come out, and those who did not want to. Some of the FES subscales, however, such as Cohesion and Expressiveness, were found to be related to coming out. Thus families of disclosers were perceived as encouraging expressiveness and those of non-disclosers as tending to emphasize cohesion.

Of those whose parents knew of their sexual orientation, Cramer found that over half the mothers and over 40% of the fathers were perceived as reacting negatively initially, but relationships tended to improve with time. No significant difference was found in perceived relationship change between those who told parents directly and those whose parents found out by other methods. Perceived parental attitudes regarding sex role, religiousness and authoritarianism were found to be associated with change in relationship with parents on coming out.

Self-esteem was found by Cramer to be higher for those subjects who had disclosed to parents. It was also found that involvement in the gay community was related to openness, with those not wanting to come out to parents being less involved. Finally, it is of interest to consider Cramer's findings regarding reasons given for non-disclosure to parents. Half the reasons concerned fear of hurting or disappointing parents, while only just over a fifth concerned fear of rejection or abuse. Cramer suggests the decision not to disclose may be associated more with ability to handle a negative reaction than with unrealistic fears of a negative reaction.

Muller (1987) interviewed 61 lesbians and gay men who were 'out' to a parent, and ten parents, in the United States. Her study, from the perspective of being a mother of a gay son, provides interesting material, although she states that she is not trained to carry out scientific research. Muller found that a quarter of the parents were initially hostile, but most expressed shock, guilt or denial rather than anger. Some parents' initial reaction was to reaffirm their love. Muller describes the outcome in terms of four types of relationship: loving denial, hostile recognition, resentful denial, and loving-open relationships.

There may be differences for lesbians and gay men relating to disclosure to parents. Muller (1987) found that daughters seemed to have more difficult relationships with their parents than sons. While three quarters of the parent-son relationships were positive, parent-daughter relationships were approximately half negative and half positive. Savin-Williams (1989) in a questionnaire study of over three hundred gay men and lesbians, aged between 14 and 23 years, looked at parental influences on self-esteem from the 'reflected appraisals' perspective of Rosenberg (1979). This perspective suggests that people are influenced by others' attitudes towards them, and eventually perceive themselves as others view them. Savin-Williams looked at perceptions of importance of parents to self-worth; perception of parental acceptance; comfortableness with being gay; and self-esteem. The reflected appraisals model was supported more by the gay male data than by the lesbians' responses. Robinson, Walters and Skeen (1989), in a survey of just over four hundred parents of gay sons or lesbian daughters, not surprisingly, found that parents of male children were more concerned about AIDS than parents of lesbians.

Parents may go through a grieving period following disclosure. Zitter (1987) considered lesbians coming out

to their mothers from intra-psychic, family systems, and sociocultural perspectives. She points out that with the major structural change in the family, a mourning process may be precipitated. Robinson, Walters and Skeen (1989) suggest their findings indicated parents tended to go through five stages of grief similar to those associated with death by Kubler-Ross (1969).

A model of family member response to disclosure of homosexuality has been suggested by Strommen (1989). It includes three components: the values held by family members; the perceived effect of these values on the relationship between person disclosing and other family members; and the availability of conflict resolution mechanisms. Where family reaction is negative, Strommen suggests, two associated processes may be seen as occurring: negative values related to homosexuality are applied to the discloser; and homosexual identity is perceived as negating, or disturbing, the previous family role of the discloser.

A further important area when considering lesbians and family is that of the position of the lesbian mother. A study of lesbian mothers has been carried out by Hanscombe and Forster (1982). They chose to use a journalist type approach with open-ended conversations, and have provided a picture of what it is like to be a lesbian mother in this country.

Coming out to family then has been seen to be an extremely important issue in the lives of gay people. The decision to come out or not to parents, siblings and other family members has practical implications for the gay person.

2.2.5 Coming out at work

"For gay people, work presents the biggest obstacle to coming out as gay. If friends turn sour, you can find new ones. If you get chunked out of the house, there is probably somewhere else to stay while you look around for another place to live. But your workmates are around day in, day out. If they turn nasty, things can become miserable. Added to that, your work record passes from employer to employer, causing problems wherever you go. The most difficult place to escape from gay oppression is at work"

NALGO Gay Group (1979; p.3)

As illustrated by the quotation from the NALGO Gay Group above, the issue of coming out at work is a particularly important one. The majority of lesbians are probably economically dependent on their earnings from their jobs. Material or economic loss however as a reason for not coming out at work is questioned by Hodges and Hutter (1977) who suggest that the real barrier may be the loss of a protective shell. But the question of unfair dismissal and discrimination against homosexuals at work is discussed by Daly (1983) who gives a number of examples. Additionally, Thompson, West and Woodhouse (1985) found that approximately a quarter of their 443 male homosexual subjects in Britain reported experiencing unpleasant remarks from co-workers, while 20 subjects reported having been sacked for homosexuality. Further, Beer, Jeffery and Munyard (1983) in an NCCL publication suggest that there is widespread discrimination at work against lesbians and gay men, and that in the last three years, it may even have become more blatant. They suggest that anti-gay discrimination is divisive and any such discrimination against a minority group is against the interests of all working people.

Some empirical studies have contributed towards a greater understanding of the experiences of lesbians at work. In a questionnaire study of 203 lesbians in New York City, Levine and Leonard (1985) found employment discrimination to be a serious problem, with lesbians both anticipating job discrimination and encountering it.

Discrimination was expected by three-fifths of the sample if their sexual orientation ever came to be discovered, with the majority of these women anticipating problems with supervisors, and the possibility of being fired, as well as being concerned about possible reactions of co-workers, and harassment. Levine and Leonard (1985; p.193) report "Fears of discrimination and harassment were completely warranted". Formal or informal job discrimination was reported by almost a quarter of the women. As a coping strategy, 77% of the women were partially or totally closeted at work, and Levine and Leonard describe the stress associated with this. Other ways of coping included self employment or working in areas where lesbians were tolerated. Work setting (city or suburb; public or private, small or large institution) appeared to have greater effect on anticipated and actual discrimination and coping strategies, than did individual attributes of the women (eg. age, education, occupation). In order to look at extent of discrimination, Levine and Leonard carried out a secondary analysis of data from previous studies together with that of their own study. They conclude that whatever the precise figures may be, the data indicate clearly that lesbians in the workforce anticipate and experience discrimination.

Of particular interest is a survey concerning lesbians and work carried out in London (Taylor, 1986). The study reports on questionnaire responses from 171 lesbians and interviews with 27 women, all from the Greater London area. Of these 23% were unemployed and 76% employed. It is suggested that the growth of unemployment may have led to increased discrimination and further that "We run the greater risk of not getting a job if we admit to being lesbians and, when we do have jobs, often we are forced to remain in the closet", (Taylor, 1986; p.20). Data collected included information on race, class, and disabilities. Discrimination was looked at in terms of assumption of

heterosexuality by co-workers, anti-lesbian remarks, lack of promotion, dismissal threats and actual dismissal. The first two types of incidents were found to be most frequent. "Sexism and heterosexism are inextricably combined and make time spent at work an on-going battle for virtually all the lesbians who responded to our questionnaire" suggests Taylor (1986, p.26).

As Taylor (1986) points out an unfortunate error was made in not asking within the questionnaire for details of the respondent's specific job - only employer was specified. This obviously represents a serious deficiency in the survey. However the report does provide some important data concerning discrimination against lesbians, concerning both those who are in employment and those who are unemployed. "At present, most workplaces do not create an atmosphere where lesbians can be 'out' as lesbians if they want to be" Taylor (1986, p.111) suggests. She examines Equal Opportunities Policies as well as various Trade Union policies. In conclusion, Taylor comments how the study has illustrated the multiple forms of discrimination experienced by lesbians and the importance of taking into account interaction of different forms of oppression.

A study by Hall (1989) highlights the ambiguity and complexities of the work situation for lesbians. Hall interviewed 13 lesbians who worked in organizations in the United States. Unlike heterosexuals who exit from family roles when working in an organization, Hall suggests homosexuals are perceived as remaining in the affective realm. She describes the danger of disclosure for lesbians at work, which may lead to constant preoccupation with concealment, and heightened sensitivity towards behaviour or attitudes of others. Non-disclosure, Hall suggests, may lead to anger or anxiety; inner conflicts created by being secretive; and sometimes, avoidance of heterosexual colleagues. Strategies used to balance non-disclosure, Hall found,

included denial of being 'in the closet' although the women had not told anyone; avoidance of personal situations at work; distraction through cultivating image of self as feminist or liberal, for example; and token disclosure. However, Hall further suggests that those who are thoroughly open at work are likely to forfeit their individuality: they may, as Goffman (1963) suggests be perceived as representatives of their category.

It would seem likely that the type of job in which a lesbian is employed may have some influence on whether or not she chooses to come out in the work situation, and potential consequences of that decision. The example of a gay male teacher's experience (Warburton, 1978) illustrates the kind of situation that may occur. John Warburton was employed by the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) as a temporary-terminal teacher in a girls' secondary school in the 1970's. Having been noticed by a pupil, on a demonstration organized by the Campaign for Homosexual Equality, discussions on homosexuality arose in some of his classes, when some pupils greeted him with insults (e.g. calling him 'queer', 'poof'). In December 1974, the ILEA decided that to continue teaching within the authority, Warburton must agree "not in future to discuss homosexuality with pupils, except in the course of a completely structured programme of sex education" (quoted in Warburton, 1978; p.8). Warburton did not feel able to comply with this, and so was unable to continue as a teacher within the ILEA.

Olson (1987) carried out a survey of 97 gay and lesbian teachers from different parts of the United States. A quarter of the sample had left teaching, and of these, approximately a third reported sexual preference as their only reason for leaving, while a further twenty percent suggested that they had left teaching partially because of sexual preference. Olson found that over eighty percent of the sample while

teaching were 'out of the closet' to at least one other person. In almost half of these cases, the person the subjects had revealed their sexual preference to was another teacher. Seventy percent of the subjects who were 'out' reported that the reaction of the person they had confided in had been positive. Responding to an open-ended question about what kept them from being open, teachers suggested it was that they wanted acceptance from peers and superiors, and feared loss of job or not receiving promotion. Olson (1987, p.80) concludes that "Decisions about becoming a teacher, staying in teaching, or "coming out" while teaching are necessarily highly individual and very complex".

At work, lesbians may experience discrimination both as women and as gays and often in that order, suggest Beer, Jeffery and Munyard (1983). A feminist perspective provided by Rich (1981) further illuminates this issue. In discussing MacKinnon's (1979) 'Sexual Harassment of Working Women: A Case of Sex Discrimination', Rich notes that a specific difference between experiences of lesbians and homosexual men arises since "A lesbian, closeted on her job because of heterosexist prejudice, is not simply forced into denying the truth of her outside relationships or private life; her job depends on her pretending to be not merely heterosexual but a heterosexual woman, in terms of dressing and playing the feminine, deferential role required of "real" women"; and further she suggests "the workplace, among other social institutions, is a place where women have learned to accept male violation of our psychic and physical boundaries as the price of survival", (Rich, 1981; p.14). Generally, sexual harassment of women at work has been shown to be a serious problem (Stockdale, 1991). Thus, coming out at work for lesbians needs to be considered not only from the point of view of sexual orientation, but also from the perspective of the lesbian as a woman living in what may be seen as a patriarchal society.

Issues of class may also need to be considered. Weston and Rofel (1985) investigated a strike at a lesbian auto-repair shop and see a class analysis as necessary for understanding the conflict. They attempt "to move toward an integrated theory of class and sexuality that views class as the ongoing production of social relations structured through the division of labor, rather than simply as class background, and that also comprehends the significance of lesbian identity as a historical construct affecting social relations in lesbian institutions", (Weston and Rofel, 1985; p.200).

"For gays, the workplace can be one of the biggest problems, but at the same time it is potentially the most important source of strength" suggest the NALGO Gay Group (1979, p.3). The strength, they suggest, is that of the rank and file, and they give the example of a social worker dismissed for being gay, and then reinstated in response to unofficial strike action. Beer, Jeffery and Munyard (1983) also see reasons for some optimism with unions increasingly willing to fight for gay members' rights, and gay workers organising within the labour movement. Tony Benn (1980), in the preface to Beer et al. (1983), points out that "the rights of homosexuals to be protected against prejudice and allowed to lead their own lives free from discrimination cannot be left to individuals to demand or even the gay movement as a whole", (p.5). He suggests that the issue is one of civil liberties concerning all.

In summary, it has been seen that the question of coming out at work is very important for lesbians. There may well be real discrimination within the workplace. The situation may vary with type of job; teaching is an example of a particularly sensitive area. A lesbian may experience discrimination both as a woman and as a gay person. It has been suggested that the issue of such discrimination should concern all.

CHAPTER THREE

ATTITUDES TOWARDS HOMOSEXUALS AND STEREOTYPING

3.1. ATTITUDES TOWARDS HOMOSEXUALS

In order to begin to understand the coming out process for lesbians it is necessary not only to study the perceptions of lesbians, but also to look at the attitudes of heterosexuals towards homosexuals. This may be seen as especially relevant to the 'coming out to others' situation, which is often an interaction between a lesbian and heterosexual person, but it may also be considered essential to understanding of the 'coming out to self' experience, since a lesbian exists not in isolation, but within a predominantly heterosexual society.

"Homosexuality is not a problem, other people's reaction to it is" Trenchard (1984, p.46) suggested. In the introduction to Galloway (1983, p.vi), Jarrett also suggested "We are not the problem" and went on to point out "In Britain today our social and sexual activities remain extensively criminalised. We are ostracised by our families, ignored at school, assaulted on the streets, harassed by the police and patronised by the media." Some of these experiences of discrimination have been described by Durell (1983) looking at the home situation, Dobson (1983) looking at the position in schools, Daly (1983) looking at work experiences and Howes (1983) considering the media. Jarrett (in Galloway, 1983, p.vii) suggested "Few people - even gay people - realise the extent of the oppression we suffer from society and its laws. Sometimes the oppression arises from irrational prejudice, sometimes from ignorance, often from the self-oppression of those who cannot come to terms with the homosexual aspects of their own personalities." Thompson, West and Woodhouse (1985) found that the negative aspect of gay living most commonly mentioned by their male subjects was

heterosexual society's discrimination or lack of acceptance. Further illustration of the part played by attitudes has been provided by Baetz (1984) who described how in coming to the realization that one is a lesbian, a woman may be confronted from society with silence, lies, isolation, intimidation and physical violence. Thus, Baetz suggested there may be no role models or sense of lesbian existence, or a distorted view presented by the mass media; isolation from other lesbians; and intimidation, ranging from ridicule and jokes to legal problems and maybe actual physical violence.

Studying attitudes towards homosexuals has been approached in a variety of ways. Some studies have taken a historical approach or have been concerned with whether attitudes may have changed (e.g. Goldstein, 1982; Gross, 1978; Schofield, 1979; Browning, 1984). Other studies have focused on the religious background (e.g. Coleman, 1980 has provided an in depth study of Christian attitudes; Maret, 1984 reported on an empirical study). A sociological approach has been taken by Kitsuse (1962) who was concerned with societal reaction to deviation, based on ideas of Lemert (1951). Leitner and Cado (1982) have used a personal construct approach to investigate 'homosexual stress', while Laner and Laner (1980) provided an empirical study concerned with 'why lesbians are disliked'. Interaction between beliefs about homosexuality and attitudes has also been investigated (Aguero, Bloch & Byrne, 1984; Furnham & Taylor, 1990). A number of studies have attempted to construct scales for measurement of heterosexuals' attitudes towards homosexuals (e.g. Millham, San Miguel & Kellogg, 1976; Larsen, Reed & Hoffman, 1980; Hansen, 1982; Gentry, 1986; Kite & Deaux, 1986; Herek, 1988). Some studies have considered certain theoretical aspects of research in this area that have tended to be neglected in earlier studies (e.g. Plasek & Allard, 1984; Herek, 1984a). Finally, one particular area of interest has been the

association between attitudes towards homosexuals, gender and sex-role attitudes.

3.1.1 History, religion and changing attitudes

"Throughout the history of Western civilization, negative attitudes have been expressed toward homosexuality" suggests Browning (1984, p.11), while Melville (1982, p.137) comments "Historically, lesbianism has invariably been regarded as shameful". Taking a psychohistorical approach, Goldstein (1982, p.437) notes a "curious discrepancy in attitudes toward male and female homosexuality", and suggests while male homosexuals have suffered throughout history, female homosexuals "though often enough frowned upon and sometimes condemned to equally horrible tortures, have been tolerated, accepted, and even encouraged". Goldstein proceeds to discuss the 'liberal attitudes' towards female homosexuality, but he does point out that his approach is psychohistorical rather than historical and involves inference and speculation together with history, and should not be looked upon in the same way as arguments of proof based only on historical facts. He considers evidence from film, art and literature, and later speculates:

"It is appalling to realize that we can tap sources as varied as Greek Mythology, the poetry of the Romantic Movement, the Bible and its commentaries, modern art, and contemporary film, pull them out of their historical and chronological time frames, and find two common denominators: an ubiquitous male fear of homosexuality between males, and a male need to see all women as lesbians".

(Goldstein, 1982, p.449)

In a comment on Goldstein's article, Saunders (1983) suggests that not all the women depicted in pictures by the various artists discussed by Goldstein may actually have been lesbians. However Melville (1982) also suggests that in literature, lesbianism has tended to be viewed with amused tolerance, and not seen as a threat. Goldstein, in concluding, suggests reality is connected

to fantasy in the male response to female sexuality, through the biological fact of everyone being born of women. Female homosexuality may be seen as an innocent regression, recapturing infantile bliss. In this way "It overrides passing social, economic and political changes and customs", (Goldstein, 1982, p.457). Thus he suggests, negative reactions arise only where, in the regression, the women do not remain female and they threaten male power.

It would seem likely that some of the roots of attitudes towards homosexuality in this country may be found in the cultural background of the Christian religion. Coleman (1980) provides a detailed study of Christian attitudes towards homosexuality. He surveys Old Testament evidence, the Inter-Testamental Period, and the New Testament. Coleman suggests that the Christian attitude has been remarkably consistent through history with homosexual offences viewed as sinful and rigorously punished from the second century through to the end of the nineteenth century. He further suggests that if opinions have changed among Christians, the Church authorities are not following too quickly.

The attitudes of fundamentalist born-again Christians towards homosexuality in comparison to those of non-fundamentalists have been investigated by Maret (1984). In a study of 151 students, fundamentalist subjects showed greater disapproval of homosexuality than non-fundamentalists, and males greater disapproval than females, but there was an interaction between fundamentalism and sex, with female fundamentalists showing the greatest disapproval, and female non-fundamentalists showing the least disapproval, and male scores less extreme. Maret points out that even the non-fundamentalist attitudes tended to be neutral rather than approving, and further that the research was carried out before the current AIDS situation.

A number of recent empirical studies of attitudes

towards homosexuals have indicated religiousness to be related to attitudes towards homosexuality (e.g. Gentry, 1987; Jensen, Gambles & Olsen, 1988; Herek, 1988).

It is not necessarily the case that people's attitudes change more quickly than those of institutions. Gross (1978) suggests that although the American Psychiatric Association has removed homosexuality from its diagnostic handbook of psychiatric disorders, attitudes may not actually have changed. She describes a study reported in Time (1978) and conducted by the journal 'Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality'. This study involved questionnaires sent to 10,000 members of the American Psychiatric Association. From the first 2,500 responses, it appeared that 69% of the psychiatrists perceived homosexuality as usually pathological rather than a normal variation; 60% believed homosexuals not to be as capable of mature, loving relationships as heterosexuals, and 70% believed homosexuals' problems tended to arise more from inner conflict than societal stigmatization.

A picture of attitudes towards homosexuality in this country, twelve years after legislation regarding male homosexuality is given by Schofield (1979). He notes that there has been little effect on public pronouncements and that although lesbianism has never been illegal, social hostility may be quite strong. He suggests there is a striking difference between public attitudes and private opinions.

3.1.2 Societal reaction

In considering societal reaction to homosexuality, it is helpful to look at the ideas put forward by Lemert (1951) on social deviation. Lemert who is concerned with social pathology generally explains:

"The socially visible deviations within a group, community, or society stir its members to a wide variety of expressive reactions and attitudes, depending upon the nature of the deviations and expectancies of the conforming majority.

Admiration, awe, envy, sympathy, fear, repulsion, disgust, hate, and anger are felt and manifested by those confronted by departures from their sanctioned ways of behaving. These are the elemental stuff from which the societal reaction is compounded"

(Lemert, 1951, p.54)

(From the point of view of considering homosexuals, those who have 'come out' within the particular context may be considered as 'socially visible' while those who are not 'out' may not be visible).

Lemert distinguishes between primary and secondary deviation. Thus "The deviations remain primary deviations or symptomatic and situational as long as they are rationalized or otherwise dealt with as functions of a socially acceptable role" but "When a person begins to employ his deviant behavior or a role based upon it as a means of defense, attack, or adjustment to the overt and covert problems created by the consequent societal reaction to him, his deviation is secondary", (Lemert, 1951, pp75 & 76).

The particular case of societal reactions to "homosexual behaviour" is looked at by Kitsuse (1962) investigating theoretical and methodological problems in the study of deviation arising from societal reactions. He attempts to focus on "processes by which persons come to be defined as deviant by others" (Kitsuse, 1962, p.248). Interviews were designed to look at behaviour forms interpreted as deviant and the processes of defining a person exhibiting these behaviours as deviant and treating the person as such. Seventy five subjects out of over seven hundred interviewed reported they had "known" a homosexual. Evidence of homosexuality was either indirect (eg. through rumour) or through direct observation, although here there was wide variation in behaviour taken to indicate homosexuality, and often vagueness of description. Direct observation evidence included behaviours "which everyone knows"; deviations from "behaviours-held-in common" and behaviours interpreted as overt sexual propositions. The imputation

of homosexuality was then considered in the interviews to investigate the linking of this "evidence" with the category homosexual. Retrospective interpretations were generally found. Next, societal reactions were looked at by asking the interviewee what s/he did next. Kitsuse found the reactions ranged from explicit disapproval with immediate withdrawal, through explicit disapproval with subsequent withdrawal, or implicit disapproval accompanied by partial withdrawal, to the further extreme of no disapproval and sustaining of relationship. On the basis of the data obtained, Kitsuse suggests it is the interpretations made of behaviours by others, rather than the actual behaviour of the person being defined as deviant, that is the critical feature of the deviant-defining process. Kitsuse remarks that although the reactions tended to be negative, they tended to be generally mild. However, he cautions against generalizations from the sample to the general population, because of the subjects' higher than average educational level. Kitsuse suggests that implications of the study are that the many different conceptions held by individuals, groups or agencies, concerning a form of behaviour, need to be explicitly taken into account for a sociological theory of deviance. Such a theory needs to focus on the interactions that define behaviour as deviant and activate sanctions, since

"in modern society, the socially significant differentiation of deviants from the non-deviant population is increasingly contingent upon circumstances of situation, place, social and personal biography, and the bureaucratically organized activities of agencies of control."

(Kitsuse, 1962, p.256)

3.1.3 Further empirical studies & measurement of attitudes

An example of a psychological approach to looking at feelings about homosexuality held by heterosexuals is provided by a study by Leitner and Cado (1982). Leitner

and Cado considered assessment of potential for homosexual threat (homosexual stress) using a personal constructs approach developed from Kelly's (1955) personal construct theory. Homosexual stress may be measured in terms of the amount of change, regarding understanding of self in particular, that is implied for an individual by the possibility of becoming homosexual. Using 40 subjects, it was found that the greater the stress for the individual - implying greater change in construing of self - the more negative his/her attitudes towards homosexuality. A sex difference was found in that for males those most stressed by homosexuality construed homosexuality as more personally meaningful, while for females there was a negative relationship. Personal meaningfulness was defined in terms of extremity of ratings for self "as I would be if I were homosexual" (Leitner & Cado, 1982; p.870). Homosexual stress was not found to be highly related to religious fundamentalism and was independent of authoritarianism. Leitner and Cado (1982, p.872) conclude "it appears that the potential threat of construct reorganization not the negativeness with which homosexuality is construed - is the more important determinant of a person's attitude toward homosexuality".

'Why lesbians are disliked' has been investigated by Laner and Laner (1980). They consider whether it may be personal style, displaying inappropriate gender-related mannerisms as suggested by MacDonald and Games (1974), or sex-object choice as suggested by Storms (1978). Laner and Laner's subjects were asked to rate hypofeminine, feminine and hyperfeminine lesbians or hypofeminine, feminine and hyperfeminine heterosexual women for likeableness. It was found that heterosexual women were generally liked more than lesbians, and among heterosexual women, the least liked type was the hypofeminine (i.e. masculine), although ratings still reflected likableness or neutrality. Hypofeminine

lesbians were most disliked. For both hyperfeminine and feminine lesbians, raters divided approximately equally between liked-to-neutral and disliked ratings. Partial support is given to both notions of personal style and sexual preference being implicated in dislike of lesbians.

It is possible that heterosexuals' perceptions of the origins of homosexuality may interact with their attitudes towards homosexuals. Agüero, Bloch and Byrne (1984) suggest that there may be two major belief systems: belief that homosexuality is mainly determined by learning and personal choice, and belief that homosexuality is physiologically or genetically determined. These beliefs, they suggest, may interact with attitudes, thus determining how heterosexuals perceive homosexuals and their behaviour towards them. In a study involving 255 female and 221 male students, subjects were presented with questionnaires which included the Sexual Opinion Survey (Fisher et al., 1983); questions on their own sexual behaviour, attitudes and beliefs about homosexuality, and previous experiences with homosexuals; and ratings regarding feelings concerning a hypothetical homosexual friend. Results indicated that subjects with negative affect and the belief that homosexuality was learned showed the greatest dislike of homosexuals. Subjects with negative affect and belief of homosexuality as genetic were found to avoid social situations where homosexuals were present.

People's beliefs about the aetiology of male homosexuality, as well as their attitudes towards homosexual behaviour, and perceptions of 'cures' for homosexuality have been looked at by Furnham and Taylor (1990). In the study based on 255 male and female subjects, a factor analysis with varimax rotation of aetiology items, produced six factors, accounting for almost two thirds of the variation, and interpreted as: early relationships, genetic, father problems, fear of

women, mental illness and sexual abuse. Correlations indicated that subjects generally did not tend to be discriminating in their beliefs. Furnham and Taylor found that beliefs varied most strongly with sexual orientation (32 of the sample were homosexual; 205, heterosexual; and 18, bisexual); and contact with homosexuals. There were some age, education and sex differences: younger women with more education were less intolerant than older men with less education. Subjects with the most contact with homosexuals were generally less likely to agree with the notions of aetiology, behaviour and cure.

A recent study with a different approach to considering attitudes regarding lesbians is that of Kitzing (1987). Using Q methodology, Kitzing elicited 'actual' attitudes as well as people's most 'favourable' view of lesbians. Thirty seven non-lesbians completed both Q sorts, and six lesbian subjects completed the 'most favourable' sort. Data from 'favourable' and 'actual' Q sorts were entered into a factor analysis together. The first two factors that emerged corresponded to 'favourable' attitudes towards lesbianism: Factor I representing a radical feminist political analysis of lesbianism, and Factor II, the liberal view of lesbianism as natural and personal. Factor I was defined mainly by the lesbian sample sorts, and to a lesser extent by heterosexual feminist sorts related to 'actual' view; Factor II was defined by 'most favourable' sorts of two lesbians and a heterosexual woman, and an 'actual' view of a heterosexual man. Factor III corresponded most closely to traditional concepts of homophobia, while Factor IV corresponded to a definition of lesbianism in sexual terms where this was perceived by the men defining the factor with sexual interest, as opposed to disgust. For both Factors V and VI, lesbianism was regarded as unnatural, but for Factor V this was from a 'scientific' point of view, and for

Factor VI, from a religious perspective. Factor III was defined on sorts of two heterosexual women; Factor IV on the sorts of two men; and factors V and VI, each on the sorts of a single participant.

A number of studies have attempted to construct scales for measuring heterosexuals' attitudes towards homosexuals. A factor-analytic conceptualization of attitudes towards homosexuals is provided by Millham, San Miguel and Kellogg (1976). 795 heterosexual subjects were presented with a 76 item Homosexual Attitude Scale (half the items referring to male homosexuals and half to females) to be rated as true or false. Data for male and female homosexual targets were analysed separately. Six factors emerged: repressive-dangerous; personal anxiety; preference for female over male homosexuals; cross-sexed mannerisms; moral reprobation, and preference for male over female homosexuals. These factors accounted for varying proportions of attitudes towards male homosexuals and attitudes towards female homosexuals, with repressive-dangerous accounting for approximately 56% of the variance in describing male homosexuals but only 14% in describing female homosexuals, and personal anxiety accounting for almost 53% of variance in describing female homosexuals and only 10% in describing male homosexuals. The personal anxiety factor covered items indicating anxiety, disgust or avoidance related to homosexuals. Differences in responses over some factors were found between male and female subjects, and between those who had a friend or close relative who was homosexual and those who did not.

Some problems with the analysis of Millham et al. (1976) are discussed by Herek (1984b). First, use of dichotomous data may affect the size of inter item correlations and the factor solution. Secondly, distortion may have occurred using unit values in the correlation matrix diagonal. Further, Herek suggests, the factors 'preference for male over female

homosexuals', 'preference for female over male homosexuals' and 'cross-sexed mannerisms' may all be low level factors. He points out that they account for little of the variance, and include highly correlated items measuring similar phenomena. Herek goes on to suggest that "the greatest flaw" in analysis of this study may be the assumption of uncorrelated factors which is indicated in the use of varimax rotation.

In factor analyses using oblique rotation, which allows factor correlations to be calculated, Herek (1984b) found that a 'condemnation-tolerance' factor accounted for 35 to 45% of the total common variance in attitudes of male and female subjects toward lesbians and gay men. This condemnation-tolerance factor "includes items that characterize homosexuality as unnatural, disgusting, perverse, and sinful; as a danger to society and requiring negative social sanctions; and as a source of personal anxiety to the individual respondent, consequently leading to avoidance of gay men and lesbians", (Herek, 1984b, p.48).

Larsen, Reed and Hoffman (1980) describe the development of a Likert-type scale to measure attitudes of heterosexuals towards homosexuality. A 20 item Heterosexual Attitudes Toward Homosexuality (HATH) scale was produced and validated. It was found that males tended to be less tolerant of homosexuality than females; business students tended to be less tolerant than liberal arts students, and those who reported attending church often were less positive in attitude than those who reported rarely or never attending church. Correlations were found between the HATH, peer attitudes and authoritarianism.

Hansen (1982) also developed a scale for measuring prejudicial attitudes towards homosexuality (homosexism). Both long (44 items from 182) and short forms (15 items) of the scale were found to be reliable, and results indicated the scale to be valid for the particular

college population. Males were found to have greater homosexism scores than females; those who did not know any homosexuals personally scored more than those who did. No significant difference was found between subjects from rural and non-rural areas.

Guttman scales measuring social distance towards male and female homosexuals have been developed by Gentry (1986, 1987). Gentry was concerned with discomfort related to being in close quarters with homosexuals, and reactions towards homosexuality rather than opinions. The scales were developed in three phases using sample sizes of 53, 83 and 201 subjects respectively. The eight items presented to subjects in phase three ranged from the situation of being at a party where a homosexual was present, to the situation of living in the same house as a homosexual. Sex of homosexual was specified within items. Gentry (1986) mentions the limitations of sample size, homogeneity, and not taking into account degree of discomfort, or looking at possible behaviour in the situations described. However, she suggests the scales developed here may be seen to be not only statistically sound, but also based on clearer conceptualization than that of many previous studies.

Another recently developed scale is that of Kite and Deaux (1986). This is a Likert-type scale and its development seems particularly well grounded. An initial pool of 40 items was derived from considering a variety of sources, including questions asked in psychology classes at gay rights group presentations; and material from the media, textbooks and previous studies. Twenty-one of these items form the final version of the scale. This has one major factor accounting for over 40% of the variance, and high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.93$). Attitude scores did not differ significantly when gay male and lesbian targets were substituted for homosexual.

The ability of their scale to predict behaviour in an experimental situation is also investigated by Kite

and Deaux (1986). Tolerant and intolerant male subjects (i.e. those with positive and negative attitudes) were informed initially, informed later, or not informed, that their male partner was homosexual. Further, a random half of the subjects were informed they would meet this partner, while the others were told they would not. Findings indicated that when it is believed by subjects that they are interacting with a homosexual, tolerant and intolerant subjects react very differently. In this situation, the partner is rated more negatively by intolerant males on a liking measure. Information requested and provided also differs according to attitudes. Both tolerant and intolerant subjects, however, were found to rate a person perceived as homosexual more negatively than someone perceived as heterosexual.

Taking into account sex of target, Herek (1988) has developed a twenty item Likert scale: 'Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men' (ATLG). This contains two, ten item subscales, one related to attitudes towards lesbians, and the other, to attitudes towards gay men. Using an initial sample of 368 subjects (249 female and 119 male subjects), and then replicating the study on a further six samples, Herek found independent variables of sex-role attitudes, authoritarianism, perceived social support, personal contact, and religiosity, all contributed towards attitudes, but none were more predictive than others. Heterosexual male subjects expressed more negative attitudes than heterosexual female subjects, particularly towards gay men.

Finally, of interest because of the importance of the issue of coming out at work for lesbians, is the development of a scale, by O'Brien and Vest (1988), that is designed to measure beliefs about the consequences of employing homosexuals. The thirteen item scale derived from a principal components analysis was based on the responses of a sample of 182 male and female managers in

the United States. It includes items that refer to belief that homosexuals may 'undermine company morale'/'hurt the company image'/'make it difficult for employees to concentrate on their work'/'cause some employees to quit' (O'Brien & Vest, 1988, p.549). Sex of homosexual target does not appear to have been specified.

Thus, approaches to studying attitudes towards homosexuals have included personal constructs, Q methodology, and a variety of attempts to develop scales. However, certain issues regarding the study of attitudes towards homosexuals require further examination.

3.1.4 Some general theoretical considerations

Some of the more recent studies concerned with heterosexuals' attitudes towards homosexuals have considered aspects that have often been ignored, or perhaps dealt with inadequately, by earlier studies. Thus, attention has been focused on, for example, more precise definitions; different dimensions of attitudes; the function attitudes may serve; neglect of the social context in studies in this area; and sex differences regarding both subject and target.

Firstly then, there has been an attempt to define more precisely what is meant by 'attitudes towards homosexuals' and 'homophobia'. At the most basic level there is the question of what is meant by the terms 'homosexual' or 'homosexuality'. Plasek and Allard (1984), although concerned only with male homosexuality, put forward several points about research in the area of attitudes towards homosexuals that need consideration. They suggest that homosexuality has tended to be treated as a unitary phenomenon, and propose instead that homosexuality, as an object of attitudes, be analysed in three ways: as a person, a trait, and as collectivities and cultural objects. They also question the assumption of homosexuality as a "master status trait".

It may be appropriate to consider responses to homosexuality in terms of social distance. Gentry (1986) suggests that the term 'homophobia' has often been used incorrectly. In her study, Gentry chooses to use a modification of Weinberg's (1973) definition of homophobia, where the term refers to fear of being in close quarters with homosexuals. Instead of fear, Gentry looks at discomfort. In looking at perception of threat, Plasek and Allard (1984, p.26) suggest that "Many items measuring responses to homosexuality may be placed upon a continuum of social and psychological distance from the heterosexual respondent". Thus, they suggest, impingement into life space, threat to others, and

finally, threats to other components of culture, may be looked at. Further, they suggest, a distinction between 'ego-alien' or 'not-me' responses and those that are phobic should be made.

Discussing the problem of finding an operational definition of homophobia, Kitzynger (1987) suggests that

" - prejudice against homosexuals cannot be objectively defined. There exists only a range of different ideological positions, each positing its own definition of what constitutes a 'prejudiced' attitude towards homosexuals. People's definitions of what constitute 'favourable' (unprejudiced) or 'unfavourable' (prejudiced) attitudes depend heavily on their own opinions and beliefs".

(Kitzynger, 1987; p.156)

Thus, Kitzynger makes the point that it is only possible to define prejudice against homosexuals within the context of particular ideological frameworks. For example, attitudes perceived as 'favourable' from a liberal humanistic point of view, might be perceived in a different way from the perspective of traditional psychoanalysis.

In many studies of attitudes towards homosexuals, no distinction has been made between cognitive and affective dimensions. Plasek and Allard suggest that the emphasis has been on cognitive aspects, while emotional and behavioural elements have tended to be neglected. Also they suggest there is the problem of confounding of cognitive and affective dimensions, and the possibility that some 'cognitive' items are artifacts of affective predispositions. Similarly, Gentry (1986) points out that many previous studies in this area have failed to distinguish between opinions about homosexuality (cognitive evaluation) and reactions to homosexuality (affective response).

A further way of distinguishing between different kinds of attitudes toward homosexuals is suggested by Herek (1984a). He proposes a model based on a social psychological perspective which takes into account the functions the attitudes serve. Thus, he suggests the

attitudes may be experiential, defensive or symbolic. Experiential attitudes develop with generalizations based on a person's previous interaction with homosexuals. Defensive attitudes arise where a person copes with inner conflict or anxiety by projecting it onto homosexuals. Symbolic attitudes express abstract ideological concepts related to notions of self, and a person's social network and reference groups. Having developed a scale of 'Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men', Herek (1988) focused on the role of psychological defensiveness. This was conceptualized in three ways: firstly, on a psychodynamic basis; secondly, insecurity with own gender identity was thought to be associated with conforming to gender role; and thirdly, insecurity was hypothesised to lead to exaggeration of difference between self and a gay person. From a functional perspective, Herek (1988) suggests, differences between males and females may be understood within the context of cultural constructions of gender. Thus, for males, heterosexuality is important for affirming masculinity; for females, this may not be so important for gender identity.

Functions of attitudes towards homosexuals may be understood on individual and social or cultural levels. Forstein (1988) links sex differences in attitudes towards homosexuality with men's and women's feelings about penetration and issues of power. From a sociological perspective, attitudes towards homosexuality reflect stigmatization (Martin & Hetrick, 1988); and negative reactions towards lesbianism may be linked to its threat to male power, and men's fears of women's independence (Weitz, 1989). Weitz describes how lesbians and other groups of women existing independently from men, such as spinsters, widows and nuns, may be subject to stigmatization and punishment.

An issue that requires more investigation is the possible link between attitudes towards homosexuality and behaviour. Present research would seem to suggest that

behaviour towards homosexuals does reflect attitudes (e.g. Kite & Deaux, 1986; Gray, Russell & Blockley, 1991). Gray et al. found that help, in the form of responding to a request for change of a pound, was less likely to be given to a person (male or female) wearing a tee-shirt with a pro-gay slogan on it. From the United States there is evidence of violence towards lesbians and gay men. Herek (1989) looked at 'hate crimes' against lesbians and gay men, defined in terms of words or actions intended to harm or intimidate. He has suggested that surveys indicate over 90% of lesbians and gay men reporting verbal incidences, and approximately a quarter, physical attacks. A study by Comstock (1991) indicates lesbians and gay men are more often the victims of violence than people in the general population. (In this country, the police authorities have just agreed to monitor attacks on gay men and lesbians).

Further methodological/theoretical problems to which Plasek and Allard (1984) draw attention are, firstly, the assumption of stability of response in varying situations; and secondly, the way knowledge of a person's homosexuality is often taken for granted in questionnaire items, thus not taking into account that this kind of knowledge may form a continuum.

Social aspects of reactions to homosexuality may have been neglected in previous research. Plasek and Allard suggest previous studies have tended to examine individual reactions to homosexuality rather than the social process of reactions as would occur in group situations. Future studies they suggest should examine attitudes towards homosexuality within the different social contexts in which they arise.

Importantly, Plasek and Allard question the methods used to derive items for attitude to homosexuality scales. They emphasize the need for research in this area to be grounded within a model of the "social construction of reality" and point out the need to base

questionnaire items on qualitative investigation: "the failure to base the instruments on grounded observations of social reality brings into question the findings of all existing studies", (Plasek & Allard, 1984, p.32).

A further important methodological issue that is pointed out by both Herek (1984a) and Gentry (1986) is the need to specify whether the term 'homosexual' refers to gay men, or to lesbians, or to homosexuals of both sexes. Many previous studies have not specified this. Black and Stevenson (1984) found that 73% of male subjects and 37% of female subjects in their study reported that they had used the term 'homosexual' as primarily referring to males. All the other male subjects and 62% of the female subjects had used the term as referring to homosexuals of both sexes. Only one female subject had used the term 'homosexual' as referring primarily to female homosexuals. Within a survey on British Social Attitudes (Jowell, Witherspoon & Brook, 1990), while almost three quarters of the respondents reported understanding the term 'homosexual' as applying to either sex, one quarter reported interpreting the term as applying to men only. Gentry (1986) and Herek (1984a) point out that there may be some interaction between sex of subject and sex of target.

3.1.5 Attitudes towards homosexuals, sex differences and sex role

A number of quite recent studies investigate possible associations between attitudes towards homosexuals, gender, and sex role. These include investigations by Weinberger and Millham (1979), and Black and Stevenson (1984), on the relationship between attitudes toward homosexuality and self-reported sex role; a cross-cultural study by Lieblich and Friedman (1985); a study by Newman (1985) linking sex-role attitudes with attitudes towards lesbians; and a meta-analytic study on sex differences in attitudes towards

homosexuals by Kite (1984). More recently, sex differences in attitudes have been further investigated by Herek (1988), and Whitley (1988), the latter study focusing on possible interaction between sex of subject and kind of question asked. The issue of sex role in relationship to attitudes has been examined further by Whitley (1987). Thus, the main questions to be looked at here include whether there is a difference between the attitudes of males and females towards homosexuals; whether males and females may hold different attitudes towards male and female homosexuals; and whether self-reported sex role or sex-role attitudes may be associated with attitudes towards homosexuals.

The relationship between attitudes toward homosexuality and support of traditional sex roles was investigated by Weinberger and Millham (1979). They presented 117 male subjects and 150 female subjects with the Homosexuality Attitude Scale (HAS) of Millham, San Miguel and Kellogg (1976), the Sex-role Survey (SRS) of MacDonald (1974), and masculine and feminine traits from the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (Bem, 1974). A second-order factor analysis of the SRS and HAS factors yielded four orthogonal factors. The first factor reflected homophobic attitudes and accounted for just over 40% of the variance; the second factor accounted for almost 17% of the variance and represented "attitudes toward equality between the sexes"; the third factor, accounting for nearly 12% of the variance, represented preference for male homosexuals over female homosexuals; and the fourth factor, accounting for approximately 9% of variance, reflected beliefs that homosexuals show sex-role incongruent mannerisms.

Measurements on the HAS were not found by Weinberger and Millham to vary with sex of subject, apart from the items referring to preference for one sex of homosexual over the other. Here, subjects expressed a preference for opposite sex homosexuals rather than those of the

same sex. Weinberger and Millham suggest this preference is not part of the homophobic response pattern. It was also found that subjects who presented themselves as undifferentiated or incongruent with traditional sex roles were less negative in their attitudes towards sex role incongruence than subjects who presented themselves as androgynous or traditionally sex-typed. Weinberger and Millham conclude that the common element between homophobic responses and traditional gender characterizations lies in distinctions between masculinity and femininity rather than beliefs about sexual equality.

The relationship between self-reported sex-role characteristics and attitudes toward homosexuality was further investigated by Black and Stevenson (1984). As well as using a 30 item form of the Bem Sex-role Inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1981), they used a 16 item form of the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ; Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1974). 62 male subjects and 65 female subjects completed the Attitudes Toward Homosexuality Scale of Millham, San Miguel and Kellogg (1976), the BSRI and the PAQ. Gender of homosexual person was not specified for completion of the attitudes scale, but subjects were asked afterwards whether they had been thinking mainly of male or female homosexuals, or of both. Attitudes of female subjects were not found to vary with whether they perceived 'homosexual' as referring to males only or to both sexes. Attitudes of male subjects were more negative where the term was perceived as referring to males than where it was perceived as referring to both sexes. It was found that females with more instrumental traits tended to be more accepting of homosexuals, but males with more expressive traits tended to be more rejecting. Cross sex-typed females were found to be more accepting of homosexuals than sex-typed females, but, in contrast to the findings of Weinberger and Millham, the undifferentiated females

were found to be less accepting of homosexuality, while androgynous females were more accepting. Cross sex-typed males were found to be less accepting than sex-typed males, but findings concerning androgynous and undifferentiated males were similar to those of Weinberger and Millham.

A further perspective on the relationships between attitudes toward homosexuality, gender, and sex role is provided in a cross-cultural study by Lieblich and Friedman (1985). Subjects were 65 American students and 105 Israeli students, approximately half of whom were male and half female. Instruments presented to the subjects were the Attitude Towards Homosexuality Scale of Macdonald and Games (1974); the Sex-role Survey of Macdonald and Games (1984), and the Social Desirability Scale of Crowne and Marlowe (1960). Findings indicated the Israeli subjects to have a more negative attitude than the American subjects towards homosexuals, particularly regarding male homosexuals. Men were found to have more negative attitudes than women towards both male and female homosexuals, and they also showed greater sex-role polarization. Male and female subjects showed more negative attitudes towards male homosexuality than towards lesbianism. Israeli subjects showed greater sex role polarization than Americans. Findings were not accounted for by social desirability. Lieblich and Friedman suggest their results support the "sex-role confusion theory" put forward by Macdonald and Games (1974). In this, homosexuality is seen as a sex-role deviation leading to confusion within ordered reality. Homophobia may then be viewed as a way of maintaining the distinction between males and females, and would increase with polarization of sex roles. Since findings are correlational however, Lieblich and Friedman point out, causal direction cannot be inferred.

Another study that provides some information about the relationships between gender and sex-role attitudes

with attitudes towards homosexuals is that of Newman (1985). Generally, she is concerned with the development of heterosexuals' attitudes toward lesbians. 114 male and 183 female subjects completed questionnaires including an attitudes toward lesbians scale developed by Newman, and the Attitudes Toward Women Scale (Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1973). A principal component factor analysis indicated the three main dimensions of the attitudes towards lesbians scale were "1) attitudes toward the normalcy of lesbians as socially responsible, 2) attitudes toward the morality of a lesbian sexuality and 3) beliefs in gender role stereotypes of lesbians", (Newman, 1985, p.64-66). No significant sex differences were found overall on the Attitudes Toward Lesbians Scale. However, sex-role attitudes, measured by the Attitudes Toward Women Scale, was found to be the most important of five predictors of attitudes toward lesbians, using a path analysis. Multiple regression indicated that for males sex-role attitudes were the only significant contributor, but for females, sex-role attitudes, parental attitudes, authoritarian attitudes and education, and media all contributed significantly. However, Newman points out, the path analysis did not account for 57% of the variance in attitudes toward lesbians, and therefore some other important independent variables need to be included in a future model.

A meta-analytic review of sex differences in attitudes toward homosexuals has been carried out by Kite (1984). She attempted to find all the studies that had looked at sex differences in attitudes toward homosexuals, where subjects had been predominantly heterosexual and English speaking. Glass's d statistic was used as an estimator of effect size. Independent variables considered were sex of author, sex of target, question type (firstly, general or concerning personal anxiety, and secondly, number of questions used), sample size, and year of publication. A small effect was found,

indicating that men's attitudes towards homosexuals are more negative than women's attitudes. Sample size, publication year, and possibly sex of target, may account for much of the variance. Few studies were found that provided information regarding sex differences and sex of target, and Kite suggests that if such information were available, it might be found to account for much of the variance. Thus, Kite suggests that the findings of this study that males are more negative towards homosexuals than females may be dependent on an interaction between sex of target and sex of subject.

Analysing data from the most recent report on British Social Attitudes (Jowell, Witherspoon & Brook, 1990), Wellings and Wadsworth (1990) indicated that the 68% of respondents who perceived homosexual relations as always or mostly wrong was composed of 72% of male respondents and 65% of female respondents.

Findings on sex differences remain varied. Recent studies have indicated that males express more negative attitudes than females, particularly towards gay men (Herek, 1988); but that while male attitudes are more negative than female attitudes, correlates of negative attitudes are similar for males and females (Kurdek, 1988). However, female subjects have been found to rate female homosexuals more negatively than male subjects do, while male subjects rated male homosexuals more negatively than female subjects (Whitley, 1988); and correspondingly for both male and female subjects, there was greater discomfort towards same-sex homosexuals than towards opposite-sex homosexuals (Gentry, 1987). Whitley (1988) investigated sex differences on four types of item (contact with same-sex homosexuals; contact with other-sex homosexuals; responses to homosexual advances; and social roles of homosexuals) and concluded sex differences in attitudes do depend on the type of question asked. A further study by Jensen, Gambles and Olsen (1988) did not find sex to be a good predictor of

attitudes.

Recent findings concerning the relationship of sex role and attitudes towards homosexuality contribute further to understanding in this area. Tolerant attitudes may be associated with perception of self as not fitting a male or female stereotype (Herek, 1988), and with less traditional sex-role beliefs (Whitley, 1987). In Whitley's (1987) study, the relationship of three sex-role measures with four attitude measures was investigated. Sex-role variables related to beliefs, self-concept and behaviour. Attitude measures concerned attitudes towards male homosexuals, towards female homosexuals, responses to homosexual advances and feelings, and attitudes towards the social role of homosexuals. Sex-role variables were found by Whitley to account for an average of twenty percent of the variation across the four attitude variables for women, and eleven percent of the variation for men. Whitley concludes that the strength of the relationship between attitudes and sex-role beliefs is a function of both sex of subject and operational definition of attitude.

In summary, it can be seen that there may be differences between the attitudes of males and females towards homosexuals, and that men's and women's attitudes may vary with gender of homosexual target. Further, differences in attitudes may be associated with sex role; and sex-role attitudes may contribute towards variation in attitudes towards lesbians. However, looking at the evidence from the previous studies, it would seem that the precise relationship between attitudes, gender and sex role have yet to be determined.

3.1.6 Possibilities of changing attitudes

The question of whether negative attitudes towards homosexuals may be changed is important to consider. Laner and Laner (1980) suggest that dislike of lesbians might tend to be reduced through heterosexually defined

conventionality of style. Larsen, Reed and Hoffman (1980) suggest the roots of homophobia may be in the fundamental insecurities of individuals, and education may fail to induce more tolerance if such negative attitudes are serving ego defensive functions. Instead, they suggest, attention might be directed towards the institutions providing normative support to these attitudes. Herek (1984a) also discusses possibilities for attitude change related to the functions of attitudes. Symbolic attitudes, which relate to notions of self, and a persons social network, might be changed most effectively from negative to positive through "appeal to the values consistent with the self-concept of individuals and supported by their important reference groups" suggests Herek (1984a, p.13). Further, positive interaction with lesbians and gay men would be useful for changing both symbolic and experiential attitudes. The most difficult attitudes to change, Herek suggests, are defensive ones. For those holding this type of attitude, contact with homosexuals may increase anxiety.

An attempt to change homophobic attitudes among college students is reported by Serdahely and Ziemba (1984). Previous observations regarding responses of students to a unit on homosexuality, within an undergraduate human sexuality course, had indicated that homophobia of the class appeared to increase rather than decrease with having gay speakers talking to the class. A course including reading, role-playing, and discussion of common myths about homosexuality was introduced instead. One of the authors formed the impression that homophobia was reduced. This was tested by Serdahely and Ziemba using a modified version of the Hudson and Ricketts (1980) Index of Homophobia in which higher scores indicated greater homophobia. While the 41 treatment group subjects participated in the course on homosexuality, the 47 control group subjects did not receive any instruction regarding homosexuality.

Homophobia scores for subjects who scored above the median on pretesting, decreased after completing the course, in comparison with scores of control group subjects. There was no significant difference between treatment and control group homophobia scores for those subjects who had scored below the median on pretesting. There was also no significant increase in homophobia among these 'below the median' subjects on completion of the course.

An evaluation of intervention strategies designed to modify attitudes towards homosexuality has been carried out by Stevenson (1988). He reviewed thirteen studies, eight of which looked at attitude change following presentation of lectures or educational materials within courses on human sexuality. (The studies included those of Larsen, Reed & Hoffman, 1980, and Serdahely & Ziemba, 1984). Stevenson concludes that education may change attitudes towards homosexuality, although the change may be limited in extent and the period it lasts for. The specific qualities of presentations leading to greater tolerance in attitudes were, however, unclear. Stevenson notes some methodological problems including volunteer samples, mainly consisting of students choosing to take human sexuality courses who may be more tolerant; and studies in which sex of target and/or sex of subject were not specified.

Overall, it would seem then that it may be possible to change attitudes towards homosexuals, but the functions the attitudes are serving need to be considered, and different strategies for the different types of attitude are likely to be appropriate.

3.1.7 Some current issues

Issues pertinent to the context of coming out during the 1980's, and of continuing relevance in the 1990's, include AIDS; attempts by local councils to improve the situation for gay men and lesbians; media presentation of

homosexuality; educational provision; laws relating to homosexuality in this country (in particular, Section 28 of the Local Government Act, 1988); comparison of the situation in the United Kingdom with Europe; and general attitudes towards homosexuality.

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), a new and fatal disease, occurs most frequently in the West among gay or bisexual men (Richardson, 1987a). This link between AIDS and the gay community obviously has implications for attitudes towards homosexuals. Ruse (1988) fears a backlash against homosexuals. This would affect the coming out process.

Although lesbians are considered a very low-risk group for AIDS, Richardson (1987a) points out that lesbians are affected by AIDS in a number of ways. She suggests that "The main impact of AIDS on the lesbian community relates to the way in which AIDS has been seen, wrongly, as a 'gay disease' and the way in which lesbians have been categorised together with gay men", (Richardson, 1987a, p.55). Thus, Richardson points out that lesbians may be affected by the increase in anti-gay hostility and discrimination that has arisen from ignorance and hysteria surrounding the issue of AIDS. She suggests that "Many lesbians have been insulted and threatened in connection with AIDS" (Richardson, 1987a, p.56), and also gives the example of a case in the United States where a judge stopped a lesbian mother from visiting her children in case she gave them AIDS.

This possibility of a connection between attitudes towards lesbians and issues of AIDS is given some backing by data from the most recent report on British Social Attitudes (Jowell, Witherspoon & Brook, 1990). Almost two thirds of respondents to the survey perceived lesbians as greatly, or quite a lot, at risk from AIDS. Wellings and Wadsworth (1990) point out this proportion is an increase on that found in the previous report.

During the mid-1980's there were some positive

contributions made towards gay and lesbian rights by the Greater London Council. These included one publication that made recommendations over a wide range of issues affecting lesbians' and gay men's everyday lives: language, media coverage, violence, education, work, housing, health, social services and the law (Changing the World: A London Charter for Gay and Lesbian Rights). A second publication, from the GLC's Women's Committee looked specifically at heterosexism and lesbians, covering a range of issues including employment, health, the media, housing, lesbian mothers and the law, and education; and made recommendations within each of these areas. These GLC publications may be seen as reflecting the more tolerant attitudes towards lesbians and gay men of the early 1980's.

Overall during the 1980's, there has been greater availability of literature about lesbians, and books relevant to lesbian or feminist issues, with the growth of women's publishing companies (e.g. Virago; The Women's Press). In contrast to earlier periods, there are now books directly relevant to life as a lesbian in this country (e.g. Trenchard, 1989).

Generally, the treatment of homosexuality by the press has not been positive. Armitage, Dickey and Sharples (1987) report on a survey of 254 publications monitored for lesbian/gay content during a fortnight in November 1985. These included daily and Sunday newspapers, local/regional newspapers, women's magazines, and general interest magazines too. Treatment of homosexuality was generally negative with most publications displaying heterosexism (defined broadly by Armitage et al. to cover passive discrimination and omission, as well as active discrimination and homophobia). Overall, approximately a quarter of the total 475 items were perceived as to some extent positive; just under a half, negative; and the remainder neutral. However, when left-wing and alternative

publications were removed, leaving only the 'mainstream' publications, only 15% were rated as positive, and over half were rated as negative. Few of the items concerned lesbians only (approximately a quarter were mainly about AIDS). Reflections of homosexuality in the media obviously affect both lesbians' perceptions in coming out, and heterosexuals' attitudes.

Education also needs to be seen as fundamentally important to issues arising within the coming out process. The position for lesbian and gay persons within the school education system in this country has been described by The Gay Teachers' Group (1987). This provides illustrations of gay and lesbian teachers' and students' experiences, as well as describing local government and union positions. A major section focuses on school policy; the curriculum; gays and the pastoral system; and books on homosexuality in school libraries. Harris (1990) has suggested that English departments within schools could play an important part in the introduction of issues of sexuality into the school curriculum, and in defusing homophobia. He suggests possible strategies for this at both primary and secondary levels; and provides examples of schemes of work for 15/16 year old students. Comely (1991) has found that Educational Psychology Services in this country neglect gay and lesbian issues. Some possibilities for positive intervention within school systems have been illustrated by Rofes (1989) who describes two education programmes that were set up in the United States. 'Project 10' in Los Angeles provided counselling, training for school staff, and support services, allowing gay and lesbian young people to continue within the mainstream education service. The Harvey Milk School in New York was an attempt to provide a separate school for gay and lesbian young people. This latter approach raises some serious questions on the dangers of creating a ghetto; possible neglect of

education about homosexuality in mainstream schools; and reduced contact of heterosexual students with gay students.

A reflection of current attitudes towards the gay and lesbian community, and education issues, in this country was provided by the passage through Parliament of Section 28 of the Local Government Act, 1988. After much debate in both the House of Commons (e.g. Hansard, 15 Dec.1987 & 9 Mar.1988) and the House of Lords (e.g. Hansard, 16 & 17 Feb. 1988), Section 28 prohibiting local authorities from 'intentionally promoting homosexuality' came into force as law at the end of May 1988. One of its key points was that schools should not teach that homosexuality was acceptable as 'a pretended family relationship'. As well as teaching, it was thought that the Section might affect gay and lesbian counselling services, provision of library books concerned with homosexuality, and the arts. Legally, however, it seems the effects will be less than was originally thought. Thus, Geoffrey Robertson, QC, in the Guardian newspaper (1.6.88) suggested that Section 28's main effect may be as a symbol of prejudice.

The Annual General Meeting of the National Council for Civil Liberties, 1988, condemned Section 28 as a direct threat to the civil liberties of lesbians and gay men. It suggested the Section would restrict equal opportunities initiatives; raise doubts regarding the legality of providing local authority services for lesbians and gay men; and censor information available in school classrooms, libraries, and in the arts. Additionally, the AGM suggested Section 28 will increase prejudice and encourage bigotry.

It has recently been suggested by Tatchell (1990) that the United Kingdom has more laws discriminating against homosexuals than any other country in Europe, and that more lesbians and gay men are prosecuted here under such laws than in other European countries. A cross

cultural study of attitudes towards homosexuality was carried out on a large sample (N=4623) obtained through representative sampling, in England, Germany and Spain, by Jensen, Gambles and Olsen (1988). They found attitudes in all these countries were disapproving rather than approving. In England and Germany, just over forty percent of subjects perceived homosexuality as never justified, and in Spain, 56% of subjects perceived homosexuality in this way. Overall, less than twenty percent of subjects' responses indicated approval.

During the mid-1980's, there was evidence to suggest that attitudes towards homosexuals became more negative. From the survey of British Social Attitudes (Jowell, Witherspoon & Brook, 1986), Airey and Brook reported an increase in proportion of sample responding that homosexual relationships are always or mostly wrong, from 62% in 1983, to 69% in 1985. In the 1985 survey, 59% of subjects responded that homosexual relationships were always wrong, and 10%, that homosexual relationships were mostly wrong. The most recent British Social Attitudes survey (Jowell, Witherspoon & Brook, 1990) indicates that 68% of respondents to the 1989 survey perceived sexual relations between adults of the same sex as always or mostly wrong. Wellings & Wadsworth (1990) describe the hardening of attitudes towards homosexuality between 1985 and 1987, and the change of direction in attitudes between 1987 and 1989, bringing the level of disapproval back to that of the mid-1980's, but not to that of the early 1980's.

3.1.8 Association of attitudes towards homosexuals with stereotyping

It might be expected that there be some link between negative attitudes towards homosexuality and stereotyping of homosexuals. The findings of Walker and Antaki (1986) suggest that sexual orientation may be used to cognitively represent information about people, by those

with negative attitudes towards homosexuality. Walker and Antaki looked at errors in recalling who said what in a discussion, where subjects had been informed that half the participants were homosexual and half heterosexual. It was found that subjects with the most negative attitudes towards homosexuals tended to confuse homosexuals with each other, and heterosexuals with each other. They did not tend to confuse homosexuals with heterosexuals. Subjects with the least negative attitudes did not show this pattern of recall errors.

Browning (1984) sees negative reactions to homosexuals as related to institutions of social control, medical, political, religious, economic etc., which have tended to support a patriarchal social structure. She is concerned with how traditional biological and psychoanalytic theories of lesbianism have contributed towards creation and maintenance of stereotypes, and discusses the inadequacies of these theories. She presents two alternative theoretical approaches, symbolic interactionist and feminist, both of which she suggests are suitable for understanding societal attitudes towards lesbianism. Looking at the impact of theories of lesbianism on attitudes, Browning suggests the traditional theories have focused on aetiology. Lesbianism has been conceptualized as a homogeneous construct, thus involving overgeneralization. "It is this assumption of homogeneity that has contributed to the formation of stereotypes and misconceptions about lesbians", (Browning, 1984, p.25). Since the development of heterosexuality is not examined by these approaches, she points out, there is an implicit assumption of it being 'natural' in contrast to homosexuality not being natural. Thus, Browning suggests the traditional theories have described categories that "define" the lesbian and serve as a basis for stereotypes. These include 'confused gender identity', emphasis on the sexual aspects of lesbianism, and viewing sexual

orientation as permanent.

The issue of stereotyping is of major importance in considering attitudes towards homosexuals. It is likely that in the coming out to others situation, both the lesbian and the heterosexual person may be aware of stereotypes within society. Stereotypes may also play an important part in coming out to self. In considering homosexual stereotypes, the notion of sex role is particularly important.

3.2 STEREOTYPING

3.2.1 Definitions and the nature of stereotyping

Allport (1954, p.191) defines a stereotype as "an exaggerated belief associated with a category." It may be favourable or unfavourable and it serves to rationalise conduct towards the category. He sees stereotypes functioning firstly as justificatory devices for accepting or rejecting groups, and secondly as selective or screening devices for simplicity of thinking and perception. He points out stereotypes may develop from sharpening facts and overgeneralization of facts, or they may be completely unsupported by facts. Thus a stereotype does not need to be completely false. However, Allport (1954, p.190) points out that "The possession of stereotypes may interfere with even the simplest rational judgements." Stereotypes are sustained, Allport suggests, by selective perception and selective forgetting. Secord and Backman (1964) provide a further perspective on the nature of stereotyping. They suggest that stereotyping may be seen as the "action of assigning attributes to a person solely on the basis of the class or category to which he belongs", (Secord & Backman, 1964, p.67). Stereotyping, they suggest, has three characteristics. Firstly there is categorization of persons, and a member of the category may be judged to have all the attributes associated with the category. Secondly, there is consensus on attributed traits, and thirdly, there is discrepancy between attributed and actual traits. They further suggest that the inaccuracy of a social stereotype arises partly from the notion within its definition of every member of a class possessing the traits of that class.

Tajfel (1981, p.132) suggests that stereotypes "introduce simplicity and order where there is complexity and nearly random variation". But Tajfel points out that the problem with stereotypes lies in the relation between the discontinuous classifications and the attributes that

vary on continuous dimensions. An example of the former would be nationality and of the latter height. If all people of one nationality were actually taller than those of a second nationality, class membership could be predicted from that dimension, or value on the dimension from class membership. Such correlations however will vary from a fully predictable relationship to no relationship. Tajfel describes how characteristics or personal traits may be treated as dimensions, and how such dimensions are associated, subjectively, with group membership. Where a person has little specific knowledge of an individual, there will be a tendency to ascribe characteristics to the individual from knowledge of class membership. Tajfel further suggests that supporting evidence for the class characteristics will be easier to find than contradictory evidence; and in ascribing the behaviour as a whole of group members to assumed class characteristics, there is not likely to be much obvious negative feedback. Arising from the tendency to simplify in order to cope, Tajfel (1981, p.133) suggests two consequences: "when a classification is correlated with a continuous dimension, there will be a tendency to exaggerate the differences on that dimension between items which fall into distinct classes, and to minimize these differences within each of the classes".

Rigidity and resistance to contradictory information is suggested by Tajfel to be one of the most prominent features of hostile stereotypes. The ambiguity of complex social situations makes it easier to ignore contradictory information. Also, a person will have an emotional investment in preserving distinctions between his/her own group and the other group, and maintaining the stereotype will be self-rewarding.

Individual and social functions of stereotypes are described by Tajfel (1981). Individual functions include cognitive functions whereby stimuli are systematized or ordered through categorization, and defence or

preservation of individual values, with stereotypes functioning to protect the existing system of social values. Social functions of stereotyping include creation and maintenance both of group ideologies and of differentiation between social groups. Considering these social functions, Tajfel discusses their relation to stereotype content and points out that psychological analysis is insufficient by itself and power relations between groups need to be taken into account. Further, Tajfel is concerned with the links between the social and individual functions of stereotyping. He suggests research on this might be through either of two approaches. Firstly, he suggests a social identity perspective which may link the social functions of differentiation and justification with individual functions. Secondly, he suggests an approach involving the notion of social attribution as discussed by Hewstone and Jaspars (1981), linking the social functions of justification and causality with individual functions. These approaches would begin with the social functions to reach the individual functions.

Looking at the question of why particular stereotypes exist, Jones, Farina, Hastorf, Markus, Miller and Scott (1984) distinguish three approaches to study of this issue. Firstly, there is the sociocultural perspective where it is suggested that beliefs about others are acquired through information received from others, as well as direct experience. Beliefs about minority groups may be transmitted by parents, the media, and other agents of socialization. Secondly, there is the motivational approach where it is suggested that stereotypes may be motivated by psychological and social needs. The psychodynamic perspective, or the "just world" hypothesis of Lerner (1980) provide examples here. Finally, there is the cognitive approach to the issue. Here, it has been suggested that both the process of stereotyping and the content of stereotypes may be seen

as the result of cognitive functioning (Hamilton, 1981).

Jones et al. (1984) also consider why false beliefs persist. From the sociocultural perspective, such beliefs may be seen to persist as the conditions from which they initially arose continue. Taking a motivational approach, false beliefs may be seen to persist through their psychological importance to the individual holding them. Cognitive approaches suggest that biased information-processing, originating within basic features of cognitive functioning, leads to stereotype persistence.

Considering whether stereotypes may be changed with disconfirming evidence, Hewstone (1989b), taking a mainly cognitive perspective, also considers motivational and affective influences. He suggests cognitive 'escape routes' such as discounting need to be cut off. Hewstone concludes by suggesting that the disconfirming information needs to be linked to typical members of the outgroup; the perceivers need to be highly motivated; and intergroup anxiety should be low.

Taking a historical perspective, a vivid description of how a stereotype may be formed, and then the reluctance of people to question its validity, has been illustrated by Cohn (1976) in his examination of the witch hunts in Europe from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries.

3.2.2 Methodological and theoretical issues

It is important to consider the methods used to investigate stereotypes. Much stereotype research has used the checklist approach introduced by Katz and Braly in 1933 (described in Katz & Braly, 1958), and many of these studies are concerned with ethnic stereotypes. Katz and Braly constructed a check-list of 84 descriptive adjectives of ten national and racial groups from characteristics suggested by 25 subjects supplemented by characteristics from literature. A hundred subjects were

then asked to select words from this list to describe each nationality/race in turn, adding any characteristics they thought necessary, and finally choosing the five words thought to be most typical for each group. A further group of subjects rated the adjectives according to desirability, and finally another group ranked the national/racial groups according to preference for association with them. Agreement was found among subjects on characteristics attributed to groups as well as preferential ranking. Katz and Braly (1958, p.46) suggest "In fact the conception of "foreign" groups is so stereotyped that it cannot be based upon actual contact with or direct knowledge of the groups in question." Clarity of the stereotyped picture however was not found to be related to degree of prejudice. Desirability ratings were in agreement with preferential ranking. Katz and Braly (1958, p.46) conclude "Racial prejudice is thus a generalized set of stereotypes of a high degree of consistency which includes emotional responses to race names, a belief in typical characteristics associated with race names, and an evaluation of such typical traits."

Later studies found subjects more reluctant to make stereotyped generalizations. Gilbert (1951, p.252) reports such reluctance especially where there had been little contact with the ethnic groups: "Some students regard it as almost an insult to their intelligence to be required to make such generalizations, while others do so with considerable reservations." He suggests this may be due to greater popularity of social science courses; changes in the student population to include a greater cross-section of American youth, and stereotyped characterizations gradually disappearing from the media. Karlins, Coffman and Walters (1969, p.1) also found subjects "protested the unreasonableness of ethnic generalizations" although in contrast to Gilbert's finding of a fading effect, they found stereotypes highly

uniform.

Looking at the methodology of stereotype research, Ehrlich and Rinehart (1965) examined the use of a stereotype checklist as opposed to an open-ended form of questionnaire in research on ethnic stereotypes. They found that more traits were assigned and greater consensus was shown by subjects using a checklist. Also, it was found that different listings of traits were produced by the different methods. Ehrlich and Rinehart suggest that the main deficiencies of an 'inadequate' answer format are failing to elicit new answer options and tending to elicit "meaningless" answers. Further where check list scores have been used as an index of prejudice, Ehrlich and Rinehart suggest there may have been a bias towards indicating more prejudice or intergroup hostility than actually exists.

A modified conceptual framework for ethnic stereotypes is proposed by Brigham (1971). He suggests that "much of the ambiguity, both conceptual and empirical, in this area may be reduced if stereotypes are regarded as generalizations that are considered as unjustified by the person who affixes the label" (Brigham, 1971, p.15). Thus he defines an ethnic stereotype as "a generalization made about an ethnic group, concerning a trait attribution, which is considered to be unjustified by an observer" (Brigham, 1971, p.31). Brigham points out these assumptions of unjustifiableness need to be made explicit by researchers.

3.2.3 Sex role and sex-role stereotyping

Some previous studies have indicated that sex-role typifications are important in stereotyping of homosexuals (e.g. Taylor, 1983).

Sex Role

A useful distinction to make is between 'sex', the biological division of male and female; and 'gender', the socially constructed notions of femininity and masculinity. Deaux and Kite (1987), for example, have used such a distinction in discussing 'gender belief systems' which concern beliefs and opinions about men and women, including attitudes towards appropriate roles for women and men, and stereotyping. The terms 'sex' and 'gender', however, have not been distinguished between in many previous studies, and have often been used interchangeably.

A simple definition of the term 'sex role' is provided by Howells (1986, p.268) who suggests it refers to "those behaviours understood or expected to characterize males and females within a society". Similarly, Al-Issa (1987, p.155) suggests "Gender role refers to social expectations about how males and females should behave".

Mednick and Weissman (1975) discussing the psychological study of sex roles point to problems arising from the vagueness of constructs. They suggest that evidence indicates masculinity and femininity are not opposites, and should be conceptualized independently. An example of masculinity and femininity conceptualized as independent entities is provided by Bem (1974).

An interesting conceptualization of sex role is provided by Block (1984). She does not see development of sexual identity in traditional terms of achieving masculinity or femininity, but instead sees it as "the earning of a sense of self that includes a recognition of gender secure enough to permit the individual to manifest human qualities that our society, until now, has labeled unmanly or unwomanly", (Block, 1984, p.1). Sex role, Block defines, as the qualities understood by an individual to characterise males or females, and she sees

biological and cultural factors interacting and mediated by cognitive and ego functions in this. Underlying Block's conceptualization of sex role development are Loevinger's hierarchical model of ego development and Bakan's notion of two fundamental modalities, agency and communion, where "Agency is concerned with the organism as an individual and manifests itself in self-protection, self-assertion, and self-expansion" and "Communion ... is descriptive of the individual organism as it exists in some larger organism of which it is part and manifests itself in the sense of being at one with other organisms", (Block, 1984, p.5-6). Block suggests that in the highest developmental stage, there is integration of the two modalities. Further, she points out that the socialization process, the internalization of values, has a differing effect on male and female personality development, broadening sex-role definitions and behavioural options for men and narrowing them for women. Therefore if the goal of society is seen as encouragement of personal maturity, Block suggests conventional sex role needs redefining and socialization practices need changing.

Sex role, it has been seen, may be viewed from a number of differing perspectives. Certain of these views have formed the basis for attempts at measurement.

Measurement of Sex Role

Instruments designed to measure masculinity-femininity or sex-role stereotypes include the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (Bem, 1974), the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1975), and a Stereotype Questionnaire (Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz & Vogel, 1970).

The Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI), described by Bem (1974), includes independent masculinity and femininity scales each based on twenty personality characteristics selected on the basis of sex-typed social desirability

rather than on differential endorsement by male and female subjects. Using the BSRI a person may be characterized as masculine, feminine or androgynous where androgyny is a function of the difference in endorsement of the masculine and feminine personality characteristics. In response to arguments in favour of distinguishing among those classified as androgynous, between those who scored high on both masculinity and femininity, and those who scored low on both, Bem(1977) concludes the distinction would seem to be warranted. She found significant differences between the low-low scorers and high-high scorers with the former group lower on self esteem, less responsive towards a kitten, and male subjects reporting less self-disclosure. Significant differences were not found between the two groups however for a number of other scales including Internal-External Locus of Control (Rotter, 1966), and the Attitudes Toward Women Scale (Spence & Helmreich, 1972). Bem (1977) concludes that those who score highly on both masculinity and femininity may be described as androgynous and those with low scores on both, as undifferentiated, but she points out that the two groups are similar in not being sex typed. Further Bem(1977) suggests where possible, analysis of data should avoid categorization of individual subjects, as valuable information regarding subjects' actual masculinity and femininity scores is lost. Instead, multiple regression techniques should be used, which retain information on actual scores, and make it possible to examine independent effects of masculinity and femininity.

The androgynous personality was seen by Bem (1975, p.209) as necessary for "fully effective and healthy human functioning". Further, she makes three suggestions for 'a liberated sexual identity': sexual preference should be ignored; sex roles abolished; and gender should "move from figure to ground" (Bem, 1975, p.223). Bem's views on androgyny became modified in further studies

(e.g. Bem, 1977; Bem, 1981a: to be discussed later). The concept of androgyny is based on a number of assumptions (e.g. see Cook, 1985) which later studies have focused upon and criticised.

Bem (1979) responds to critiques of the BSRI by Pedhazur and Tetenbaum (1979) and Locksley and Colten (1979) concerning methodological issues and the concept of androgyny. She suggests here that the concept of androgyny contains an inner contradiction and that when androgyny becomes a reality within a culture, its concept is transcended. Further, Bem (1981b) responding to Spence and Helmreich (1981) suggests that empirical studies indicate the BSRI taps different things for different people rather than only instrumental and expressive traits. Thus, it may be tapping instrumental and expressive traits for non-sex typed individuals, but sex-typed individuals will be responding to the masculine or feminine connotations of the items. A multidimensional view of masculinity and femininity rather than Bem's unitary perspective has been argued for by Archer (1989), but he has pointed out that multidimensional and unidimensional views of gender attributes are not mutually exclusive (Archer, 1990). Further, Archer (1989, 1990) has suggested the potential usefulness of taking a situation-dependent perspective, incorporating the ideas of Deaux and Major (1987). Archer (1989) has been criticized by McCreary (1990) who suggests investigation is needed of conceptual, as well as psychometric, limitations of gender role dimensions.

Rosenkrantz, Vogel, Bee, Broverman and Broverman (1968) developed a Stereotype Questionnaire which is described briefly in Broverman et al. (1970) and provided a basis for the Personal Attributes Questionnaire developed by Spence, Helmreich and Stapp (1974). The original Stereotype Questionnaire of Rosenkrantz et al. consisted of 122 bipolar items each describing a particular behaviour trait or characteristic, and with

one typically masculine pole and one typically feminine pole. 41 of the items were classified as stereotypic, since agreement of 70% or over was found on which poles characterized which sex.

The development of the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ) from the Sex-role Stereotype Questionnaire (SRSQ) of Rosenkrantz et al. (1968) is described by Spence, Helmreich and Stapp (1974, 1975). Supplementing the 122 items of the SRSQ with 16 of their own items, one sample of male and female subjects was instructed to rate the typical adult male and female; another sample was instructed to rate the typical college student, and a third sample, to rate the ideal male and female. All subjects then rated themselves on the items. Spence et al. then selected 55 of the 138 items to form the PAQ. These were items for which significant stereotypes had been found for both male and female subjects in the typical adult and student conditions.

Three subscales were formed from 54 of the 55 PAQ items: 23 items were assigned to a male-valued scale, 18 to a female-valued scale, and 13 to a sex-specific scale. Male-valued items were those for which mean ratings of ideal male and ideal female were towards the stereotypic masculine pole, and female-valued items were those for which mean ratings of ideal male and ideal female were towards the stereotypic feminine pole. For sex-specific items, ratings of the ideal male were towards the masculine pole, and ratings of the ideal female, towards the feminine pole. Female-valued items appeared to mainly reflect expressive characteristics; male-valued items, instrumental characteristics; and the sex-specific items, a mixture of expressive and instrumental. Intercorrelations of the three subscales suggest masculinity and femininity to be positively related, and possibly orthogonal, rather than bipolar and negatively correlated. Their findings, Spence et al. suggest, support "the conceptualization of masculinity and

femininity as a dualism: each a separate, socially desirable component present in both sexes, though typically in different degrees", (Spence et al., 1975, p.38). However, in contrast, the sex-specific scale appears to correspond more closely to a bipolar model of masculinity and femininity. Spence and Helmreich (1978) refer to the sex-specific scale as the M-F (Masculinity-Femininity) scale as they suggest this better indicates the bipolar nature of the scale.

A median split on data from male and female subjects combined, for both male-valued and female-valued scales, was carried out by Spence et al. (1974). This gave classification of subjects into four groups: low masculine and low feminine; low masculine and high feminine; high masculine and low feminine; and high masculine and high feminine. Self-esteem was found to be highest for those scoring high on both masculinity and femininity, and lowest for those scoring low on both scales. Spence et al. (1974) suggest the data indicate the merits of conceiving masculinity and femininity as separate dimensions, and further, of taking into account their absolute as well as relative values in considering androgyny. Subjects scoring high on both masculinity and femininity are described as 'androgynous' by Spence et al. (1975), while subjects scoring low on the two dimensions are described as 'undifferentiated'.

A short version of the PAQ, consisting of eight items from each of the three subscales, is presented by Spence et al. (1974), and used by Spence and Helmreich (1978). Correlations between the short form scores and full scale scores were found to be .93 for both the male-valued and female-valued subscales, and .91 for the sex-specific subscale, (Spence & Helmreich, 1978).

Problems of methodology and conception concerning the notion of psychological androgyny are considered by Taylor and Hall (1982). They use a two way analysis of variance model to look at androgyny and point out that

Bem's (1974) conception corresponds to an interaction hypothesis, while Spence, Helmreich and Stapp's (1975) corresponds to a main effects hypothesis. Further, Taylor and Hall suggest that psychological well being is predicted by masculinity rather than by androgyny, and point out the importance of interpretation for feminists attempting to develop strategies for change based on research findings.

In a comparison of the BSRI with the PAQ and the De Cecco-Shively Social Sex-Role Inventory (DSI), Smith (1983) found the BSRI and PAQ to agree more closely with each other than with the DSI. Further, Hungerford and Sobolew-Shubin (1987) investigated the values of the PAQ, BSRI and Storm's Sex-Role Identity Questionnaire (SSRIQ; Storms, 1979) in predicting masculine and feminine self-schematic processing. These predictive values were measured in terms of response latencies to, and endorsement of, self-descriptive phrases. Controls were included for social desirability, syllable length etc. The PAQ was found to be the best predictor of schematic processing, while gender and the SSRIQ were not found to predict schematic processing. Findings also indicated partial support for Storms's (1979) suggestion that same-sex-typed attributes are influenced by sex-role identity, but opposite-sex-typed attributes are not.

The BSRI and PAQ are important approaches to measuring sex role and sex-role stereotyping. The notion of psychological androgyny, however, must be seen as conceptually limited.

Some further perspectives on sex-role stereotyping

Further aspects of sex-role stereotyping that need to be looked at include gender stereotype categorization; stability of stereotypes across different roles or within different social contexts; and whether there may be different ways of looking at gender.

It is suggested by Deaux and Lewis (1984) that

gender stereotypes may be best described in terms of components. Their findings indicated that information such as role behaviours or traits often outweigh the influence of the gender label. Further, they found that although components were relatively independent, information about one component may implicate others. Influence of different components varied, but physical appearance was found to be of particular importance. Freeman (1987) further investigated content and structure of the female stereotype, looking particularly at the part played by physical appearance. His findings support those of Deaux and Lewis (1984).

Three studies designed to investigate levels of categorization in gender stereotyping, as well as content of categories, are described by Deaux, Winton, Crowley and Lewis (1985). They looked at whether 'woman' and 'man' might be superordinate categories, and also at the degree of overlap among attributes of the various categories. No evidence for a hierarchical model of gender-related concepts was found. Results also indicated considerable overlapping among some common categories. Further, greater diversity was found in female subtypes than in male subtypes. This, Deaux et al. (1985) suggest, may indicate that the female stereotype might be more influenced by context or situation than the male stereotype.

A critique of the 'sex category' approach is provided by Condor (1987). She looks at gender as an independent or stimulus variable, particularly in the context of sex stereotyping research. Condor suggests that sex stereotyping researchers in social psychology have tended to begin with the assumption of the existence of the categories of 'male' and 'female', and this structure is then imposed on subjects, and reproduced within results. Three ways in which this process may be seen within sex stereotyping research are discussed by Condor. Firstly, she suggests, there is an assumption of

rigidity of sex category distinction. There is often no consideration of particular gender distinctions arising from particular social contexts. Secondly, Condor looks at the assumption of fixed category content. She points out that within sex-role literature, sex stereotypes are often seen in terms of characteristics differentiating men from women. It is not usually suggested that national or ethnic stereotypes are distinctive to particular groups. Further, the way individuals actually describe men and women, and in particular 'real' individuals, is not usually in terms of characteristics exclusive to each sex. Also, there is often the assumption that adjectives have a fixed meaning regardless of whether they are used to describe men or women, and as Condor points out, with the example of 'aggressive', this is often not so: "Surely one of the most important aspects of gender as a stimulus variable is the meaning that this imposes upon other symbols", (Condor, 1987, p.53). Thirdly, Condor considers how sex stereotypes tend to be regarded as cross-situational, and the particular social context in which they have arisen is overlooked.

The stability of self-descriptions on the BSRI across different social roles has been investigated by Uleman and Weston (1986). In the first of two studies, parents of 41 infants were presented with the BSRI, first under standard instructions, and then later, under parental role instructions. In the second study, 76 student subjects completed the BSRI under standard instructions, and then as students, and as girlfriends or boyfriends. Self-descriptions were not found to be stable across social roles in either study. Adoption of specific sex roles did not increase sex-role traditionalism as might be predicted by Bem's gender schema theory. Parental role instructions were found to result in greater numbers of androgynous mothers and feminine fathers suggesting maybe that this role demands

high expressiveness with moderate instrumentality. Boy/girlfriend instructions increased numbers of feminine women and men, with both sexes becoming more expressive and less instrumental. The student role increased undifferentiated women numbers and decreased numbers for androgynous men and women, and thus might be described as demanding decreased social instrumentality and less expressiveness. Uleman and Weston interpret the overall results as supporting Spence and Helmreich's conceptions of the BSRI measuring instrumentality and expressiveness rather than Bem's interpretations of it in terms of masculinity, femininity and sex roles.

Support that the PAQ is mainly measuring instrumental and expressive traits rather than sex roles is provided by Helmreich, Spence and Holahan (1979). This study indicates that the relationship between these personality dimensions and sex-role behaviours is minimal. Helmreich et al. further suggest that while the PAQ M and F scales may be characterized in terms of instrumental and expressive traits, although many of the BSRI M and F scale items may be characterized similarly, this is not the case for all the items, and it is possible that through these other items, a stronger relationship exists with sex-role behaviours.

However, it is pointed out by Gilligan (1982) that sex-role stereotypes, where women are seen as having expressive characteristics in contrast to men's instrumental characteristics, may be looked at from a different perspective. Thus, she suggests the stereotypes may "reflect a conception of adulthood that is itself out of balance, favoring the separateness of the individual self over connection to others, and leaning more toward an autonomous life of work than toward the interdependence of love and care", (Gilligan, 1982, p.17).

A further perspective on the notion of sex role is provided by Bem's (1981a) 'gender schema theory'. This

concerns the process of sex typing: "The process by which a society thus transmutes male and female into masculine and feminine", (Bem, 1981a, p.354). Gender-based schematic processing may arise in part, Bem suggests, from society's insistence that the sex of the individual makes a difference in virtually every part of human experience. Thus she suggests, society teaches children a network of sex-related associations that may become a cognitive schema, and further that children are taught that "the dichotomy between male and female has extensive and intensive relevance to virtually every aspect of life", (Bem, 1981a, p.362). Bem describes studies indicating sex-typed individuals to be readier than individuals who are cross-sex-typed, androgynous or undifferentiated, to process information in terms of gender schema. Further, this applies to processing of self concept too. The self concept becomes assimilated with the gender schema. Thus Bem suggests sex-typing may be seen as, in part, derived from gender-based schematic processing.

Considering gender schema theory from the feminist perspective, Bem (1981a) first points out that it is the sex-typed individual rather than the non-sex-typed individual that is focused on here. She notes how her earlier work focused on the androgynous person, and that prior to conceptualization of androgyny, such individuals tended to be ignored in much sex-role research. She goes on to suggest however that although the concept of androgyny may appear to provide a more liberated alternative to sex-biased standards traditionally accepted with regard to mental health, it may also be seen as prescribing being both masculine and feminine, leaving the individual with two potential sources of inadequacy. Also Bem points out:

"Even more importantly, however, the concept of androgyny is insufficiently radical from a feminist perspective because it continues to presuppose that there is a masculine and a feminine within us all, that is, that the concepts of masculinity and

femininity have an independent and palpable reality rather than being themselves derived from gender-based schematic processing. A focus on the concept of androgyny thus fails to prompt serious examination of the extent to which gender organizes both our perceptions and our social world."

(Bem, 1981a, p.363)

Gender schema theory, on the other hand, may alert people to society's underlying emphasis on the gender dichotomy. Thus Bem (1981a, p.363) suggests that as far as a feminist moral may be contained in gender schema theory, it is that "human behaviors and personality attributes should cease to have gender" and she concludes "The feminist prescription, then, is not that the individual be androgynous, but that the society be aschematic".

Implications of gender schema theory for child development discussed by Bem (1983) indicate how she perceived moving towards a gender aschematic society. Parents could teach their children about biological sex differences while retarding their knowledge of cultural associations of sex differences. They could also provide their children with alternative schemata with which to understand cultural associations, such as those focused on individual differences, cultural relativism or sexism.

Debate about what the PAQ and BSRI are measuring has continued. Bem (1981b) suggested that since the BSRI which is two dimensional is only a tool for identifying sex-typed individuals, no contradiction is involved in using it for research concerning the unidimensional concept of gender-schematic processing. Frable (1989) suggested that while the PAQ measures expressivity and instrumentality only, the BSRI, considered within the framework of gender schema theory, may be appropriate for use in studies which consider a link between sex typing and gender ideology. Spence (1991) compares the PAQ and BSRI, looking at item generation, selection and content for both instruments; and their results in studies of self-esteem, gender-schematic processing and sex-role attitudes. She concludes that there is presently

insufficient evidence to support Frable's suggestion that the PAQ measures only instrumental and expressive characteristics, while the BSRI measures higher order gender constructs.

Other methodological issues related to gender schema theory research have been raised by Archer (1991). He criticises studies that have used the same or similar instruments to measure both gender trait self-description, and processing of gender related information. Archer suggests using the relationship of masculinity and femininity scales with recall and clustering to investigate Bem's gender schema theory.

Gerson and Peiss (1985) suggested a conceptual framework for analysis of gender relations in terms of boundaries, negotiation and domination, and consciousness. Condor (1987) has looked at this notion of gender boundaries as an alternative to the sex category approach. In contrast to the sex category, the gender boundary is not necessarily static, as boundaries may be crossed and negotiated. Sex could be studied as a dependent variable, and attention could be turned towards understandings of gender within particular contexts. Condor (1987, p.55) suggests that such a reconceptualization would emphasize "that sex categorizations are socially constructed and reconstructed in everyday life", and thus categories cannot just be presupposed. It would focus attention on understanding how meanings regarding gender may differ, and on the generation of meaning through social interaction. It would also help to indicate that particular understandings may be seen within a social context, rather than located within individuals.

Condor provides examples from her research illustrating the limitations of the sex category approach in contrast to the notion of gender boundaries. First, she looks at gender themes that have emerged. Examples given include 'they're all the same'; individualism;

similarity/difference/ complementarity; and angels and devils. Condor points out that themes apparent within traditional sex stereotyping research appear here, as well as themes that may not tend to arise within such a framework, such as male-female symbiosis. Secondly, Condor illustrates how within different contexts, a theme may imply different things. She gives examples of how 'career woman' may be used to imply different things, and similarly 'lesbians' and 'prostitutes'. Thirdly, Condor uses further examples to illustrate problems of viewing particular gender images as something an individual 'has' in contrast to explanations available to be drawn.

Finally, Condor outlines some ways in which the gender boundary approach is preferable to that of sex categories. Firstly, such an approach is necessarily social, with boundaries and meanings negotiated. Since negotiation is involved, aspects of power may be considered, concerning for example, the production and dissemination of gender themes, and boundary settings. Further, Condor points out, such an approach allows for changes in social representations of 'male' and 'female'.

The notion of sex/gender role, it has been seen, is complex. It may be interpreted in a number of ways, and attempts to study or measure it need to take into account problems of definition, and limitations of conceptualization. It is possible, however, that sex-role variations are of some fundamental importance in homosexuality.

Sex Role and Homosexuality

A number of studies appear to indicate a link between homosexuality and sex role. Bem (1981a) has suggested that the development of gender based schematic processing may be fostered by heterosexuality. Bell, Weinberg and Hammersmith (1981), in a study for the Kinsey Institute, looking at the development of sexual preference in men and women, interviewed nearly 1000 homosexuals, and just under 500 heterosexuals. Childhood gender nonconformity was found to be strongly associated with development of homosexuality for both men and women. However, use of the statistical method of critical path analysis may make interpretation problematic. The findings of Green (1987) also suggest that childhood sex-role behaviour may be important to the later development of homosexuality. In a fifteen year study of two groups of behaviourally different young boys - one group consisting of "feminine boys" and the other of conventionally masculine boys - Green found that three quarters of the two thirds of the feminine group boys who were interviewed in adolescence or as young adults, were homosexual or bisexual, in contrast to only one boy from the masculine group.

Other studies have looked at sex role and homosexuality in adulthood, rather than from a developmental point of view. A study by Ward (1974) is described by Spence and Helmreich (1978). This looks at range of sex-role identity in a homosexual sample of 56 male and 54 females. Using the PAQ, Ward found that only 9% of the male homosexuals were classified as masculine, while 50% were classified as undifferentiated, 23% as feminine and 18% as androgynous. Of the female homosexuals, only 13% were classified as feminine, while 33% were classified as androgynous, 32% as undifferentiated, and 22% as masculine. Findings were compared with those of Spence, Helmreich and Stapp (1975) for an unselected college sample. For the lesbian

sample, findings indicated a low percentage classified as feminine, against large increases in those classified as masculine and undifferentiated, and a smaller increase in those classified as androgynous. Spence and Helmreich (1978) suggest that these results indicate that their dualistic formulation of masculinity and femininity may differentiate between heterosexual and homosexual populations.

Further on this issue, Storms (1980) found no differences between homosexuals, heterosexuals and bisexuals on measures of masculinity and femininity, but did find support for sexual orientation being related to erotic fantasy orientation. However, looking at heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual women, using an extended version of the PAQ, LaTorre and Wendenburg (1983) found that a much greater proportion of self-labelled homosexual women were classified as androgynous or undifferentiated. Few bisexual or homosexual women were classified as feminine. In the masculine category, bisexual women were over-represented, and homosexual women, under-represented.

Howells (1986, p.273) suggests "To develop a homosexual interest or to engage in homosexual behaviour, may require a significant shift in the self-concept and sex-role identification". He suggests then that a likely consequence of homosexuality is modified sex-role behaviour, and goes on to look at the possibility of sex-role variables playing a causal part too. Surveying a number of empirical studies, Howells concludes that although problems of interpretation exist, some relationship between sex-role inversion and homosexuality seems to be indicated, with cross-sex behaviour shown by many homosexuals in childhood. However, this is not the case for all homosexuals, Howells points out, and also some sex-role inverted children grow into heterosexuality. Generally, it is suggested by Al-Issa (1987) that previous research has shown that in childhood

and adulthood, homosexual males tend to be feminine, and homosexual females, masculine. But more recent research, Al-Issa suggests, indicates homosexual males and females to be androgynous. Also, Ross (1983, p.1) considering homosexuality and social sex roles points out: "The relationship of social sex role (masculinity or femininity) to homosexuality has for a long time been assumed to be a necessary, if not a sufficient, one". He concludes however that "homosexuality and deviant social sex role are not necessary or sufficient causes of one another", (Ross, 1983, p.3). Thus it would seem that the relationship between sex role and homosexuality, although unclear, is of some importance.

A reflection of the general pervasiveness of gender distinctions within our society may be seen within the lesbian community in the form of 'butch-femme' role playing. This has never been general among lesbians, but occurred among some up to the 1960's, and there has been a revival of it by some women during the 1980's (Jeffreys, 1989). Ardill and O'Sullivan (1990) suggest a number of questions concerning the recent revival of 'butch-femme': where does feminism fit in; is the notion of butch-femme liberating or constricting; can psychoanalysis contribute to an understanding; and what are the implications within lesbian relationships? Although Ardill and O'Sullivan suggest they would like to see discussion relating butch-femme to the context of social construction of lesbianism, and its association with masculinity and femininity, they do not attempt to develop this theme, or to consider the notion of masculinity/femininity from the perspective of domination/subordination and power inequality. However, Jeffreys points out that while in the 1950's and 1960's, role playing was a survival strategy, now it needs to be seen as a dangerous political development, the polarity of male-female being based on that of dominance and submission.

3.2.4 Stereotyping of homosexuals

Stereotyping of homosexuals has been looked at in a variety of different ways. Taylor (1983), surveying empirical studies in this field, comments:

"Where one would hope for complementary results and designs as well as a developed theory to predict and explain the related findings, there is instead a wide variety of approaches to the question, and little organizing theory behind it. To date little evidence is available to allow definite comment on the extent and depth of homosexual stereotypes, their nature and function".

(Taylor, 1983, p.38)

Some examples of empirical work on stereotyping of homosexuals include Simmons (1965) and more recently, Ward (1979), Taylor (1983), Page and Yee (1985), and Kite and Deaux (1987). Simmons (1965) investigating public stereotypes of deviants looked at agreement on what deviation is, whether the public hold stereotyped images of deviants and whether there were any consequences of this. Homosexuals were mentioned by 49% and lesbians by 13% in answer to the question "What is deviant?" Some of the most frequently chosen traits for homosexuals were sexually abnormal, perverted, mentally ill, maladjusted and effeminate.

Ward (1979) presented 34 traits from Simmons (1965) to over four hundred subjects, and also obtained data regarding social distance, looking at tolerance or rejection of homosexuals. A factor analysis of the trait data indicated three interpretable factors: 'sinful lust', 'sensitive intellectual' and 'sick deviant'. Further it was found that these factors were related differently to rejection of homosexuals, with the 'sinful lust' not being correlated overall; 'sensitive intellectual' being related to overall tolerance, and 'sick deviant' related to greater rejection. Scores on the factors were not found to be related to sex or religion, but did vary with education and age. Taylor (1983) and Page and Yee (1985) were both specifically concerned with stereotyping of homosexuals according to

masculinity-femininity, the former making use of the Personality Attributes Questionnaire, and the latter using the scale devised by Broverman et al. (1970).

Taylor (1983) compared stereotypes of male and female homosexuals with stereotypes of male and female non-homosexuals. Subjects were 64 women and 39 men, none of whom were students. The Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ; Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1974), as used by Taylor, consisted of 54 bipolar items, each with a masculine and feminine pole. Each subject was presented with four copies of the PAQ and asked to rate "men", "women", "male homosexuals" and "lesbians" in the way applicable to the majority of members of that group. Analysis of variance yielded significant F values for all items ($p < 0.001$). There were significant differences between ratings for "male homosexuals" compared with "lesbians" on 41 PAQ items. "Male homosexuals" ratings were significantly different from "men" on 47 items, and "lesbians" significantly different from "women" on 45 items, indicating "strong evidence for the hypothesis that the homosexual targets were seen as sex-role deviants", Taylor (1983, p.49) suggests. Further for 48 items, the "male homosexual" mean was closer to the feminine pole, while the "lesbian" mean was closer to the masculine pole, supporting a cross gender hypothesis. Thus the existence of homosexual stereotypes within this study was demonstrated and the difference between male and female homosexual stereotypes shown. Taylor points out too that the differences tend to be best described in terms of comparisons.

Page and Yee (1985) presented 85 student subjects with 41 items from the Broverman et al. (1970) rating scale, for description of a "male homosexual" or a "lesbian" or a "normal, healthy adult". Male homosexuals were perceived significantly differently from the normal adult on 27 scales, and lesbians significantly differently from male homosexuals on 20 scales and from

the normal adult on 11 scales. Both lesbians and male homosexuals were perceived negatively in comparison to perceptions of a normal adult, but lesbianism was viewed as closer to normality than male homosexuality. Page and Yee (1985, p.116) suggest the general stereotype of homosexual people found "seemed to reflect the perception of personal maladjustment rather than of a stigmatized minority group". Further they discuss the possible relation of attitudes and actual behaviour, and conclude that "From such a perspective, it is interesting, and perhaps disturbing, that the attitudes of the present samples, measured in a university environment, were as negative as they were", (Page & Yee, 1985, p.117).

The inversion model, proposed by Freud in 1905, in which homosexuals are assumed to be similar to opposite sex heterosexuals, is considered by Kite and Deaux (1987). Approximately 200 male and female subjects were randomly assigned to one of the four target conditions of homosexual male or female, and heterosexual male or female. Subjects were first asked to list qualities they thought characteristic of the target group. Secondly, subjects were asked to rate the probability that the target person had certain attributes. For this, a measure devised by Deaux & Lewis (1983) was used, which includes masculine and feminine traits, role behaviours, physical characteristics, and occupations. Both the results from the list of attributes and the probability ratings indicated that generally homosexual men were perceived as most similar to heterosexual women, and homosexual women were perceived as most similar to heterosexual men. Thus, the stereotypes of homosexual men and women supported an implicit inversion theory, and also, Kite and Deaux suggest, a bipolar model of gender stereotyping.

3.2.5 Some possible implications of stereotyping

Relevant to the coming out situation is the effect stereotypes may have on interpersonal behaviour. Stereotyping may have important implications for homosexuals. Lewis (1984, p.466) suggests "Many women in the early stages of same-sex identification have all the stereotypes that culture perpetuates". It is pointed out by Plasek and Allard (1984) that in previous research, positive characteristics are cited less frequently than negative ones, and further, that such characteristics may not necessarily be viewed as favourable. Thus, for example, a male may be considered to have too much sensitivity. Ward (1979, p.421) suggests "The truly critical aspect of stereotypes is their impact on the labeled deviant". Moreover, he points out, stereotypes may continue to affect even those homosexuals who have become part of the homosexual community, since there may be feedback between stereotypes and actual behaviour.

Jones, Farina, Hastorf, Markus, Miller and Scott (1984) look at the role of stereotypes in 'marked' relationships. They use the term 'mark' as a "generic term for perceived or inferred conditions of deviation from a prototype or norm that *might* initiate the stigmatizing process", (Jones et al., 1984, p.8). Hence, the person bearing a discrediting mark is 'markable' and may become a 'marked' person. A 'marker' is the person who perceives or infers the mark. Discussing the role of stereotypes in marked relationships, Jones et al. look at determinants of the impact of false beliefs and consider factors that determine when false beliefs will be confirmed or disconfirmed. First, they look at the situation where the belief holder observes the target, but the two do not interact. In such a case, two important factors, Jones et al. suggest, are the basis of the belief, and its content. Thus, the belief may be based on direct personal experience, or indirect

information, and focused on the particular target person or the general category. Beliefs may be about a variety of different phenomena, such as personality traits, physical characteristics and attitudes, and these will vary in the ease with which those that are false may be disconfirmed. Traits differ in the extent to which expression of them is perceived as controllable. A further difference among traits is whether they tend to be defined mainly in terms of average or extreme behaviours. An example of the former is 'warmth', and of the latter, 'dishonesty'. There will also be more frequent opportunities for manifesting some traits than others. Further, where a trait tends to be defined in terms of intention or motivation, a false belief is likely to be harder to disconfirm.

When there is interaction between belief holder and target person, Jones et al. (1984) suggest additional aspects of traits become relevant. Looking at the impact of false beliefs on the belief holder's behaviour, some beliefs may be associated with scripted behaviour - i.e. a particular course of action. There will also be varying perceived costs by the belief holder. Considering the impact of false beliefs on the target person's behaviour, Jones et al. discuss self-fulfilling, self-defeating, and self-altering prophecies.

Although the target person's behaviour may be strongly influenced by how others perceive them, Jones et al. suggest it is also necessary to consider their power and motivation in disconfirming false beliefs. The extent of a markable person's awareness of the false beliefs held by others will vary. Beliefs may be communicated directly or inferred from behaviour, and as well as this, the markable person may hold stereotypes of what others think or feel. Where the markable person is aware of someone's false belief, there is the decision whether to disconfirm this or not to be taken. Factors relevant here include the aversiveness of the false

belief and perceived costs and rewards of disconfirmation. Ease of disconfirming a false belief, Jones et al. suggest, depends very much on content of belief. Thus stigmatized individuals may learn to be selective over which to deal with, taking into account which false beliefs are most easily disconfirmed, which are related most centrally to stereotypes, and which result in the greatest amount of discrimination. The stigmatized individual may attempt to disconfirm the false belief regarding their own case only or, generally harder, regarding that of the general category.

Jones et al. also point out that the individual interacting with the stigmatized person may wish to communicate s/he is not prejudiced. This is often not easy, and some "normals" may avoid interaction through fear of contradicting images of self as non-prejudiced. Motivation of the stigmatized and non-stigmatized to contradict the stereotype held by the other is likely to be different. Jones et al. suggest both will want to clear misperceptions about themselves, but the cost to the stigmatized individual of being misperceived is likely to be much greater. The non-stigmatized individual is likely to have more alternative relationships available, and his/her main aim will be to be seen as unprejudiced.

A number of empirical studies illustrate the possible implications of stereotyping on interpersonal behaviour. Farina, Allen and Saul (1968) carried out an experiment involving pairs of male subjects, one of each pair of the experimental groups having been lead to believe that he was perceived by the other as either someone who had experienced mental illness, or as a homosexual, although all partners had actually been presented with a control group life history describing "a pretty normal person". Both conversation and performance on a task were found to be influenced by belief that one is viewed as stigmatized. Thus Farina et al. (1968,

p.178) suggest "If an individual believes he is perceived in an unfavorable way by another person, his behavior in a subsequent interaction is affected independently of the other person's actions in the situation". Further, the individual attempting to dispel the unfavourable impression, may actually behave in a way that instead causes rejection by the other.

In a study concerned with apparent sex differences in behaviour, Zanna and Pack (1975, p.584) were interested in whether the differences were "the consequence of interpersonal, self-fulfilling prophecies". Characterizations of themselves were elicited from 80 female subjects directed towards male partner who were classified according to desirability and known by the subjects to hold either the traditional stereotype of women or an untraditional stereotype. It was found that both attitudinal and behavioural measures of self-presentation conformed to perceived sex role expectations. Zanna and Pack (1975, p.590) suggest then their study indicates "that differential stereotypes (through the process of interpersonal, self-fulfilling prophecies) induce differential behaviors".

Snyder, Tanke and Berscheid (1977) consider the self-fulfilling nature of social stereotypes by looking at the effects of stereotypes of physical attractiveness on interactions between male perceivers and female targets. Targets unknowingly perceived as physically attractive came to behave in a friendlier, more likeable manner than those perceived as unattractive. Thus behavioural confirmation of the perceivers' attributions becoming concerning the targets was produced, with these initially wrong attributions becoming real. Thus Snyder et al. (1977, p.663) state "Our research suggests that stereotypes can and do channel dyadic interaction so as to create their own social reality".

Further, it would seem that stereotypes may interact with factual memory in a reconstruction of past events.

Snyder and Uranowitz (1978) presented subjects with a case history of a woman, followed later for some with the information that she was living a lesbian life-style or a heterosexual life-style. Recall was then examined for errors and accuracy, and Snyder and Uranowitz suggest the results may be best characterized in terms of interaction between stereotypes and memory of facts.

It has also been found that effects of anticipated interaction on liking varied for male subjects rating a non-homosexual male and those rating a homosexual male, (Gurwitz and Marcus, 1978). The male subjects rated the homosexual male less favourably if interaction was anticipated. Increased liking was produced by anticipated interaction in female subjects for both homosexual and non-homosexual male targets, and in male subjects for non-homosexual targets. Further Gurwitz and Marcus found that the homosexual target was liked less and had more stereotypic traits attributed to him than the non-homosexual target, by both male and female subjects.

Jenks (1986) demonstrated that people perceived as deviant regarding a specific trait or characteristic may then be perceived as deviant regarding other characteristics. His findings, thus, support the notion of a master status theory. In the study, 146 American undergraduate subjects were presented with a questionnaire concerning perceptions of members of the 'deviant' groups of homosexual and atheist, and the non-deviant groups of Republican and Catholic. Homosexuals and atheists were perceived as having had less education; as being of lower social class; using drugs more often; and in greater need of counselling, than Republicans and Catholics.

Olson's (1987) study of gay and lesbian teachers provides another perspective on the implications of stereotyping for homosexuals. Subjects were asked what stereotypes had been conveyed to them by parents,

students and colleagues, and how these stereotypes had affected them personally and professionally. Only six of the ninety seven subjects reported not experiencing stereotypic notions. The majority of stereotypes mentioned were negative. No personal effects were reported by only three subjects. Some subjects reported feelings of resentment and anger. While some subjects reported the stereotypic notions forced them to stay in the closet, others reported they had forced them to come out of the closet. Several subjects reported having to put on a "front", and several mentioned feelings of hurt. Only four subjects reported no professional effects of the stereotypes. Having to lead a double life was mentioned most frequently.

These few examples illustrate some of the possible implications of stereotyping for homosexuals. There is a further question that is of particular importance in considering both stereotyping of homosexuals, and the coming out situation: that is, are people generally able to detect the sexual orientation of a person where they have not been specifically informed? Berger, Hank, Rauzi and Simkins (1987) looked at this in a study where 143 subjects were presented with 24, two to three minute, videotaped interviews of homosexual and heterosexual men and women. Subjects were divided into four groups by sexual preference and gender. None of the four groups was found to correctly identify sexual orientation above chance levels, although homosexual women did significantly better than the others. It was also found that homosexual women were more often mislabelled (as heterosexual) than other groups. About 80% of subjects were unable to identify sexual orientation correctly, but some individuals, referred to as "hitters", did exceed chance levels of detection. Here, females were found to be more accurate than males, and homosexual women proportionally more accurate than heterosexual women. Responses of subjects, regarding reasons for rating of

target individual's sexual orientation, were coded into nine categories, including masculine traits and feminine traits; appearance; a typical or different category, and a 'no reason' category. Only the 'no reason' category was significant for 'hitters', but it accounted for little of the variance ($R=0.18$). Berger et al. suggest findings indicated subjects were probably using intuitive or un verbalized hunches, or guessing. They discuss their results in terms of signal detection theory (Licklider, 1959), and decision theory (Goldiamond, 1962; Tanner & Swets, 1954), and point out that heterosexuals' detection rate of homosexuals may be influenced by homophobic attitudes.

These studies have mainly illustrated some of the implications of stereotyping on an individual/interpersonal level. However, stereotyping also needs viewing from intergroup and cultural perspectives. Weitz (1989) suggests cultural stereotypes make it less likely lesbianism will be perceived in terms of an alternative lifestyle, and in this way may serve to reduce the threat of lesbianism to male power. These intergroup/societal level implications will be examined further in later chapters.

From the previous studies, it would seem probable that stereotypes may affect interpersonal behaviour, and that for stereotyping of homosexuals, the notion of sex role is particularly important to consider. It can be seen that stereotypes are likely to be of importance in considering the coming out process. Firstly, it is possible that lesbians themselves may hold stereotypes of homosexuals before coming out to others. This may affect their perceptions regarding both coming out to self and coming out to others. Having come out to other lesbians, they will still probably be aware of stereotypes within society, even if they no longer hold the stereotypes themselves. In coming out (or not coming out) to a heterosexual person, the situations just described

regarding stereotypes and interpersonal behaviour may apply. Thus, the coming out process takes place within the context of heterosexual attitudes towards homosexuals and stereotyping within society.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PILOT STUDIES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The process of "coming out" may be seen as involving both the formation of lesbian identity, and the disclosure of one's sexual orientation to others. Central to this investigation are lesbians' perceptions of the coming out process. This includes perceptions of development towards a lesbian identity, and perceptions regarding the disclosure of this identity to others, including to other lesbians, family, heterosexual friends, and work colleagues. Within this latter area, concerning the revealing of one's sexual orientation to others, it is as necessary to consider the issue of non-disclosure or not coming out, as it is to consider disclosure to others. A further perspective on the coming out process is provided by considering heterosexuals' attitudes towards homosexuals and their perceptions concerning the hypothetical or actual situation of a homosexual person coming out to them. Finally, coming out may be considered within the more general context of self acceptance and self disclosure either for other minority group members, or concerning individuals' different life experiences.

Thus, the pilot studies have been designed, firstly, to look at lesbians' perceptions of coming out and to conceptualize the issues involved in the coming out process; secondly, to look at heterosexuals' attitudes towards homosexuality; and thirdly, to look more generally at self disclosure in other life experience or minority group situations.

The basic methodological approach for all three aspects of the pilot investigation is 'depth' interviewing (supplemented for the lesbian and heterosexual investigations with sentence completion, open-ended written questions, and sex-role inventories).

It is therefore necessary to consider the nature of interviews; and the possible sources of error and bias in using this approach, and in analysis of qualitative data.

Farr (1982) emphasises the social nature of the interview, and points out that it is necessary to take into account actions and experience of both interviewee and interviewer. The importance of examining the relationship between interviewer and interviewee is illustrated by Krieger (1985). She suggests one's understanding of self may affect one's understanding of others: "We see others as we know ourselves" (Krieger, 1985; p.320). Platt (1981) has suggested that interviewing one's peers may affect the interview relationship. Three sources of bias within the interview situation are discussed by Plummer (1983); the first source of bias arises from the interviewee; the second, from the researcher; and the third, from the interaction between subject and researcher. Further, it is suggested by Oppenheim (1966) that barriers of awareness, irrationality, inadmissibility, self-incrimination and politeness may exist. The necessity of precisely worded questions for accurate responses and maximum validity is emphasised by Sudman and Bradburn (1982). They identify four factors as related to response error: "memory, motivation, communication, and knowledge" (Sudman & Bradburn, 1982; p.19). Greenwald (1980) discusses how the ego, as an organization of knowledge, may fabricate and revise personal history. The possibility of interviewees responding to questions by recounting a story, and the implications of this for analysis of data are discussed by Askham (1982). Of particular relevance to this study, it is suggested by Oakley (1981a) that the traditional approach in interviewing methodology may reflect a masculine social and sociological perspective.

The initial pilot interviews on lesbians' perceptions of coming out were carried out for my MSc Project (Markowe, 1985). Pilot interviews with

heterosexual subjects; supplementary lesbian interviews; and piloting of stereotype tasks for lesbian and heterosexual subjects are described here. Following this is a pilot study of 'self-disclosure'; and finally, an overall discussion of the pilot studies.

4.2 HETEROSEXUALS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS HOMOSEXUALITY

4.2.1 Introduction

Since the coming out process for lesbians takes place within the context of a predominantly heterosexual society, for a fuller understanding of lesbians' experiences of the coming out process, it is essential to consider heterosexuals' attitudes towards homosexuals. This part of the pilot study was designed to explore heterosexuals' general attitudes towards homosexuals and, in particular, their awareness of stereotypes of homosexuals, and their feelings regarding the possibility of a sibling, friend, child or work colleague 'coming out' to them.

Previous literature indicates the importance of reactions of family and friends for homosexual men and women in the process of coming out (e.g. Baetz, 1984; Trenchard & Warren, 1984). Another area of life where heterosexuals' attitudes towards homosexuals are important is work (NALGO Gay Group, 1979). Identifying as gay may affect much of everyday life (Durell, 1983). School days may be an important time for many gay people in the process of coming out. Development of sexual orientation may begin early in life (Bell, Weinberg & Hammersmith, 1981). The experiences of young lesbians and gay men have been described by Trenchard and Warren (1984). The average age for cognitive awareness found in one study for a sample of lesbians was sixteen years (Gramick, 1984). Additionally the lesbian pilot interviews (Markowe, 1985) indicated that some women had become aware of their sexual orientation while still at school.

Issues that may be of importance in considering attitudes towards homosexuals include possible sex differences, previous contact with homosexuals, stereotyping, and perceptions of roots or 'causes' of homosexuality. Extent and quality of previous contact with homosexuals may also be an important variable.

Previous studies have indicated that there may be some relationship between attitudes towards homosexuals, gender and/or sex-role attitudes (e.g. Weinberger & Millham, 1979; Lieblich & Friedman, 1985; Kite, 1984). It has been suggested that there may be interaction between sex of subject and sex of homosexual target contributing to variation in attitudes (Herek, 1984a; Gentry, 1986; Kite, 1984). Previous findings have varied. In some studies, males have been found to show more negative attitudes towards homosexuality than females (e.g. Larsen, Reed & Hoffman, 1980; Hansen, 1982; Lieblich & Friedman, 1985). It has been suggested that both sexes may have more negative attitudes towards male homosexuality than towards lesbianism (Lieblich & Friedman, 1985). Subjects have been found to express a preference for opposite sex homosexuals over those of the same sex (Weinberger & Millham, 1979). Kite (1984) points out that many studies have omitted information on sex differences and sex of target, and that findings showing males to be more negative than females towards homosexuals may be largely accounted for by interaction between sex of subject and sex of target.

Stereotyping of homosexuals has been looked at by a number of studies (e.g. Simmons, 1965; Ward, 1979; Page & Yee, 1985). Sex role would appear to be particularly important within homosexual stereotyping, with homosexuals perceived as similar to opposite sex heterosexuals (Taylor, 1983; subsequently supported by Kite & Deaux, 1987). When considering the eliciting of stereotypes, it is necessary to take into account that there may be a reluctance among subjects to make

stereotyped generalizations, (Gilbert, 1951; Karlins, Coffman & Walters, 1969).

Perceived roots or 'causes' of homosexuality may interact with attitudes toward homosexuality. Agüero, Bloch and Byrne (1984) have suggested that there are two major belief systems: belief that homosexuality is learned, and belief that it is genetically determined. These beliefs may interact with attitudes, determining perceptions and behaviour.

The general aim of this part of the pilot investigation was to explore heterosexuals' attitudes towards homosexuals, in particular regarding the situation and context of coming out. It was thought that informal depth interviews would constitute the most appropriate approach. Since it was intended to link findings from these interviews to the findings from the interviews of lesbians' perceptions of coming out, where possible comparable topics and questions were included.

It was thought that attitudes might vary with previous contact with homosexuals; perceived roots or 'causes' of homosexuality; and genders of subject and homosexual target. It was hypothesized that more negative feelings might be expressed towards homosexuals of the same sex as the subject than towards homosexuals of the opposite sex to that of the subject. It was thought that subjects might be aware of stereotypes of homosexuals, and that the subjects might be readier to provide responses regarding their perceptions of how 'most people' perceived homosexuals, rather than reporting personal observations. Other areas explored included feelings about the hypothetical (or possibly real) situation of friends or family members coming out to the subject; attitudes regarding homosexuals at work; awareness of homosexuals at school; awareness of media coverage of homosexuals/homosexuality; and examples of times the subject of homosexuality had arisen in general conversation.

4.2.2 Method

Subjects

Twelve undergraduate and postgraduate students at LSE participated in the study, (for $n=11$, mean age: 26.18; standard deviation: 8.48; range: 18 - 46 years). Seven subjects were female, and five, male. Seven were from the United Kingdom, two from Canada, and one each from Greece, Australia and the United States. All were heterosexual.

Materials

A cassette tape recorder was used to record all the interviews.

Procedure

Potential subjects, at LSE, were approached by the researcher, and informed that she was a research student from the social psychology department interested in interviewing individuals on the topic of 'what people think about homosexuals'. Those who agreed to participate, were interviewed individually and each interview was tape recorded. Length of interview ranged from just under half an hour to just under one hour. Since the interviews were intended as exploratory, they were informal and generally unstructured, although an attempt was made to cover all the areas outlined below within each interview:

Interview Areas

1. Personal understanding of what the terms homosexual/gay/lesbian mean.
2. Contact with homosexuals
3. Stereotypes - how interviewee thought 'most people' might describe homosexuals (male and female).
4. Subjects' feelings about a hypothetical (or real) homosexual telling them s/he is gay:
 - (i) friends
 - (ii) brothers/sisters
 - (iii) son/daughter
 - (iv) work colleagues

5. Feelings of subject regarding gender of homosexual person.
6. Perceived roots or 'causes' of homosexuality.
7. Perceptions of suitability of different types of employment for homosexuals.
8. Examples of times the subject of homosexuality has come up in conversations.
9. At school - awareness of anyone being gay.
10. The media - anything the subject could recall having seen or read about homosexuals.
11. Any other areas suggested by the subject concerning people's views of homosexuals.

Order of topics within the individual interviews varied, and there was sometimes overlapping of interview areas. Where possible, questions were phrased in an open manner, and care was taken to avoid 'leading' questions.

4.2.3 Summary results and discussion

(Heterosexual interviews)

Reviewing the heterosexual interview data, it can be seen that consideration of definition of terms is of primary importance in this study. While most heterosexual subjects defined 'homosexual' simply in terms of a person attracted to someone of the same sex, some subjects perceived the term as applying to men rather than to both sexes. Further, while for some subjects the terms homosexual and gay were interchangeable, for others they were perceived as having different meanings, and one subject perceived the terms gay and lesbian as having political connotations. As Herek (1984a) and Gentry (1986) have pointed out, a number of previous studies concerning attitudes towards homosexuals have simply referred to the term 'homosexual' without specifying sex. Considering the findings in these pilot interviews, it would seem important not only to clarify issues of gender, but also to take into account further personal understandings of the different

terms when interpreting the interview data.

Subjects' perceptions of how 'most' people perceive homosexuals included reactions and feelings, as well as images.

"Perhaps she's quite old fashioned, or wears boots" (S5)

Sometimes more than one image was suggested. For the male homosexual, there were suggestions of an effeminate image, an artistic or sensitive person, or in contrast a 'body building' image or someone who hangs around toilets. Similarly, more than one image emerged for female homosexuals. The masculine, aggressive, feminist, on the one hand, contrasted with the gentle, very effeminate woman, lacking in self-confidence, on the other hand. It was suggested that perceptions might vary with a person's contact with homosexuals, feelings about his/her own sexuality, gender, age and culture. Suggested views ranged from people "completely sickened" by homosexuality, to those who accept it.

It was thought that attitudes towards male and female homosexuality might vary with gender, with the more negative attitudes directed towards homosexuals of the same sex as the subject. Taking into account subjects' views of what they perceived most people would feel, as well as direct comments made by some subjects, it would seem that males may perceive male homosexuality as less acceptable than female homosexuality. Female subjects expressed varied personal feelings. For most of them there seemed little or no difference in their attitudes towards male and female homosexuality, but two seemed to feel more negatively about female homosexuality, and one, more negatively about male homosexuality. These findings would seem to support data from previous studies that have indicated some sex differences in attitudes towards homosexuals (e.g. Kite, 1984), but the precise nature of these differences, particularly regarding females' attitudes, remains

unclear, and requires further investigation.

Previous contact with homosexuals is likely to be of importance in determining attitudes and reactions to a lesbian "coming out". For these pilot study subjects, previous contact ranged from no awareness of knowing any homosexuals of either sex, to having homosexual friends of both sexes. From the subjects' responses, it would seem important to consider whether homosexuals they 'know' are close friends or only acquaintances; whether they know homosexuals of both sexes or only one, and whether they know several or many homosexuals, or maybe only one.

Coming out to friends and family are two very important areas. Reported feelings about friends (hypothetical or real) coming out to the subjects ranged from little or no reaction, through surprise, to shock. For some there seemed to be feelings of conflict or ambiguity.

"If I knew a woman was a lesbian ... I wouldn't even talk to her"
(S1, female)

"I was surprised that I was shocked actually - I thought it wouldn't bother me at all - but when she told me, I went bright red and I didn't know what to say and the conversation just died"

(S8, female)

Possible different reactions according to gender of homosexual person are suggested, and also the possibility/threat that the homosexual person might be making a proposition. Concern about what others might think ("the general public") if associating with a homosexual of the same sex was also mentioned. Who the friend was, how long s/he had been known for, and whether s/he had appeared "overtly heterosexual" before, might all affect reaction.

Considering the hypothetical situation of a sibling coming out to them, subjects suggested similar feelings of shock and surprise, as well as concern with others' views.

"...what will they be thought of in other people's eyes?"
(S11, male)

While some subjects suggested they would dislike it or be upset, several reported they would try to accept or understand, and help with any problems there might be. It was also suggested that reactions might vary with gender of gay sibling, the sibling's own positiveness of feelings, or the sibling's lover.

Suggested reactions to the hypothetical situation of a son or daughter coming out to the subject, as for friends and siblings, included concern for problems the child might have.

"[I] would feel sad because I think it involves a lot of social problems"
(S6, female)

There was concern about what others might think, and possible differences in reaction according to gender of homosexual. There was also a suggestion that it might just be a phase. Importantly too, concern was expressed that as parents, they might hold some responsibility for their child's sexual orientation.

It is suggested by Cramer (1985) that parents themselves may need a period of 'coming out' as they struggle with values and expectations in order to eventually become more comfortable with their son's sexual orientation. The conflict and ambiguity shown, and suggestions of initial shock, and of trying to accept or understand the gay person reported by the subjects in this study, suggest that heterosexuals may need to go through this kind of coming out process not just as parents, but in coming to terms with the homosexuality of others, such as friends and siblings, too.

At work, some subjects suggested it would make little or no difference if a colleague were homosexual, while others suggested some caution, or even, in one case, that they would not work with a homosexual if they did not need the money. It was also pointed out that one's attitude might depend on what others thought. One

subject expressed concern for the vulnerability of the homosexual person in the typical office situation.

Looking at the suitability of different types of employment for homosexuals, while a few subjects simply stated that there were no types of employment unsuitable for homosexuals, others discussed a variety of work areas that people might perceive as unsuitable, in particular working with children. Many subjects suggested possibly unsuitable work, but then after further thought rejected the work as unsuitable. The notion that it was all right if the homosexual 'did not go public' was also put forward. One subject concluded that although logically no jobs were unsuitable for homosexuals, within our society there may be some.

Perceptions of why some people are homosexual are likely to be of importance in contributing towards attitudes. Genetic or biological reasons as well as psychological or emotional, and socialization and upbringing were suggested. The question asked here, may well have influenced subjects' responses and it is intended to substitute a more open form of question in the main study.

Lesbians' perceptions of heterosexuals' attitudes towards homosexuality are likely to be formed in a variety of ways. One of these may be experiences of hearing heterosexuals talking informally about homosexuality. Examples of times that the subject of homosexuality had come up in conversations included jokes; speculations about whether or not people they know are gay; and abuse. Sometimes the subject arose in response to a television programme or a newspaper article. It was also pointed out that for some homosexuality is a taboo subject and there may be a reluctance to talk about it.

While some subjects could not recall having seen any television programmes with homosexuals in them, others had seen some programmes. One subject wondered why they

'advertise' is so much on television and was concerned that it might lead people to come out. Similarly, with films, some subjects could not recall having seen any films with homosexual characters, while others recalled many. Reactions to television programmes and films ranged from disgust or shock to enjoyment. Few subjects recalled newspaper or magazine articles on lesbians, although it was suggested that many pornographic magazines contain features on lesbians. There was little recall of homosexual characters in books either. Interestingly, one subject, having read part of a book generally thought to be about a homosexual character, reported that he did not think the character was really gay.

Looking at subjects' recollections of school, many, but not all, reported a lack of awareness of homosexual peers. Some, especially males, described a hostility towards gays at school which would have prevented anyone from coming out. Suspicions about members of staff were reported by some.

Generally, these interviews reflect ambivalence, and some conflict in views about homosexuality.

"As long as it's something outside that door, it's fine" (S1)

A more detailed description of the interview accounts is provided in Appendix A.

4.3 LESBIAN SUPPLEMENTARY INTERVIEWS

4.3.1 Introduction

This part of the study was designed to investigate some topics concerning lesbian identity and the coming out process that appeared to need further investigation, or had been omitted from the previous pilot study (Markowe, 1985).

It has been suggested that many women in the initial stages of coming out may hold stereotypes (Lewis, 1984), and that stereotypes may even continue to affect homosexuals within the homosexual community (Ward, 1979). Some support that women may hold stereotypes in the early stages of coming out emerged from the initial pilot interviews (Markowe, 1985). Possible implications of stereotyping for interpersonal behaviour have been described by Jones, Farina, Hastorf, Markus, Miller and Scott (1984), and illustrated in a number of studies (e.g. Farina, Allen & Saul, 1968; Zanna & Pack, 1975).

In addition to stereotyping, it would seem likely that lesbians' perceptions generally of heterosexuals' attitudes towards homosexuals might affect their coming out experiences.

Different lesbian identities have been suggested by Kitzinger and Rogers (1985). It may be that these different identities are associated with different experiences of coming out. Contributing to the defining of these different identities are, among other issues, women's attributions of aetiology and reported feelings about being a lesbian.

There may be similarities between the experience of coming out for lesbians and the experiences of some other minority groups regarding self acceptance and self disclosure. Goffman (1963) has looked at stigma and the experiences of the blind, deaf and physically handicapped, ex-mental patients, alcoholics, ex-prisoners and religious minority members, and homosexuals. He discusses such individuals in terms of the 'discredited'

where the stigmatized individual's differentness is evident or known about, and the 'discreditable' where the individual's differentness cannot be seen and is not known about. Similarly, Jones et al. (1984) have considered social stigma generally, and looked at interactions between 'markable' and 'unmarked' persons, where a mark defines a perceived deviation from a norm or prototype that may initiate stigmatization. Taking a different approach, Breakwell (1986) has proposed a model of identity, threat and coping, providing a framework within which to consider a variety of threats to identity and strategies that may be employed for coping.

This part of the pilot study was designed to investigate further lesbians' perceptions of stereotyping; their perceptions of heterosexuals attitudes towards lesbians; certain aspects of lesbian identity; and perceptions of similarities with other minority groups. On stereotyping, it was hypothesised that women may hold an initial stereotype of lesbians before coming out to others, and that there are probably changes in any general image of lesbians they may hold once they start meeting others. Relevant to lesbian identity and the coming out process are perceptions of the roots or origins of homosexuality; whether homosexuality is perceived as a choice; and general feelings, both positive and negative, about being a lesbian. It was thought that a variety of psychological, environmental and biological roots of homosexuality might be suggested; that while some women might perceive homosexuality as a choice, others would not; and that general feelings about being a lesbian would probably vary between mainly positive and mainly negative. Since similarities and differences of the coming out experience with experiences of other minority groups in self acceptance and self disclosure, may be of importance in providing a fuller picture of the coming out process for lesbians, it was thought appropriate to investigate

whether subjects perceived any similarities with other minorities. Finally, it was intended to explore briefly the topical subject of sex education in school, including the subjects' own school experiences, and whether they would have found it helpful for homosexuality to have been mentioned in lessons at school.

4.3.2 Method

Subjects

Eight self-defined lesbians (mean age: 44 years; standard deviation: 10; range: 31 - 57 years) participated in this investigation. Six had taken part in the initial pilot study (Markowe, 1985).

Materials

A cassette tape recorder was used to record all interviews.

Procedure

All subjects were interviewed individually and the interviews recorded on tape. Subjects were informed that the interviews were to consist of just a few supplementary questions that had not been included in the original interview on 'coming out'. The length of these interviews ranged from about 10 minutes only to approximately half an hour.

The interviews were designed to look at the following areas:

1. Stereotypes (initial stereotype of lesbians; changes on meeting other lesbians; present description)
2. Perceptions of heterosexuals attitudes towards lesbians
3. Perceived roots/origins of homosexuality
Is homosexuality seen as a choice?
4. General feelings (positive & negative) about being a lesbian
5. Any perceived similarities with other minority groups
6. School sex education

These subject areas were introduced in varying order and there was some overlapping. Interviews covered most areas for all subjects, but for several area 5 was omitted. The interviewer tried to phrase questions in an open manner and to avoid leading questions in order to elicit the subjects' own ideas and perceptions.

4.3.3 Summary results and discussion

(Lesbian supplementary interviews)

For a detailed description of the lesbian supplementary interviews, see Appendix B.

Regarding stereotypes held before coming out to other lesbians, some subjects recalled having held a 'butch'/masculine image of lesbians, while others could recall no stereotype image.

"I think I always thought of lesbians as being old - ladies in sort of baggy trousers, thick shoes, probably walking dogs, short hair, anoraks, unattractive" (S6)

"I really couldn't visualize them" (S4)

Age or historical life cycle position does not appear to have contributed towards these subjects having held or not held stereotypes. On coming out to other lesbians, surprise that they were ordinary people was mentioned, but in addition, several subjects remarked that many lesbians they met did seem to fit the butch image. Some suggested however that lesbians now seemed more natural or integrated, and less butch. As one subject commented this could be due to seeing things differently or an actual change.

These findings are interesting viewed in the light of previous studies' findings and the sex-role inventory data in this pilot study. The predominant stereotype of a lesbian would seem to be masculine (e.g. Taylor, 1983, and the BSRI and PAQ data here), but personal views of lesbians seem to tend towards an androgynous/undifferentiated character (BSRI data here), while some previous studies based on self-report of lesbians seem to

indicate lesbians may tend to be androgynous or undifferentiated (Ward in Spence & Helmreich, 1978; LaTorre & Wendenburg, 1983).

In addition to awareness of stereotypes, perceptions of how heterosexuals generally feel about lesbians are important in understanding the coming out situation. Some subjects suggested that heterosexuals may feel threatened or frightened.

"..very uncomfortable, frightened, uneasy..." (S5)
It was also pointed out that many heterosexuals may not think much about lesbians, hardly recognizing their existence. Some thought that heterosexuals' feelings might vary with whether they knew any gay people.

General perceptions of possible reasons why some women are lesbian and some heterosexual were summarized by subject 8:

"I'm a believer in both nature and nurture" (S8)
Subjects tended to discuss upbringing and social or environmental reasons first and then suggest that there might also be genetic or hormonal reasons, or predispositions. Some suggested that it might generally be a combination of nature and nurture, while others suggested for some lesbians it was the former, and for others the latter. A further suggestion as to why some women are lesbian and others heterosexual was simply that people are different.

Perceptions of whether being a lesbian was a choice or not varied. Considering self, some subjects were clear there had been no choice, while one subject suggested in retrospect she had made a choice, but at the time had been unconscious of doing this.

"I may have made a choice, but the choice was dictated by my nature"

(S8)

Some subjects made the distinction between having a choice of behaviour, but maybe not having a choice of how you feel. Considering lesbians generally, responses were similarly varied, and additionally there was awareness of

some women having made a political choice. Both the question of choice, and general feelings about being a lesbian may help distinguish the more traditional type lesbian identity from the type(s) of identity that challenge traditional assumptions (as described for example by Ettorre, 1980a, and Kitzinger & Rogers, 1985).

Subjects described both positive and negative feelings about being a lesbian. Overall, three of the eight subjects seemed to feel predominantly negative. Of the other subjects, three expressed feelings of being generally comfortable as lesbians. Interestingly, two of these three commented how their feelings had changed over time, and that in the past they had felt that they would have preferred to be heterosexual, but this was no longer the case. Many of the negative feelings expressed concerned society/society's attitudes.

As a positive feeling about being gay, one subject commented that she felt more understanding of other minority groups. Three subjects were asked whether they perceived any similarities with other minority groups. Others with something to conceal, (e.g. alcoholics, drug addicts); others who experience discrimination (e.g. blacks), and others who fight for rights (e.g. black people, Jews) were suggested. Thinking of lesbians as a group was questioned by one subject.

There seemed to have been little or no mention of homosexuality in lessons at school for these subjects. Most reported that they would have found it helpful if there had been something on it.

"I wish it had been [mentioned] ... it would have saved me years of agony!" (S7)

One subject suggested gay people should be mentioned in ordinary lessons, as for example, when a character in history was homosexual. Olson (1987) makes a similar recommendation.

4.4 STEREOTYPES INVESTIGATION

4.4.1 Introduction

Stereotypes may affect both coming out to self and coming out to others. In the early stages of coming out, it has been suggested that lesbians may hold stereotypes themselves (Lewis, 1984), and further, that stereotypes may continue to affect even those homosexuals who are part of the homosexual community (Ward, 1979). Stereotyping may affect interpersonal behaviour in a number of ways (Jones, Farina, Hastorf, Markus, Miller & Scott, 1984). Affects on behaviour arising from a person's belief of how he is perceived have been shown by Farina, Allen and Saul (1968), and interaction between stereotypes and factual memory, by Snyder & Uranowitz, 1978. This part of the pilot study was designed to investigate perceptions of both heterosexual and lesbian subjects of a lesbian stereotype, and was intended to supplement data from the taped interviews.

Previous studies have suggested links between childhood gender non-conformity and homosexuality (Bell, Weinberg and Hammersmith, 1981; and subsequently, Green, 1987). Sex role may be important in the stereotyping of homosexuals (Taylor, 1983). Subsequently, there has been support from Kite and Deaux (1987) that homosexuals may be perceived as most similar to opposite sex heterosexuals. The notion of sex role, or behaviours that are perceived as characteristic of males and females in our society, may be viewed from different perspectives. Illustrating the diversity of approach to conceptualization of gender issues are Block's (1984) suggestions of a model based on notions of agency and communion; Bem's (1981a) 'gender schema theory'; Deaux and Major's (1987) interactive model of gender related behaviour; and Gilligan's (1982) ideas concerning notions of attachment and separation in women's development. Methods of measuring sex role developed by Bem (1974, 1977), and Spence, Helmreich and Stapp (1974, 1975) have

categorized sex role in terms of masculinity, femininity and androgyny. Some problems of the 'sex category' approach have been suggested subsequently by Condor (1987). These include the assumptions of categories of 'male' and 'female', and of fixed category content, with exclusive characteristics; and the assumption of fixed meaning of adjectives, and no consideration of social context. Deaux, Winton, Crowley and Lewis (1985) suggest context or situation may influence the female stereotype more than the male stereotype, and subsequent findings by Uleman and Weston (1986) support the idea that sex role may vary with social role.

Other methodological problems in stereotyping research have been suggested. Different listings of traits for ethnic stereotypes were found by Ehrlich and Rinehart (1965) using stereotype check list and open-ended form of questionnaire. Subjects may be reluctant to make stereotype generalizations themselves, (Gilbert, 1951; Karlins, Coffman and Walters, 1969). As stereotypic generalizations may be considered unjustified by subjects, it has been suggested that assumptions of unjustifiableness need to be made explicit by researchers (Brigham, 1971).

With the aim of further investigating perceptions of a lesbian stereotype, it was thought appropriate to attempt to elicit stereotypes in two different ways here: firstly, using a questionnaire containing open-ended items, and secondly, using sex-role inventories (the Bem Sex-role Inventory, Bem, 1974, and the Personal Attributes Questionnaire, Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1974). It was thought that whether or not people hold stereotypes of lesbians themselves, they may be aware of some stereotype of lesbians within society. Thus, the general aim here was to elicit knowledge of a lesbian stereotype within society, rather than any particular stereotype held by the individual. Further, it was thought necessary to make explicit that generalizations

made may be considered unjustified by the subject. It was hypothesized that there would be some awareness of a lesbian stereotype, and that this stereotype would tend to be masculine, in contrast to perceptions of a feminine heterosexual woman stereotype. It was also hypothesized that subjects' personal views of lesbians might tend to be different from the lesbian stereotype. Further, it was thought that there might be some differences in stereotyping between lesbian and heterosexual subjects.

An additional investigation was aimed at examining whether a short form of the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1974) might be substituted in a future study instead of the longer version.

4.4.2 Method

Subjects

Two groups of subjects participated in this investigation, the first consisting of those not selected with reference to sexuality and generally assumed to be heterosexual, and the second consisting of self-defined lesbians. In the first group of twenty subjects (mean age: 25.10 years; standard deviation: 3.68; range: 20-34 years), eleven were female and nine were male. Most were students at LSE. A few worked at LSE (as office or library staff). The second group consisted of eight women (mean age: 44.25 years; standard deviation: 9.91; range: 31-57 years), none of whom were either students or connected with LSE.

Materials

(i) A one page questionnaire designed to elicit perceptions of stereotypes of lesbians and heterosexual women (see Appendix C). This was divided into three sections, the first part concerned with personal definitions, the second involving sentence completion, and the third, open ended questions.

(ii) The Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1974; see Appendix D) in the form of a sorting task. The sixty items were presented on individual cards with seven envelopes marked to correspond to a seven point scale, running from (1) Never or Almost Never True to (7) Always or Almost Always True. Twenty of the items form a masculinity scale, and another twenty form a femininity scale.

(iii) The Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ; Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1974). This was presented in the form of five point rating scales (see Appendix E). Twenty three of the items form a male valued scale; eighteen items, a female valued scale; and the remaining thirteen items, a sex specific scale.

Procedure

All subjects were presented first with a one page questionnaire designed to elicit written responses to open-ended items concerning lesbian stereotypes. This was divided into three sections. In section I, subjects were asked for their understanding of the meaning of the terms heterosexual, homosexual and lesbian. Section II contained six incomplete sentences concerning description of heterosexual women and lesbians. In section III, subjects were asked for any words that they thought most people might use to describe (i) a woman who is heterosexual and (ii) a lesbian, even if the subject did not personally agree with these descriptions. Subjects were allowed as much time as they needed to complete this questionnaire. Presentation of this questionnaire was prior to the presentation of any of the other tasks, so that vocabulary presented in the later tasks would not affect responses to the open questions.

For the remaining tasks, there was some variation in order of presentation, due to an additional task being included for later subjects. The first six subjects in the 'heterosexual' group were presented next with the PAQ, and then lastly with the BSRI stereotype sorting

task. All the other subjects (i.e. subjects 7 to 20 of the 'heterosexual' group and all the lesbian subjects) were presented first with the BSRI sorting task for their personal view, then with the PAQ ratings, and finally with the BSRI stereotype sorting task.

On presentation of the PAQ, subjects were instructed that they were to complete the ratings to indicate how they thought 'most people' would describe either lesbians or heterosexual women. An example was provided of completing a five point rating scale running from 'very noisy' to 'very quiet' concerning how 'most people' might describe 'children'. In completing the PAQ, half the subjects were presented with the task of rating people's views of lesbians first and heterosexual women second, and half with rating people's views of heterosexual women first and lesbians second, so as to deal with any possible order effect.

The BSRI sorting task regarding stereotypes of lesbians was presented with the following instructions:

SORTING TASK

Each card has a different personality characteristic written on it. Please sort the cards to show which characteristics most people might see as true/not true of a lesbian. Use the seven point scale shown below:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never or Almost Never True	Usually Not True	Sometimes But Infre- quently True	Occasion- ally True	Often True	Usually True	Always or Almost Always True

After sorting, place the cards in the appropriate envelopes, numbered 1 to 7.

Example

If the personality characteristic on the card was 'carefree' and you think that most people might see it as 'Often true' that a lesbian is carefree, place the card in envelope 5.

The instructions for the BSRI sorting task regarding personal view of lesbians were modified accordingly (i.e. 'Please sort the cards to show which characteristics you see as true/not true of a lesbian, using the seven point scale...').

On completion of the tasks, subjects were asked for any comments they had about any of the tasks they had been presented with.

4.4.3 Results

Qualitative questionnaire data

Definitions

Examples of some typical responses to Section I of the questionnaire, covering personal understanding of the terms 'heterosexual', 'homosexual' and 'lesbian', include:

Heterosexual

"Person who is sexually attracted to the opposite sex"
(S6, H. Group)

"Attracted to the opposite sex - in love and/or sex"
(S5, L. Group)

Homosexual

"Person attracted to same sex"
(S15, H. Group)

"Man who has sexual feelings for other men"
(S13, H. Group)

"Sexual relationships with people of same sex"
(S7, L. Group)

Lesbian

"Women who are sexually attracted to women"
(S14, H. Group)

"Woman who feels strong sexual and/or emotional attractions to other women"
(S2, L. Group)

The numbers of subjects who mention love or emotion within their definitions are shown in Table 4.4.1.

Table 4.4.1: Frequency of subjects mentioning love or emotion in their definitions of the terms heterosexual, homosexual and lesbian.

Definition		Mentions love/ emotion	Does not mention love/ emotion
Heterosexual	H. Group	2	18
	L. Group	5	4
Homosexual	H. Group	2	18
	L. Group	4	5
Lesbian	H. Group	3	17
	L. Group	6	3

Using the Fisher test, significant differences were found between the heterosexual and lesbian groups in mentioning love or emotion in their definitions of the terms heterosexual and lesbian ($p < 0.05$ in both cases, two tailed). It can be seen that the heterosexual subjects tended not to mention love/emotion. No difference was found between the two groups mentioning love or emotion in their definitions of the term homosexual ($p > 0.05$).

Table 4.4.2: References to men in defining the term homosexual

Definition refers to:

	Men only	Usually men	Either sex
H. Group	5	1	14
L. Group	2	1	6

Table 4.4.2 indicates the number of subjects in the two different groups whose definitions of the term homosexual applied only to men, usually to men or to either sex. It can be seen that the two groups of subjects responded similarly here. In both groups the majority defined homosexual as referring to either sex, but a substantial minority perceived the term homosexual to refer always or usually to men.

Sentence completion and open ended questions

Responses to the incomplete sentences and open ended questions of the questionnaire were coded into twenty four categories. Those categories that included the

greatest numbers of responses for the lesbian stereotype are shown in Table 4.4.3 below. Percentages are based on the total number of responses for the particular group, for the particular stereotype.

Table 4.4.3: Percentages of responses falling into the most commonly occurring response categories for the lesbian stereotype.

		Lesbian stereotype		Heterosexual stereotype	
		H.Group	L.Group	H.Group	L.Group
Category	Sub-category				
Normality	normal abnormal	0 21	0 7	13 1	4 0
Sex role	feminine masculine androgynous	0 13 1	1 18 0	3 0 0	7 0 0
Political/ feminist		12	4	0	0
Aggression/ assertion	aggressive non- aggressive	8 0	5 0	1 4	0 3
	Total no. of responses (all categories)	200	99	141	92
	No. of subjects	20	9	20	9

It can be seen from Table 4.4.3 that the greatest number of responses regarding the lesbian stereotype fell into the categories of normality, sex role, political/feminist and aggression/ assertion. The lesbian stereotype was seen as abnormal, masculine, political/feminist and aggressive, while the heterosexual woman stereotype was seen mainly as normal, and attractive. Examples of some responses categorised in these areas include the following:

abnormal
unnatural
perverted
freakish
weird
misfit

masculine
butch
tomboy
unfeminine
failures as women

political/feminist
 feminist
 "women's lib"
 separatist
 radical feminist

aggressive
 threatening
 fierce
 assertive
 militant

Looking at Table 4.4.3, there appear to be some differences in response between heterosexual and lesbian subjects with, for example, heterosexual subjects appearing to mention abnormality more often than the lesbian subjects. In order to test any such differences the qualitative data was re-analysed in the form of number of subjects mentioning or not mentioning, abnormality/sex role etc. in response to particular items. This data is summarized in Tables 4.4.4, 4.4.5 and 4.4.6.

Table 4.4.4: Numbers of subjects mentioning abnormality for lesbian stereotype

Item	Mentions abnormality	Does not
II.2 Many people think lesbians are...		
H. Group	8	12
L. Group	0	9
II.3 Lesbians are often described as...		
H. Group	7	13
L. Group	1	8
III.2 A lesbian		
H. Group	14	6
L. Group	4	5

Table 4.4.5: Numbers of subjects mentioning normality for heterosexual stereotype

Item	Mentions normality	Does not
III.1 A woman who is heterosexual		
H. Group	12	8
L. Group	3	6

Table 4.4.6: Numbers of subjects mentioning sex role* for lesbian stereotype

Item	Mentions sex role	Does not
II.2 Many people think lesbians are...		
H. Group	6	14
L. Group	7	2
III.2 A lesbian		
H. Group	16	4
L. Group	7	2

*excluding feminist

Fisher tests however indicated no significant differences between the lesbian and heterosexual groups in most of the stereotype descriptions, ($p > 0.05$, two tailed). The only significant difference occurred for mentioning sex role in item II.2, 'Many people think lesbians are..', (Table 4.4.6) for which lesbian subjects tended to mention sex role while heterosexual subjects did not ($p < 0.05$, two tailed). However this situation is contradicted in the data for item III.2 (Table 4.4.6) where both lesbian and heterosexual subjects tended to mention sex role for the lesbian stereotype.

The difference between the two subject groups for mentioning abnormality in item II.2 just missed significance ($p = 0.0586$, two tailed) with the heterosexual subjects appearing to mention abnormality more than the lesbian subjects.

The BSRI and PAQ Pilot Study Results

Data from both the BSRI and PAQ indicated that the lesbian stereotype was perceived as masculine. This contrasted with a feminine heterosexual woman stereotype, and personal views of lesbians that tended to be androgynous. Cluster analysis of the BSRI data indicated a clear distinction between masculinity and femininity items for the lesbian stereotype, but the personal view of lesbians did not reflect this differentiation. There were generally no differences between lesbian and heterosexual subjects' perceptions, although some

differences did emerge from an examination of correlations between BSRI and PAQ scales. A detailed description of the analysis of the BSRI and PAQ data is presented in Appendix F.

Short form PAQ pilot

4.4.5 Method

Subjects

Ten subjects, four male and six female (mean age: 27.70; standard deviation: 4.00; range: 21-35 years) took part. Six were psychology students, and the others were further volunteers from LSE.

Materials

- (i) A short form of the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ; Spence, Helmreich and Stapp, 1974). This consisted of 24 items: eight male valued, eight female valued and eight sex specific items, presented in the form of five point rating scales. The order of items was randomised using random number tables, and then modified so that there were no runs of more than three items of the same type. Following this some poles were reversed so that not more than three in a row were in the same direction, and also so that there were equal numbers beginning and ending with masculine and feminine poles.
- (ii) The Bem Sex-role Inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1974) in the form of a sorting task.

Procedure

Each subject was first asked what he/she understood the word 'heterosexual' to mean. Subjects were informed that there were no right or wrong answers, and that the researcher was just interested in their own understanding of the term. Following this subjects were asked for their personal understanding of the word 'lesbian'.

Subjects were then presented with the BSRI sorting task and instructed to sort the cards, on a seven point scale, to indicate their personal view of lesbians. Following this subjects were presented with the short

form PAQ. Instructions given to subjects and form of presentation were as described in the method section for the long form PAQ pilot. Thus an example of completing a five point rating scale was shown to all subjects, and then half the subjects were presented with the task of rating people's views of lesbians first and heterosexual women second, and half with rating people's views of heterosexual women first and lesbians second. Following completion of the PAQ forms, subjects were presented with the BSRI lesbian stereotype sorting task.

4.4.6 Results (Short form PAQ)

Both BSRI and short form PAQ indicated a masculine lesbian stereotype, and again this contrasted with a personal view of lesbians as androgynous, and a feminine heterosexual woman stereotype. Significant correlations were found between BSRI and short form PAQ masculinity scales; and between BSRI and short form PAQ femininity scales. Comparison of short form PAQ data with long form PAQ data from the previous pilot study indicated no significant differences. See Appendix G for a detailed description of this analysis.

4.4.7 Discussion (stereotype investigation)

The qualitative questionnaire data: a summary of findings

Both the interview and the questionnaire data have indicated that it is important to consider subjects' personal understanding of the terms homosexual, gay and lesbian. It has been seen that some subjects for example use the term 'homosexual' to refer only to men, while for others its use refers to both sexes. It has also been found that for some subjects the terms 'gay' and 'homosexual' are perceived as having different meanings, and further that the terms 'gay' and 'lesbian' may have political connotations for some. In addition, from the questionnaire data, it has been seen that there were significant differences between the heterosexual and

lesbian groups in mentioning love or emotion in their definitions of the terms 'heterosexual' and 'lesbian'. The heterosexual group tended not to mention love/emotion. No such difference was found between the groups in defining the term 'homosexual'. The differences found here need further investigation, as personal understandings of the terms 'lesbian' and 'homosexual' are obviously of fundamental importance to the issue of "coming out". It is possible however that the differences in mentioning love/emotion may arise through differences between men's and women's perceptions rather than differences between heterosexuals and lesbians. Numbers here were too small to test this, but it will need to be looked at in the main study.

Stereotypes emerged more clearly from the questionnaire data than from the interviews. It would seem that there is a definite distinction between the stereotypes of lesbians and heterosexual women. Differences lie not only in perceptions of sex role (as shown by the Personal Attributes Questionnaire data), but also in, for example, the area of normality/abnormality. This latter area emerges from the coded qualitative data. From this data the lesbian stereotype is seen as abnormal, masculine, political/feminist and aggressive, while in contrast, the heterosexual woman stereotype is seen mainly in terms of being normal and attractive.

No significant differences were found in the perceptions of stereotypes held by the heterosexual and lesbian groups of subjects. However, the difference in frequency of mentioning abnormality only just missed significance and is probably worthy of further investigation. It is particularly interesting that a greater number of heterosexuals mentioned this issue as the older lesbian group might have been expected to mention abnormality more than a younger heterosexual group.

Subsequently, Kite and Deaux (1987) have found that

subjects tended to describe female homosexuals in terms of masculine qualities, and positiveness toward females was also mentioned frequently. Female heterosexuals were most frequently described as positive toward males, feminine and normal. Generally, findings from this study agree with those of Kite and Deaux, but additionally, here lesbians were often described more negatively, in terms of abnormality. This is likely to reflect the approach used here, in that subjects were asked to describe lesbians as they thought 'most people' would, even if they did not personally agree with the description, whereas in the Kite and Deaux study, since subjects were reporting their own perceptions, they may have been more reluctant to express negative qualities.

Sources of error

Some possible sources of error originating within the coding frame need to be made explicit. Although some words or phrases may be coded using the frame quite straightforwardly i.e. without ambiguity, in a number of other cases, some interpretation on the part of the coder was necessary. Wherever such a process was necessary, it is possible that misinterpretation of the data may have occurred, possibly then leading to inaccurate or distorted results. For example, the word 'common' may be interpreted as referring to frequency, or taking the context of this particular response into account, it may have been used in the derogatory sense.

A further possible source of distortion of results lies in the designating of words or phrases as positive, negative or neutral by the coder. Others might perceive the words/phrases differently. Another possible complication that must be kept in mind in analysing this data is that the lesbian sample subjects may use some words in a different manner to that of the heterosexual sample. For example, the word 'dyke' may be used positively by a lesbian, but negatively by a heterosexual person, although it would seem likely that where the

particular item makes clear that the response refers to a stereotype (i.e. 'most people's' view), the lesbian may then perceive the word in a similar manner to the heterosexual subject. However, such potential sources of misinterpretation need to be clarified.

The BSRI and PAQ data

Perceptions of the lesbian stereotype, elicited through the BSRI and the PAQ, emerged clearly as masculine for both heterosexual and lesbian subjects. This was in contrast to the feminine stereotype of the heterosexual woman derived from the PAQ data, and the personal view of lesbians as basically androgynous shown in the BSRI data. As in the case of the lesbian stereotype, there seemed to be no differences in perceptions of the heterosexual woman stereotype between lesbian and heterosexual subjects. Similarly, there appears to be little difference in personal views of lesbians between the two subject groups, although the heterosexual subjects' views ranged more widely than those of the lesbian subjects here.

Basically, the perceptions of the lesbian and heterosexual subjects elicited through the BSRI and the PAQ appear to be similar. However, a difference between the two groups does emerge when correlations between the BSRI and PAQ data for the lesbian stereotype are considered. For heterosexual subjects, there are the expected significant correlations between the two masculinity scales and the two femininity scales, as well as correlations between the PAQ sex specific scale and the BSRI masculinity and femininity scales. For the lesbian subjects however, there seems to be little or no association between the BSRI and PAQ data. Spence and Helmreich (1978), citing work by Stapp and Kanner, discuss differences between the PAQ and BSRI scales that may account for lowered correlations. Firstly, they point out that the BSRI is presented in the form of unipolar trait descriptions, whereas the PAQ is presented

in the form of bipolar scales. Secondly, while the BSRI masculinity scale contains trait descriptions judged more desirable for men than for women, and the BSRI femininity scale contains trait descriptions judged more desirable for women than for men, in the PAQ, items assigned to the masculinity and femininity scales have been judged as socially desirable for both sexes. Further, Spence and Helmreich point out, items of the PAQ M-F (sex specific) scale are found on the masculinity and femininity scales of the BSRI, and particularly, on the former.

The short form PAQ pilot

Perceptions of stereotypes elicited using the short form of the PAQ corresponded quite closely to those elicited using the long form of PAQ. As with the long form PAQ, the lesbian stereotype was found to be predominantly masculine, while the heterosexual woman stereotype was predominantly feminine. BSRI data for subjects in this pilot similarly corresponded to the findings in the original pilot study. Comparisons of the short form PAQ data with the BSRI data revealed similar patterns to those found in the analysis of the long form PAQ data with the BSRI data from the heterosexual group of the previous pilot study. No significant differences were found between the subjects' ratings on the short form PAQ and the ratings by the subjects from the previous pilot study using the long form PAQ.

Most of the items for the male valued, female valued and sex specific scales correlated significantly with their respective scales for the lesbian stereotype, but correlations for the heterosexual woman stereotype were weaker overall.

4.5 SELF-DISCLOSURE PILOT

4.5.1 Introduction

The coming out process, in terms of self acceptance and/or self-disclosure, may have parallels with the experiences of other minority group members, or with the experiences of other individuals undergoing certain life events. Examples might include the person with an alcohol problem coming to accept him/herself as alcoholic; and the experiences of a religious minority group member or an ex-psychiatric patient in disclosing this information about themselves to others. Diverse life experiences such as abortion or unemployment may also raise issues of self acceptance or self-disclosure. It is thought that an examination of similarities and differences of the lesbian's coming out experiences with those of other minority group members, or with individuals in other comparable circumstances, would serve to illuminate further the experience of coming out for lesbians.

Previous studies concerned with self-disclosure have looked at the relationship of self-disclosure with mental health; effects of non-disclosure; notions of 'appropriate' disclosure; self-disclosure and friendship formation; disclosure reciprocity; and revealing of deviant information (Chaikin & Derlega, 1976).

Issues of self acceptance and self-disclosure comparable to the coming out process may be considered within a variety of different frameworks. Thus, Breakwell's (1986) model of identity, threat and coping may be applicable. The notion of stigma may be of particular importance, and may be considered in terms of the positions of the 'discredited' and 'discreditable' (Goffman, 1963), or 'marked relations' (Jones et al., 1984). Certain experiences of individuals may be viewed as psycho-social transitions (Parkes, 1971). The notion of privacy and its relationship with power and norms (Kelvin, 1973) may also be relevant.

This pilot study was designed to explore women's experiences concerning self-disclosure using depth interviews. It was thought that women might have experienced difficulty in talking about certain topics to family or friends. It was intended to investigate what these topics were; the women's perceptions of why they had found communication difficult; the way they had approached talking to others; and their perceptions of others' (possible) reactions. Finally, it was intended to compare the self-disclosure situations suggested in these interviews with the coming out process for lesbians.

4.5.2 Method

Subjects

Seven female students (mean age: 24 years; standard deviation: 4.10; range: 20-32 years) participated in this investigation. All were studying at LSE. Five subjects were from the U.K. and two from the United States.

Materials

A cassette tape recorder was used to record the interviews.

Procedure

Potential subjects were informed that the researcher was a student from the Social Psychology department, interested in interviewing women about 'communication with family and friends'. Women who agreed to participate in the study were interviewed individually.

All subjects were asked if it would be all right if their interview were recorded on tape. It was emphasised that anything said would be treated as confidential, and that only the interviewer herself would ever listen to the tape. All seven subjects agreed to this, and therefore all interviews were recorded.

The interviews were of an exploratory nature, designed to investigate whether subjects had experienced any difficulties in talking to family or friends about

anything during their teens or adult life, and whether there were certain things that they chose not to speak to certain other people about. If there were such topics, it was intended to look at the subjects' perceptions of reasons for the difficulties: why they had chosen not to talk to certain others or had experienced difficulty in approaching telling others; how they expected these people to react if they were told; why, maybe, they had felt able to talk to certain people but not to others.

4.5.3 Summary results and discussion

(self-disclosure pilot)

A number of the general self-disclosure issues that arose from analysis of the interviews may be relevant to consideration of the coming out process. Thus, for example, some women may feel the need to confide in others more than other women do. Perceptions of others' reactions (or reactions perceived as possible) are likely to be very important.

"I don't talk to them [family] about my personal life ... I really wouldn't want to upset them" (S3)

The openness of an individual with others may vary with time/age and other circumstances. Some individuals may find it easier to talk to friends rather than family about certain topics, while others, at certain times in their lives, may find communication with family easier than with friends.

"I didn't think that she'd understand" (S3)

The feeling that others would not understand about a particular issue was suggested as a main reason for deciding not to talk to them about it. This reason is often given as underlying decisions taken against coming out to certain others. Such a perception may of course, in some circumstances, be well founded. The possibility of having to cope with certain reactions of others may be perceived as outweighing the likelihood of any positive outcome that might occur through confiding in another.

A woman may recognize her potential vulnerability.

"I think I would have felt very defenceless" (S1)

Some approaches that may be helpful in disclosure of sensitive information to others were suggested. These included sorting out one's own feelings about a particular issue before talking of it to others; selecting the most appropriate people to confide in; and attempting to test possible reactions. Such strategies would seem appropriate to the coming out situation, and may be used, consciously or unconsciously, by many women.

Certain topics that women had found difficult to discuss with others highlight the importance of perception of others' reactions and may be compared with coming out.

"...I think people tend to sort of shy away from you if somebody's died"

(S1)

Reactions of others to bereavement described by subject 1 - 'shying away', embarrassment, shock, and trying to change the subject - may all occur in the situation of coming out to others. It may be of interest to attempt to consider why the two outwardly very different situations of coming out as homosexual, and bereavement, may evoke similar types of reaction in a person the information is being communicated to. One might speculate that in both situations the person who reacts in this manner may experience the disclosure as some kind of threat to self. It is perceived maybe as something unexpected, and very unpleasant, that could happen to them. Both are situations which the person may have had little or no experience of dealing with. One might speculate further that coming out, like bereavement, may include some element of loss for the person who is told about it. In learning that someone is homosexual, the person may experience loss of the other s/he thought s/he knew - and as a parent, maybe loss of potential grandchildren.

Jones et al. (1984) describe death as the ultimate

disruption of the ordering of our lives, and as the "marginal situation par excellence" (p.86). In this way, fear of death forms a basis for all threats concerning the normal ordering of experience. Stigmatized conditions, they suggest, disorientate our ordering of the world, and raise questions concerning the validity of shared meanings and typifications. Such a perspective on death may begin to suggest why reactions towards a bereaved person may have some similarities with reactions towards a person coming out as homosexual. Both situations may form a fundamental threat to people's normal ordering of experience.

A similar link between bereavement and coming out as homosexual occurs where both may be interpreted in terms of psycho-social transitions (Parkes, 1971). These major changes in the life space affect large areas of an individual's assumptive world.

The example of the subject undergoing a serious operation illustrated the effects of another situation in which others were probably attempting to defend themselves. In this case, there seemed to be denial of what was happening by the family, while the friend attempted to separate herself completely from the situation (although the possibility that the friendship broke up for some other reason cannot be discounted). Again, such reactions may occur in the outwardly very different situation of coming out, and once more, the similarities may possibly be interpreted in terms of threat to self, potential loss, and attempts at defence.

Difficulties concerned with talking to others about their education and career ambitions were mentioned by several subjects. These difficulties may have arisen in a number of different ways. For example, they may have been gender or class based, or possibly have arisen from cultural or generational differences. In common with the coming out situation, the interests and expectations of others are perceived as different from, and conflicting

with, those of one's own.

Some further aspects of self-disclosure were illustrated within the interview data. A childhood/school example and that of a previous affair may perhaps be viewed as situations in which feelings of guilt inhibit communication with others. In these examples, subjects might also be viewed as trying to defend themselves against a kind of loss: loss of self respect or the respect of others; loss of others' friendship or love. Feelings of guilt and/or fear of rejection may play an important role in the coming out process for homosexuals.

Avoidance of discussion of certain topics that are felt to be of great personal importance may include some fear of lack of recognition of the significance of the issue by others. This was illustrated particularly in the bereavement examples. It may also play a part in the coming out process.

Self-disclosure at work tended to be limited with subjects generally reporting keeping personal issues and work separated. The temporary nature of much of their work experience may have affected this situation. For the lesbian at work who does not wish to be out, however, there will probably be numerous relatively trivial conversations in which assumptions of heterosexuality may force her to use coping strategies in order to avoid self-disclosure.

Many of these examples of self-disclosure situations can be understood in terms of Breakwell's (1986) notion of threatened identity. A threat arises when the identity processes of assimilation-accommodation and evaluation are not able to act in accordance with the principles of distinctiveness, continuity and self-esteem. Both disruption of interpersonal networks and group memberships may generate threat to identity. Thus, for example, bereavement, like being lesbian, may be considered from this point of view.

A variety of intra-psychic and interpersonal coping strategies (Breakwell, 1986) would probably have been used by subjects in coping with threats to their identities. For example, the main interpersonal strategy described by one subject in the bereavement example was that of isolation. This method of coping is probably also used quite frequently by lesbian women. Its value in coping, as Breakwell points out, is limited.

In summary, this pilot study on communication with family and friends has provided a general perspective on self-disclosure. It has illustrated possible approaches to disclosure of sensitive information; individual differences in communication; and the importance of perceptions of possible reactions of others. A comparison was made of topics that women have found difficult to talk about to others with the coming out process. Underlying themes that emerged from the comparison included threat to self; loss; and attempts to defend self.

(A more detailed description of this interview material is given in Appendix H).

4.6 GENERAL DISCUSSION

Considering the pilot data overall, some important issues become evident. Firstly, there is the question of personal understandings of the meanings of the terms homosexual, heterosexual, lesbian and gay. It has been seen from both the interview data and the questionnaire data that personal definitions vary. This needs to be looked at in the main study, as well as being taken into consideration when interpreting results from previous studies. Many of the previous studies on attitudes towards homosexuals have tended to ignore subjects' personal understandings of the meaning of the term 'homosexual'; some have not even specified gender of homosexual target. Both gender of subject, and gender of homosexual target, need to be considered in these

studies.

Looking at the findings on stereotypes, it can be seen that different perspectives emerge from the three different approaches taken in gathering data, i.e. from the interviews, from the sex-role inventories and from the open-ended questionnaire items. Although subjects generally tended to be less forthcoming about stereotypes in the interview situation, it was from this source only that it emerged that subjects were often aware of more than one stereotype for gay men and more than one stereotype for lesbians. Thus for lesbians separate masculine and feminine stereotypes were suggested. From the use of sex-role inventories, a clearly masculine stereotype of lesbians emerged, distinct from a feminine heterosexual woman stereotype, and contrasting with a personal view of lesbians as androgynous (since the t-test method was used to derive results on BSRI data, the category of 'androgynous' here may include undifferentiated too). From the open-ended questionnaire items, vivid stereotypes emerged indicating that lesbians were perceived not simply in terms of sex role. In particular, abnormality emerged as an important aspect of the lesbian stereotype. Thus it would seem that the three different approaches taken in data collection may be seen as complementary, with each contributing in a different way towards an overall picture of a lesbian stereotype.

Taking an overview of the lesbian and heterosexual interviews, one contrast that emerges is that for the lesbian subjects the interview is covering a topic which they have considered deeply previously, possibly over a period of many years. For the heterosexual subjects however, it would seem that many have given the issue little previous thought, and may even be formulating their ideas during the interview. This, in itself, may well have direct implications for understanding of the coming out process and, in particular, for understanding

of the interaction that takes place when a lesbian tells a heterosexual person of her sexual orientation.

In considering the study generally, potential sources of error need to be kept in mind. Thus apart from biases arising from the composition of samples, there are also all the possible sources of bias arising from the interview situation to consider, as well as the general problems of interpreting qualitative data.

It is necessary to emphasise that the lesbian sample cannot be seen as representative of lesbians generally. Firstly, the study was only designed to reach those women who had at least come out both to themselves and to other lesbians. Secondly, all the subjects were from just one London group. Thirdly, but very importantly, subjects were all volunteers. It is very likely, considering the topic of this study that those women who are less confident or open, about 'coming out' would be less likely to volunteer to take part in such a study. Several women who were considering taking part, but did not in the end, mentioned that they were concerned with confidentiality.

It is also necessary to consider the heterosexual sample. Here it was decided to use a sample from the student population. An alternative might have been to interview friends or relatives of the lesbian sample, or other heterosexuals who had had a close relative or friend 'come out' to them. Although this approach might have provided interesting material about how these people reported actually reacting when confronted with the situation of someone 'coming out' to them, considering a student sample instead does provide a perspective that might otherwise be missing. It reveals, for example, how little many heterosexuals may have thought about the issue previously. As with the lesbian sample however, it is likely that those who find the topic most difficult to cope with, would be unlikely to volunteer to participate in such a study.

In order to allow for the full diversity of experience and perceptions, and the complexity of the different issues involved, interviewing would seem to be the most appropriate method of investigation of the coming out process. The lesbian and heterosexual interviews described here provide a basis for the construction of semi-structured interview schedules for the main study. Results from the pilot stereotype investigation have provided additional material on stereotyping of lesbians, and they indicate that further investigation in this area, using both the open-ended items and sex-role inventories, would be useful.

Themes that arose from the 'self-disclosure' pilot interviews included loss; threat to self; and attempts to defend self. It was thought that all these issues may be pertinent in 'coming out'. These interviews also illustrated possibilities of taking different approaches to talking to others about sensitive issues, including testing possible reactions before confiding. The interviews provide the basis for a semi-structured interview schedule focusing on communication with family and friends.

4.6.1 Summary

The original pilot study of lesbians perceptions of coming out (Markowe, 1985) provided an initial view of coming out indicating a complex process with various psychological, sociological and political aspects. Supplementary lesbian interviews elicited perceptions regarding stereotypes and heterosexuals' attitudes; perceptions of why some people are homosexual and others heterosexual; and general feelings about being lesbian. These latter areas may be relevant to distinguishing different types of lesbian identity. Interviews with heterosexual subjects covered a range of areas related to those in the lesbian interviews and including stereotypes; feelings about the hypothetical or real

situations of a friend/sibling etc. disclosing his/her sexual orientation to them; and definitions of the terms homosexual, gay and lesbian. From the stereotype investigation, supplementing the interview data, differences were found between lesbian and heterosexual woman stereotypes. The lesbian stereotype was perceived as masculine, abnormal, political/ feminist, and aggressive. Different perspectives on the stereotype emerged from the various methods of data collection. Data elicited using a short form of the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1974) was found to correspond quite closely to data from the longer version of the questionnaire. Fundamental issues raised included personal definitions of terms referring to sexuality; potential sources of error and bias arising from the interview as a method of data collection; interpretation of qualitative data; and questions of sampling. The 'self-disclosure' pilot indicated some of the issues that may underlie talking to family or friends on sensitive topics. These pilot studies have facilitated development of semi-structured interview schedules, and form the basis of the main study.

CHAPTER FIVE

A RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF 'COMING OUT'

5.1 AN IMAGINARY LESBIAN

Jane is an imaginary lesbian, a composite figure constructed from pilot study data as well as something of my own experiences in coming out. She is described below in order to provide an illustration of the process of coming out, and to form the basis for reconceptualization and the development of an interpretational framework for the main study.

Jane is based primarily on twenty subjects: the seventeen lesbian women who participated in the initial pilot study (Markowe, 1985); two lesbian women interviewed subsequently for whom the women's movement was particularly important; and myself. (Subject numbers have been randomized). Jane also reflects something of the supplementary interview data described previously.

There are major differences between individuals' experiences of coming out, with for example some women leading a heterosexual life for many years before coming to accept themselves as lesbian. Age and historical period differences may also exist. Jane, aged about forty, thus necessarily reflects the experiences of some women more than others, but an attempt is made to illustrate something of other possible pathways that may be taken in the coming out process.

Jane

Jane feels that she has probably always been a lesbian. Although she had no label for her feelings until her teens or later, she recalls her first feelings of attraction towards women maybe as far back as the age of four or five, although for some of her lesbian friends, such feelings may have begun some years later.

"In retrospect, I think I knew probably when I was very young - seven, eight..." (S14)

She may also recall having felt 'different' from other girls. Possibly, she preferred boys' toys, or maybe even wanted to be a boy.

"I always had a sense of myself as not really fitting in" (S16)

"I remember when I was a child, I wanted to be a boy..." (S15)

As a child..."I used to think of myself as a person rather than a girl"
(S19, Sentence completion data (SC))

"I was just never interested in playing with dolls, or games of 'mothers and fathers'..." (S4)

As a child, Jane may have felt isolated, but equally, her childhood may have been a happy one.

From the age of maybe eleven or twelve, and especially during her teens, Jane was becoming more aware of her feelings towards girls or women, while friends were becoming interested in boys.

"I was never interested in boys, never, not for a minute" (S15)

Jane's feelings felt completely natural to her.

"I'd always had girlfriends, always knew what I was feeling, but I suppose it never particularly worried me or upset me, but I suppose I thought it was just me" (S11)

"..when I had the crush on this .. teacher, it was so natural, I just never never thought it was unnatural or abnormal..." (S15)

Such feelings would probably only be thought of as in any way unnatural with the beginnings of awareness of social disapproval.

"[I] don't think I knew the word lesbian then. I knew there was something slightly unnatural in having such strong feelings towards someone of the same sex" (S20)

It was around this time that Jane first started to become aware of words such as 'homosexual', 'lesbian' or 'queer'.

When I first heard the word 'lesbian'...

"I knew there was something terribly wrong"

(S15, SC*)

"it was used as an insult"

(S7, SC*)

[Lesbian:] "it's a word I hate and abominate because of associations ...when a girl" (S2)

"A friend at school used the word 'homosexual' - I went home and looked it up in the dictionary! ... I began to wonder about myself ... and worry..." (S4)

"Then, they didn't say gay, lesbian or homosexual; they tended to say queer" (S1)

*SC: sentence completion data

From this time onwards, on and off, Jane would wonder if she really were a lesbian.

Jane's ideas about homosexuality were gradually forming, particularly through comments made by school friends, and articles she read in the newspapers. The former tended to portray homosexuality as something to be joked about; as a taboo subject only to be whispered about; or as something abhorrent and disgusting. From the press, Jane began to understand that homosexuality might be regarded as some kind of sickness or immaturity, and that homosexuals were people likely to lead sad and lonely lives, and thus, should be pitied. Alongside such analysis, were reports of 'queer-bashing'. There never seemed to be any suggestion at school that anyone in one's class might be homosexual, and similarly, in the newspapers, there seemed no indication that any of the paper's readers might actually be homosexual themselves.

"..I felt strange thinking that there was nobody else in the world who felt like I did" (S1)

"The type of woman on television completely discourages you from coming out to yourself, let alone to other people" (S14)

Throughout this time Jane was experiencing considerable conflict of feelings. At times she felt there was no question that she was a lesbian, while at other times she

felt unable to comprehend how she could be the type of person her school friends whispered and laughed about, and the newspapers described as so strange and undesirable. Maybe she was just going through 'a phase'. Jane felt isolated, frightened and different from everyone else.

"We're talking about a very long time ago. Feelings that came up and were too unbearable to think about or contemplate, and so were buried and reburied, and then rose again and again" (S20)

With all the societal and peer pressure towards heterosexual conformity, Jane might have become involved with boys during her teenage years.

"It really seemed like you had to go out with boys to be accepted at all, and so that's what I did after a while. I thought it was a terrible pity you couldn't go out with girls instead, but I just thought that was it, you couldn't" (S16)

"I was at a convent and I was very programmed into rights and wrongs, and oughts and shoulds, and I had a peer group who went into boys quite early, and it was enforced on me that this was the thing to do..." (S12)

This heterosexual involvement might have lasted a comparatively short time, or might have lead on to thoughts of, or actual occurrence of, marriage, in spite of maybe some awareness of lesbian feelings.

"I was very frightened about it [feelings of attraction towards women], because it wasn't a path that I wanted to take. I wanted initially to take a very conventional path, marriage, early marriage and children, and lots of them" (S20)

"I sort of sat up all night before the wedding thinking I'm sure I'm a lesbian - what am I doing this for, but it seemed too late to get out of it really" (S16)

Marriage to a man would not necessarily reflect heterosexual rather than lesbian feelings.

"I never felt attracted to men. I always liked women" (S2, a woman who married)

Jane however did not become involved with boys during her teens, and now felt that she needed very much

to talk to someone about her feelings.

"...when I was at home and didn't know anyone, it was horrible, because, I mean, you just couldn't really say what you felt, or how you felt..."

(S1)

"I felt desperately that I needed to talk to someone, but for various reasons, I just felt there was no-one among my family or friends I could turn to ... at the same time, I was terrified that people would find out about me being a lesbian - it was only some years later that I began to realize they'd actually only ever know if I chose to tell them"

(S4)

A period of feeling unable to talk to anyone about oneself, of isolation and fear, may arise, possibly lasting only a short time, or maybe lasting many years. Jane would have considered who she might be able to discuss her feelings with. She might think of telling friends or family, and consider what they have said in the past about homosexuality. She will probably consider her work situation (school, job or career) and how openness about herself might affect her position. She may well think about how telling one person may lead to others being told. Risks of the person not understanding, of them being upset, of rejection, and of job difficulties or loss, would be likely to be considered. For an older, married lesbian, there might also be the possibility of losing one's children to think of. Balanced against these risks will be the strain and other effects of feeling unable to be open with anyone, and of maybe having to lie, directly, or by omission, in certain situations.

Jane may eventually decide that the next step for her is to attempt to contact other lesbians.

Coming out to other lesbians

For women like Jane - unlike maybe younger women who have approached lesbianism through feminist groups - initially contacting other lesbians may have been a daunting and major step in the coming out process,

requiring planning and positive action. Contributing towards an awareness that the present provides an opportunity to attempt to meet other lesbians for the first time may be issues such as career circumstances; closeness to family and whether one is living with them; opportunities in a particular neighbourhood and one's awareness of them; perceived general climate of attitudes towards homosexuality as, for example, reflected in the media; and, very importantly, some level of emotional acceptance of oneself as lesbian.

"I came to London when I was 21 because I knew that I wasn't going to meet other women who felt the same as I did - I still wasn't putting a name to it - where I lived. And even when I came to London, I didn't know what to look for. I didn't know of the existence of Gay News, or any clubs, or any publications, or any organizations, or Gay Switchboard - nothing at all" (S14)

"I read about Sappho [lesbian group] quite early on, and didn't dare go..." (S12)

Jane may well be aware of some kind of lesbian stereotype and may be very unsure as to what to expect in meeting lesbians for the first time. [These issues have been described in detail in the Pilot Studies chapter.]

Having found a reference to Lesbian Line in a magazine, it took Jane three weeks to eventually bring herself to dial the number.

"I rang up and asked for therapy or counselling, or something, and I asked them if there was a cure..." (S9)

Coming out to friends/family etc.

"I found it very difficult to tell other people, very, very difficult" (S18)

Why might Jane want to tell friends or family that she is a lesbian? Heterosexual people may suggest that it is not something that one should talk about to others, and point out that they do not tell people of their sexuality. This ignores the numerous indications of

their sexual orientation ranging from chatting about boyfriends or husbands, to weddings and wedding rings, and the use of the title 'Mrs.'. Jane, while not out to particular friends or family members cannot convey that a girlfriend means more to her than an ordinary friend. She is likely to have to deal with questions about boyfriends and her social life, and may be under some family or peer pressure to find herself a husband. Unless she has actually indicated in some way that she may be a lesbian, others are likely to assume that she is heterosexual. This assumption of heterosexuality may be a strain to deal with.

"I feel dishonest" (S2)

"I don't like lying...I kept finding myself very close to the point of having to tell lies almost, just to shut them up - cover up or whatever" (S8)

"I find it very difficult when they ask me, 'why haven't you got any children, because you obviously like children?' I like children a lot, and I find it very embarrassing to explain why...I still find it difficult to say 'well, because I'm gay, and because I believe that a child has a right to a father too'" (S15)

"I had to tell everyone immediately...particularly female friends because I was going through this guilt complex...I felt it was fairer on them to tell them" (S9)

"The more I come out, the more I relax, and the less guilty I feel" (S14)

"...you just wanted that something extra, just to be able to have other friends that you could talk to, and be yourself with" (S1)

Friends may appear easier to approach than family. Reactions however may vary, and women will probably still feel cautious. Jane may well decide not to come out to certain friends.

"I've always been dubious about coming out to them...I'm frightened in case they won't accept - [I'm frightened] that the friendship is going to end.." (S1)

"I was loath to confide..in heterosexual friends because I thought they wouldn't understand" (S18)

She may test the ground to find out people's attitudes towards homosexuality before attempting to tell them about herself. If she decides to come out to a friend, she may approach telling them in different ways.

"I don't like having to make a grand statement. I prefer just to be honest about things, and sort of just talk about it in a natural way without feeling this pressure to say it all out of the blue, which is very difficult to do anyway...if there's an opportunity...if the subject comes up in some way, then it's easier just to bring it into the conversation, but actually having to tell people cold is very difficult" (S11)

Jane may feel that some of her friends know without her having to tell them, but the actual situation is probably not clear.

"On the whole they tend to say 'Oh, I'm glad you told me' or 'why did you feel you had to tell me' or that they know anyway, or some people, you know that they know, but you know also that they don't particularly want you to talk about it. So there's different reactions really, and often you get a different reaction to what you'd expect, which is the strange thing. And I think in the past I've sort of made the mistake of thinking that people know, or assuming people know because it seems obvious, and then something perhaps somebody else says, makes me realize that they don't know, and it's people that I would assume would know that sometimes don't, and it's people you would least suspect to be thinking about it that actually do know. So when you tell people you often get different reactions to what you think" (S11)

"A lot of people, I didn't really tell. I just thought that they would find out somehow because I had told other people, and somehow it would filter through. But it doesn't necessarily - people do keep confidences sometimes" (S18)

Reactions may be unexpectedly hostile, or in some way may not meet Jane's expectations.

"Some people at my college stopped talking to me like that, and didn't speak to me for the next two years, not even to say hullo. I was quite hurt in a way and sort of ...surprised. ..I knew that people didn't like lesbians very much, but I was surprised they were so up front about it" (S16)

"My best friend wrote to me and said she was shocked and disgusted, and never wanted to hear from me again. Goodbye" (S4)

"Telling people initially seemed to be easy, and reactions seemed to be favourable. I'm putting the emphasis on 'seemed to' because the reality is that as time progresses, I think I've discovered who are my real friends, those who've stayed with me as it were, or those who have actually not been able to take it on board" (S20)

"My friends are a little bit funny about it" (S9)

Rejection is obviously extremely distressing. Jane's satisfaction with other responses is likely to vary.

"I wanted her to be interested and ask me how it happened, and so we could have a sort of friendly chat" [and she didn't want that at all - she couldn't cope with it] (S18)

"...it was quite a source of comfort..at the time...a sort of a measure of acceptance" (S17)

[Benefits of coming out to friends:] "I can talk to them quite honestly about how I feel" (S8)

Telling parents about oneself is probably harder than dealing with friends, or brothers and sisters, and many lesbians choose not to come out to their parents.

"I find it difficult to tell people of that generation - I think because I feel they don't understand what it's all about" (S11)

"There's no point telling him because he won't understand" (S14)

"I don't really think it's worth putting them through the hassle unless it just has to come out" (S9)

"I don't really want to worry my father, because I'm quite sure that he would see it as a very insecure future..." (S8)

Jane may feel that her parents possibly already know without her having to put it into words.

"I just thought that she must know, but she's 87 so I didn't say anything to her" (S12)

"I don't think my mother needed to be told..."(S13)

"They might have guessed, or they might not have done. It's not spoken about" (S18)

"I think she knows at one level, but whether she'd put a label 'lesbian' onto it, I don't know..." (S17)

"Well, I've not come out to the family at all, I mean even though I have an idea that my mother knows, but she won't say anything, and neither will I ... I should think my father would probably be hurt, and perhaps shocked. Perhaps my mother, with her perhaps having an idea...her first reaction would be, what would the neighbours think...but she might understand - I don't know - but I don't really think I could actually come out to them at all...I might change my mind, but I don't really think so. I don't think I would want to actually now" (S1)

"I thought my mother had known for years, but when I actually told her, it turned out she'd had no idea about it" (S4)

If Jane does decide to tell her parents, this may improve her relationship with them. However, telling them may instead turn out not to fulfil Jane's expectations. For example, after a good initial reaction, Jane may find her parents then become reluctant to discuss the subject with her. Jane may even have to deal with more serious reactions including being told to leave home, or being forbidden to meet other lesbians.

"...it was a shock to my mother and I had a very difficult time. She could not accept it"
(S15 whose mother told her to leave the country)

Jane may be more likely to have told her brothers and sisters about herself than her parents. She probably considered it quite thoroughly before attempting to tell them. As with friends, Jane wishes to be able to talk freely about herself, and reactions may vary.

"I thought for a long time that it was ridiculous I hadn't told her ... Because I couldn't talk about myself to her without coming out to her, we didn't really share so much" (S18)

"She totally accepted it, in so far as she doesn't say it's wrong, but she also would rather not talk about it" (S14)

Jane may feel it is unnecessary to come out.

"...I don't particularly feel that there is anything to be gained by my revealing anything to the brothers and sister-in-laws. I think I'm probably frightened of doing it as well, but I can't see any positive gains" (S8)

Jane has not been involved with men at any stage, but many lesbians have had some heterosexual experience. If Jane had been one of those women who had married, and possibly had children, she would need to consider the question of coming out to husband and/or children.

"I don't think he does [realize what was going on] even now - or he may" (S10 re husband)

"My husband, as I discovered, reacted predictably initially ...can I join in...how exciting...and then, as it became more evident that I was strongly attracted to women and likely to form a lasting relationship, his whole attitude changed, and he became - understandably in a way because I was still married - very withdrawn, and it was a very unhappy period of my life. I began to drink heavily, became alcoholic..." (S12)

Children may react in a straightforward manner, or there may be hostility and confusion.

"I came across my daughter's diary once and read it...when she was 14, and she had written 'My mother is a lesbian - I don't know what to do', and this shocked me and really I didn't know that I had been that overt. I thought I had kept this hidden, as I strongly believe that your sexuality shouldn't be overt until your children are adult..." (S12)

Concern about the possible effects of work colleagues or employers knowing that Jane is a lesbian may well lead her to decide not to tell anyone at work. She may fear that it would damage her working relationship with her colleagues; that they might stop

speaking to her, or refuse to work with her; or that she might even lose her job. In some areas, such as those where children are involved, Jane's position would be particularly sensitive. If Jane has decided not to be out she will probably have to evolve ways of dealing with tea break talk about husbands and boyfriends, and situations in which the subject of homosexuality arises in conversation. These latter occasions may be particularly difficult to deal with. Feelings about being out at work, however, are likely to be mixed.

[In nursing] "I felt really worried that the other women would refuse to work with me" (S16)

"As a teacher, in secondary school education, I really did not feel it was very wise to start flaunting my sexuality around - so I spent a long time feeling very frightened about it - should I give it all up - it didn't seem to be an easy way to live at all" (S8)

"...nothing upsets parents like having a gay headmistress" (S10)

"..I let it be too widely known and I regret it now, not because it stood in the way of anything, but..unless there's an opportunity to talk about it in a very positive way, there actually isn't a lot of point in telling any but your closest working friends" (S20)

"People can be cruel if they want to be...suppose somebody wants your job..." (S6)

[At work] "Sometimes if they said anything bad, I would feel terrible, and I'd feel, well, why can't I say something to defend.." (S1)

"I don't not want to be out at work, but it's another thing to be out" (S18)

The Women's Movement

It was not until Jane's late twenties or early thirties that the feminist movement seemed to begin to play a part in her life.

"For some reason it played no part in my life in the '70s - I can't understand that, but I didn't know it was there really" (S17)

Jane may feel that the women's movement has played a very positive part in her coming out experiences, or she may have rather mixed feelings about it.

"I suppose it's made it easier for women to actually be together and to actually not feel bad about enjoying other women's company, but, I mean, it's also had a strange effect, in that certainly in the early days it sort of split off gay women from feminists, and there's still that feeling. There's still a sort of division and a lot of mistrust I suppose of people who are political lesbians. So I don't know that it's made it easier for coming out" (S11)

"I have very ambivalent feelings about the Women's Movement and lesbianism, and the degree of raucous, radical, political lesbianism which I cannot feel for. ... There's still a lot of personal suffering I think attached to being lesbian, and I don't think they've begun to touch that" (S12)

"in some ways it's made it worse" (S2)

"rather than [being a lesbian] just being something I just happened to do behind a closed door, that was nobody's business, [the women's movement] did make it into..much more of a way of life

"...[But] you couldn't say you were a lesbian, and it was very heterosexual" (S17)

Jane has accepted herself as lesbian, and come out into the lesbian community. She has perhaps come out to a few heterosexual friends, and to her sister, but not to her parents or work colleagues. She still has some mixed feelings, but basically feels increasingly positive about her lesbian identity. Coming out to self was a difficult and isolating experience. Coming out to others, although hard to approach, has been, on the whole, a very positive experience.

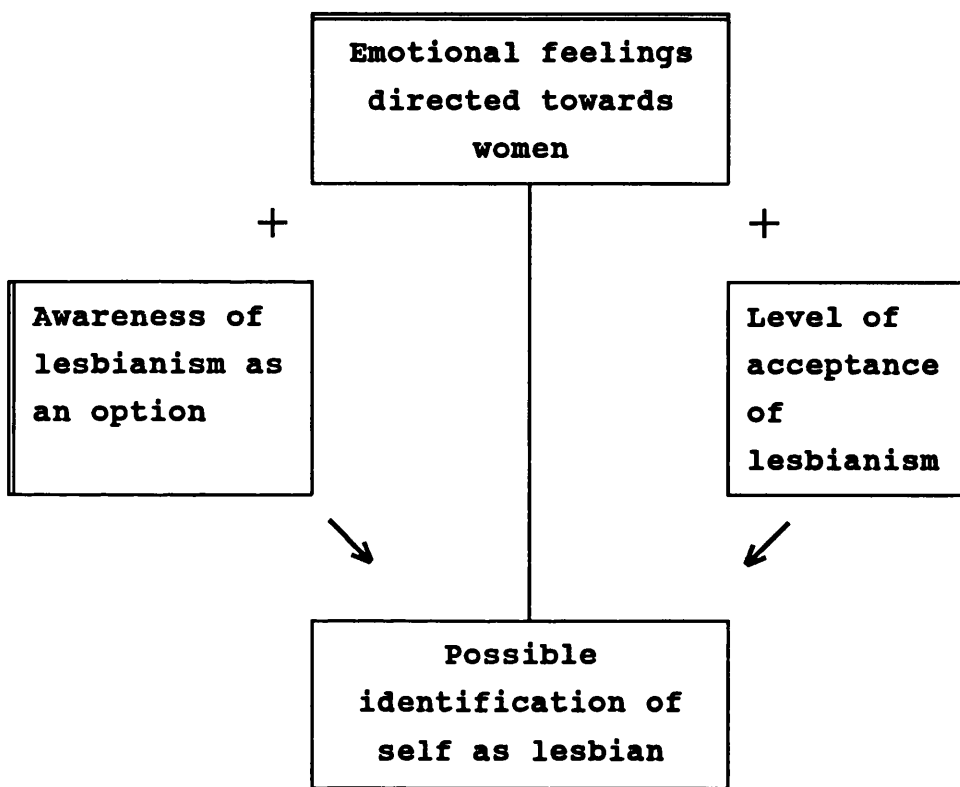
5.2 COMING OUT AS A PROCESS

5.2.1 Coming out to self

On the basis of the data from the pilot studies, as well as findings described in previous literature, it is thought that coming out to self is a process that may have its origins very early in life, and that it is an

interaction between a complexity of internal and external cues that may lead to an individual's eventual awareness of self as lesbian. However, on a more generalized level, primary emotional attachments with women rather than men, together with awareness of lesbianism as an option, as well as some degree of emotional acceptance of lesbianism, may be seen as forming a basis for self identification as lesbian (see Figure 5.2.1).

Figure 5.2.1: Coming out to self

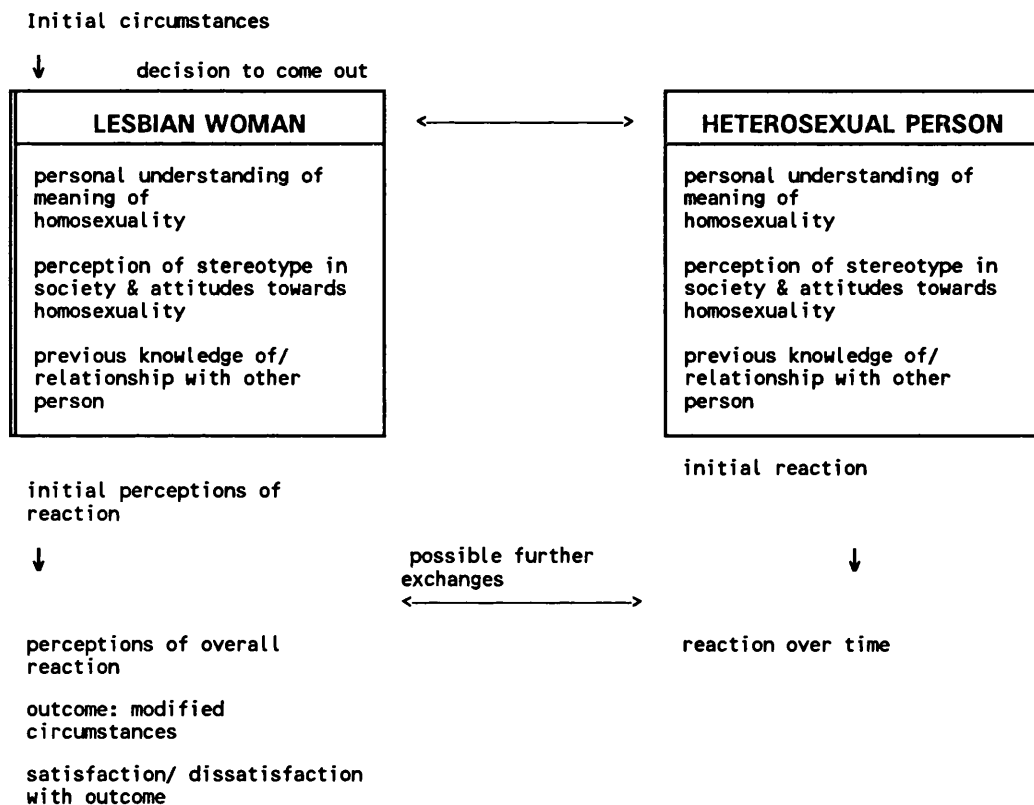


It is not suggested that all women with this basis will identify as lesbians, but only that those women who do come to identify themselves as lesbian would probably have such a background. For some women other aspects such as a political analysis or a physical relationship with another woman may be important for self definition as lesbian, but it is suggested here that it is the emotional basis that is of major importance in leading to eventual self identification as lesbian.

5.2.2 Coming out to others

In order to examine the process of coming out to others, it is thought necessary to consider firstly, the initial circumstances that may or may not lead to a decision to come out; secondly, approaches taken to coming out; thirdly, the lesbian telling the other person; fourthly, perceptions of reactions which may change over time; and finally, the modified circumstances, and associated satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the outcome (see Figure 5.2.2).

Figure 5.2.2: Coming out to a heterosexual person



Looking at coming out to others from this perspective raises a number of questions related to each of the aspects mentioned. Considering the initial circumstances, why is the lesbian contemplating telling the other person about herself and what does she hope to gain? She may wish to be able to talk freely with the

other person, and not to have to lie or 'lead a double life'. She may need to relieve present isolation and possibly needs support. She probably hopes to improve her relationship with the person she is telling. At the same time, a lesbian is likely to be aware of possible risks in telling the other person. She may think the person might not understand, or might be upset, and she may anticipate possible rejection. Often, consideration of these latter issues predominates, and the woman decides not to come out. She may, however, move further towards coming out, possibly, attempting first to test the ground.

Women are likely to take different approaches to actually telling someone about themselves. Relevant to the interaction however will be the personal understanding of what homosexuality means to each of the individuals concerned; their perceptions of societal attitudes and stereotypes; and their previous knowledge of, and relationship with, each other.

The initial reaction of a heterosexual person is thought likely to include some degree of surprise or shock, as well as probably some ambivalence of feelings. Over a period of time, the general reaction may be perceived as changing. The general outcome will include modification of circumstances for the lesbian, and some change in her relationship with the heterosexual person.

Satisfaction with the outcome will depend partly on the extent to which the original reasons for coming out, both conscious and unconscious, have been met (e.g. need for acceptance/ being able to talk more freely).

5.2.3 Further aspects of the coming out process

Coming out to self

Although coming out to self may generally precede coming out to others, this is certainly not always the case. One counter example may be provided in the situation where a woman finds herself involved with

another woman before she has ever consciously considered herself as homosexual. A second example is seen in the situation where another person suggests to a woman that she may be lesbian before she has ever considered this herself. A third example concerns the situation where a significant other has thought that someone is probably homosexual before the woman has even begun to become aware of the possibility herself. Examples of all three of these situations were provided within the initial pilot data. Thus, coming out to self does not necessarily occur before coming out to others.

Coming out to others

One question that emerges is whether it is possible to discern any order in disclosure of sexual orientation to different significant others. For example, might friends tend to be told before family, or siblings before parents? Does the age of the lesbian on coming out to others affect who she might choose to tell first? Might a younger lesbian be more likely to attempt telling her family about herself than an older woman? It is unlikely that any general order of disclosure will be found, since it is more likely to depend on particular circumstances, and on an individual's closeness to family or friends. However, given individual variations for some, generally, there are probably some ways of ordering coming out to others that may provide an easier pathway than other routes. For example, coming out to other lesbians before coming out to significant others would be likely to provide a background of support.

Coming out is a process that is unlikely to have a definable end point. Since throughout life there are likely to be interactions with people newly met, the question of whether to disclose one's sexual orientation to new friends, acquaintances or work colleagues etc. will probably arise again and again. However, for some women, at certain times in their lives, a position may be

reached where they have come out to a number of significant others, and, feeling reasonably comfortable with the present circumstances, have decided that it is probably unnecessary for anyone else to be told.

5.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

5.3.1 Coming out to self

Coming out to self needs to be examined from a social perspective, and cannot be understood simply in individual terms.

In our society sex-role differentiation pervades much of everyday life. Information may tend to be processed in terms of gender schema (Bem, 1981a). There may be a social representation of human nature that includes views on what a 'normal' person is, and why people are different, (Moscovici & Hewstone, 1983), and this may underlie heterosexism. It is thought that it is only through the heterosexist nature of society, which may have its foundations in sex-role differentiation, gender schematic processing, and inequalities between men and women in society, that coming out to self or others emerges as an issue.

At the basis of potential definition of self as lesbian lie strong emotional attachments with other girls/women rather than men. Such feelings may be experienced for many years - for some reaching back to early childhood - without application of any label, and perceived as natural for oneself. Perception of oneself as lesbian may develop with an awareness of lesbianism as an option, together with a level of emotional acceptance of homosexuality.

Leading to eventual self identification as lesbian/gay, women predominantly mentioned attachments with other girls/women including crushes, feelings of attraction, and falling in love. Fantasies were also mentioned by some subjects. It is likely that it is a woman's strong positive relationships with other women

that form the essential basis for self identification as lesbian; and that her relationship with men will often be perceived in terms of indifference rather than specifically negatively. Many of the lesbian subjects perceived reasons for some women being lesbian and some heterosexual in terms of both nature and nurture. It was suggested that while there may be choice in whether or not to lead a lesbian lifestyle, women may perceive no choice regarding the lesbian feelings they experience. Thus self labelling as lesbian is likely to reflect both internal and external cues.

In labelling oneself as lesbian, a woman may be making either a dispositional or an external attribution, in the former case seeing it as part of her personality, and in the latter case, as a choice of lifestyle. Some women's perception of self as lesbian may reflect a combination of internal and external attributes. Looking at the two extreme cases, firstly, a woman who has experienced emotional attachments with girls/women rather than with boys/men from childhood onwards, and does not have a political analysis of the relationship between the sexes, would be likely to attribute her lesbianism largely to her disposition. An example of the second type of case would be a woman who has had a heterosexual past and then takes a political decision to lead a lesbian lifestyle. She would base her definition of self as lesbian on external issues. None of the pilot subjects, however, reflected this latter understanding of lesbianism. Thus, dispositional attributions may play a particularly large part where there is no political analysis of sexuality.

As women, probably in their teens or early twenties, become cognitively aware of lesbianism and society's attitudes towards homosexuality, the issue of emotional acceptance becomes particularly pertinent.

There are likely to be conflict and feelings of ambiguity during the process of coming out to self for

many women. At a rather generalized level, on the one hand there would be the strongly positive feelings regarding women/a woman, while on the other hand, there would probably be awareness of social disapproval. Defence mechanisms such as denial, repression, rationalization or displacement may be used in an attempt to cope with anxiety about one's feelings.

There is probably awareness of stigma attached to homosexuality. By accepting herself as lesbian, a woman places herself in the position of being 'discreditable' in the sense used by Goffman (1963), or of being 'markable' (Jones et al., 1984). Awareness of one's vulnerability as a lesbian in interactions with others may make emotional acceptance of one's homosexuality harder.

Viewing the concept of self from the social perspective of Mead (1934), meaning may be seen as given by the response of others. A woman perceiving herself as a lesbian, is an object to herself, and takes the attitude of others towards herself. Coming out to self as homosexual is experienced within a predominantly heterosexual social context in which attitudes towards homosexuality may well be negative. It is these attitudes that a woman coming out to herself as lesbian would be likely to assume.

Looking at coming out to self from the intergroup perspective of the notion of social identity (Tajfel, 1981), a fundamental comparison group for lesbians will be that of women generally.

It is certainly possible that during the process of coming out to self, a woman may not know any other lesbians. Her notions of the group of which she is beginning to perceive herself as a member may be derived largely from heterosexual society. This situation emphasizes the importance of heterosexual attitudes. The situation of coming out to self may be viewed in terms of threatened identity and the coping strategies that may

develop (Breakwell, 1986). The intra-psychic coping strategies described by Breakwell are particularly relevant. These include strategies that rely on the process of assimilation-accommodation and the process of evaluation. Of those relying on assimilation-accommodation, there are deflection strategies such as denial, fantasy, reconstrual and re-attribution; and acceptance strategies such as anticipatory restructuring, compartmentalism and fundamental change. Strategies that rely on the process of evaluation include re-evaluation of existing identity content or re-evaluation of prospective content. Individuals' coping powers will depend partly on their social networks and group memberships too.

5.3.2 Coming out to others

The social and cultural background for coming out to others is similar to that described for the coming out to self situation. Thus, coming out to others is thought to take place within an essentially heterosexist society which may be seen as having its roots in gender division and inequality, and notions of normality that may be part of a social representation of human nature.

Initially, before coming out to the other person, the lesbian will be in the position of being 'discreditable' (Goffman, 1963) and will need to deal with information management. She may be using interpersonal coping strategies such as isolation and passing (Breakwell, 1986).

Tajfel's (1981) notion of social comparison is relevant at this stage too. Part of a lesbian's wish to be able to speak more freely about herself may stem from comparison of her position with that of heterosexual women. While a heterosexual woman talks about her husband or boyfriend, and they are treated as a couple, unless a lesbian woman is 'out', any important relationship she has, is not regarded similarly.

Looking at the lesbian telling the heterosexual person about herself, both individuals concerned are likely to hold a social representation regarding human nature. These representations would probably be fundamentally similar concerning sexuality as the lesbian like the heterosexual person has grown up in a predominantly heterosexual society. The lesbian, however, will have personal experience of homosexuality, as well as maybe knowing other lesbians, and is therefore likely to hold some modified ideas regarding the nature of homosexuality and 'normality'. She would be aware of societal stereotypes of lesbians but would be less likely to hold such a stereotype herself still.

A hypothetical example of a lesbian telling a heterosexual person about herself serves to illustrate something of the process that may take place. In the past, the heterosexual person may have assumed that the lesbian is also heterosexual. Further, he or she may generally have perceived sexuality in dispositional terms. However, on being told by the lesbian about herself, the heterosexual person may search for external reasons as to why she is unlikely actually to be a lesbian (e.g. 'you just haven't met the right man yet'). Thus, in this situation, the heterosexual person may be reluctant to consider homosexuality in dispositional terms. The lesbian however may attribute her sexuality to disposition. Hence, there arises a situation contrary to the Jones and Nisbett (1972) hypothesis. The actor here is perceiving herself in dispositional terms, while the observer is making situational attributions.

Conflicting ideas may still be present however, where both lesbian and heterosexual person perceive the issue in external terms. For example, while the lesbian may have a political analysis of her sexuality, if the heterosexual person is thinking along the lines suggested above, there is likely to be little agreement.

In the types of situation just described,

situational attributions being made by the heterosexual person may be an attempt to change behaviour. This would correspond to Bains' (1983) suggestion that situational attributions rather than dispositional ones may be made where a change of behaviour is the objective, rather than prediction of future behaviour.

Initial reactions of the heterosexual person are likely to include shock or surprise. Possibly, with time, their reaction changes, and attributions initially made are modified. They may, for example, begin to think of the lesbian's sexuality more in dispositional terms. Occasionally, the reaction is of complete rejection of the lesbian. The basis for this seems unlikely to be the type of attributions made. Such a reaction may serve some defensive function.

Looking at the modified circumstances, the lesbian is now in the position of being 'discredited' rather than 'discreditable' and has the new social situation to manage rather than information control, (Goffman, 1963). Her interactions with the person she has come out to will now be as a 'marked' person, (Jones et al., 1984).

From the point of view of social identity and social comparison (Tajfel, 1981), the lesbian will continue to compare her situation with that of heterosexual women. If, for example, the heterosexual person is reluctant to discuss the subject any further, while s/he talks about heterosexual relationships freely the lesbian is likely to feel dissatisfied. To the extent, however, that the lesbian has gained what she initially consciously and/or subconsciously wanted from coming out to the other person, she will be satisfied with the outcome.

5.4 PROPOSED INTERPRETATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR MAIN STUDY

5.4.1 Coming out to self

The fundamental elements contributing towards a woman eventually coming to identify herself as lesbian will be investigated by considering reported first

feelings of being homosexual and general feelings during childhood; personal definitions of lesbianism, including perceptions of the differences between love and friendship; perceptions of reasons why some women are lesbian and some heterosexual; whether being lesbian is seen as a choice; and relationship with men. Also relevant may be perceptions of societal stereotypes; connections with the women's movement; and school experiences. Positive and negative feelings about being lesbian need considering here as well.

Any age or historical period differences will be examined.

5.4.2 Perceptions of societal attitudes

The social context of coming out will be examined by considering

(a) lesbian data on stereotypes; perceptions of heterosexuals' attitudes; and the part played by the media.

(b) heterosexual data on personal definitions of homosexuality; perceived 'causes'; stereotypes; perceptions of heterosexuals' attitudes generally; media.

5.4.3 Coming out to others

(a) to other lesbians

This will be investigated by considering initial circumstances; approaches taken; and feelings on coming out.

(b) to family and friends, and at work

The investigation will focus on:

1. Lesbian data

(i) the initial circumstances e.g. why does the lesbian wish to come out (or not to come out); perceptions of possible reactions

(ii) the coming out interaction - approaches taken; experiences of.

(iii) perceptions of reaction; modified circumstances; and extent of satisfaction with outcome

2. Heterosexual data

Feelings regarding the hypothetical or real situations of friends/siblings/ children/work colleagues coming out to them.

Any order/pattern discernible in the sequence of coming out will be investigated e.g order of difficulty; order of telling others.

5.5 THE MAIN HYPOTHESES

5.5.1 Coming out to self

1. Primary emotional attachments with women form the main basis for lesbian identity. For possible self identification as lesbian, an awareness of lesbianism as an option, and a level of emotional acceptance of homosexuality are also necessary.

2. Coming out to self is generally gradual, feelings of differentness may reach back to childhood, and reinterpretation of past experiences may occur.

3. Historical time period differences may affect ease of coming out to both self and others.

5.5.2 Coming out to others

1. Initial circumstances

A variety of issues are likely to contribute to decisions on whether or not to come out to family/heterosexual friends etc. These include

(a) perception of heterosexual people's general attitudes towards homosexuality and awareness of stereotyping

(b) perception of present communication difficulties through not being out

(c) perceived value of possible gains (support; being able to speak freely etc.)

(d) perceived risks involved (e.g. distress of heterosexual person; rejection; loss of children)

(e) present position regarding support.

The importance and relative weighting of such issues may vary with time and general circumstances.

2. Approaches taken in coming out

Some women will simply assume others 'know' about them. Most, if they decide to come out, will specifically tell the person(s), but some may wait for the subject to arise naturally. Only selected people are likely to be told, and there may be 'testing of the ground' first.

3. Telling the heterosexual person

The interaction between the lesbian and the person she is telling about herself will be influenced by each of their personal understandings of what homosexuality means; their previous relationship with each other; their perceptions of societal attitudes and stereotypes; and the heterosexual person's own feelings about homosexuality.

There may be a tendency for the heterosexual person to make situational rather than dispositional attributions. Further, there may be differences between heterosexual subjects and lesbian subjects concerning definitions of homosexuality, and perceptions of stereotypes. Regarding definitions, lesbians may emphasise love/emotion. In stereotyping, lesbian subjects may be less likely to mention abnormality.

The general stereotype of a lesbian is likely to be based on sex role, as well as notions of abnormality.

4. Reactions

Reactions to a woman coming out may modify over time.

5. The outcome

Circumstances will have been modified by coming out; and satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the outcome will depend on perceived extent of gains and losses, and on the

extent of fulfilment of the lesbian's conscious and/or unconscious wishes in coming out.

Coming out to others will not generally occur in any particular order, but certain orders may be more satisfactory than others.

CHAPTER SIX
A SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK
FOR 'COMING OUT'

Coming out needs to be examined within an essentially *social* psychological perspective that takes into account issues of gender. It is suggested that coming out only arises as an issue within the context of a heterosexist society, and that heterosexism may be seen as rooted in gender division and inequalities, and social representations of human nature. Thus, it is thought useful to investigate coming out from the perspectives of social identity theory, social representations and attribution theory, within a framework that incorporates issues of gender. Finally, coming out is viewed from the perspective of self-disclosure generally; and possible counselling/therapy of lesbians related to the coming out process is considered.

6.1 LESBIANS AS WOMEN: SOME ISSUES OF GENDER

It has been seen that sex role may be important in the stereotyping of homosexuals. The issue of gender has further, and possibly more profound aspects of relevance to the understanding of homosexuality and coming out. Our language; our culture and our institutions; our everyday interactions with each other; our perceptions and interpretations of our environment; our social constructions of reality, are all founded upon a basis of gender division; and essentially, within our society, notions of gender are closely bound with heterosexual relations. Thus, the notion of gender pervades our social world, and heterosexuality may be seen as an integral and fundamental aspect of this. A further basic aspect of gender relations within our society is the power inequality between women and men. Women's position in society may be seen as socially, culturally and

economically different from that of men.

6.1.1 Gender and heterosexuality

The link between notions of gender and heterosexuality is fundamental. Bem (1981a) discusses how the development of gender-based schematic processing may be fostered by heterosexuality, which facilitates generalizing the sexes to be different. She points out "Regardless of how closely an individual's attributes and behavior match the male or female prototypes stored within the gender schema, violation of the prescription to be exclusively heterosexual is sufficient by itself to call into question the individual's adequacy as a man or a woman" (Bem, 1981a, p.361). In order to demonstrate exclusive heterosexuality some individuals, Bem(1981a, p.361) suggests, "may develop a generalized readiness to encode all cross-sex interactions in sexual terms and all members of the opposite sex in terms of sexual attractiveness, in short, a readiness to invoke the heterosexuality subschema in social interaction".

Sexual orientation is also seen as fundamental to perceptions of 'gender identity' by Spence and Sawin (1985). Based on the conceptualization of Green (1974), they define gender identity as "a basic, existential conviction that one is male or female" (Spence & Sawin, 1985; p.59). They suggest that in assessment of masculinity or femininity, heterosexual men and women are likely to give particular weight to physical characteristics and sexual orientation:

"[Homosexuals] may have particular difficulties in reconciling their sense of maleness or femaleness with their contradiction of what society at large considers a major (if not the major) consequence of appropriate gender identification"

(Spence & Sawin, 1985; p.62)

Taking a psychoanalytic perspective, Stoller suggested that homosexuality may be seen as a "threat to one's sense of core gender identity, of existence, of being" (Stoller, 1975, p.296).

Further reflections of the fundamental basis of heterosexuality to social relations within our society are seen in Raymond's (1986) conceptualization of 'hetero-reality'. Raymond views lesbianism within the context of female friendship existing in 'hetero-reality' - the situation created by 'hetero-relations'. "*Hetero-relations* expresses the wide range of affective, social, political, and economic relations that are ordained between men and women by men" (Raymond, 1986; p.7).

Thus, heterosexuality may be seen as linked fundamentally to notions of gender. The association between gender difference, heterosexuality and power inequalities is a particularly important aspect to consider.

6.1.2 Power and gender

Power differences between men and women may be seen to be operating at a number of different levels and affecting very fundamental aspects of men's and women's lives. Deaux (1985) pointed out that although an increasing number of psychological studies mentioned that issues of power needed considering, there had been little emphasis on its inclusion. Wilkinson (1986), however, has suggested that an analysis of power is a main characteristic of feminist research. Kitzinger (1991) has criticised the way some feminist psychologists have used notions of power that individualize issues that require a political analysis. She suggests that it is necessary for feminists to deconstruct understandings of power; and then to reconceptualize the notion of power in ways that are useful to feminism. Thus, power issues that may be relevant to the coming out process for lesbians need to be examined.

Inequalities between men and women are reflected in our language; evaluation of personality characteristics; and women's position generally within society. Further, at a very basic level, these inequalities may be seen

operating within heterosexual ways of relating. For the lesbian, coming out to self or others, women's subordinate position has various implications.

Gender inequalities may be seen as permeating social interaction through perhaps the most fundamental aspect of social life: language. Graddol and Swann (1989) illustrate how there are parallels in language of the unequal value applied to women's and men's social roles. They point out that language cannot be neutral because it is necessarily bound up with society's values. Language, they suggest, may aid the reproduction of social values. Aries (1987) reports on research into language differences between men and women (Aries, 1976). Generally, men's language was found to reflect a dominance hierarchy, and women's language was found to be more egalitarian, cooperative and supportive. Aries (1987) does point out, however, that there are a number of methodological issues relating to interpretation of studies of gender differences in communication. These include interpretation of behaviours without validation; differences in operational definitions of dependent variables; varied sample sizes, contexts, tasks, and time lengths; and omitting to control for amounts of speech produced by males and females.

Considering gender differences on another level, certain personality qualities or characteristics have tended to be regarded as 'masculine' (e.g. independence, assertiveness, autonomy), while others have tended to be regarded as 'feminine' (e.g. dependence, passivity, sensitivity, caring for others), and socialization encourages the development of different patterns of behaviour in boys and girls in preparation for adult roles (Williams, 1987). Behavioural attributes regarded as healthy for a man have been found to be similar to those regarded as healthy for an adult, while those regarded as healthy for a woman were found to differ from those of the healthy adult (Broverman et al., 1970).

Importantly, in our society, qualities typically attributed to women have been devalued and regarded as inferior to those qualities typically attributed to men (Miller, 1986). Looking at men and women in terms of dominance and subordination, Miller suggests that women have been treated as the subordinate group, and characteristics associated with women have come to be defined as weaknesses. Miller suggests that such characteristics (e.g. vulnerability and emotion) may be perceived instead in terms of strengths. However, she does point out that to put these 'strengths' into operation, women will need "economic, political, and social power and authority" (Miller, 1986; p.115). It has, however, been pointed out by Breakwell (1990) that feminist responses to stereotyping, either suggesting women should adopt instrumentality rather than expressiveness, or suggesting a re-evaluation of expressiveness, both make a fundamental error in dealing with stereotypes as if their reflection of women is true. This is compounded, as Breakwell describes, by the additional problem arising from use of a stereotype, of describing women as a homogeneous group.

A further perspective on characteristics/ qualities ascribed to women and men is provided by Shields' (1987) analysis of emotion. Shields considers emotion as a social or cultural construct, as distinct from emotion in the individualistic sense of subjective feeling, or a quality of consciousness. She shows how the concept is applied differently to women and men; and how different standards may arise partly from power or status differences.

Women's position generally within society may be seen as reflecting power differences. Differences between males and females in the areas of education and employment (e.g. Oakley, 1981b; Griffin, 1985; Spender & Sarah, 1988; Wilson, 1991) reflect this power differential. Women tend to be concentrated in different

types of employment to men, and their occupations are often perceived as of lower status to those of men; where both men and women work within the same occupations, men tend to occupy the higher positions; and overall, women's earnings are substantially less than men's in this country (Oakley, 1981b; Firth-Cozens & West, 1991). Further, sexual harassment at work most frequently concerns male behaviour towards women (Stockdale, 1991). Thus, from a variety of perspectives women may be seen as occupying the position of a subordinate group in our society.

Women in our society have generally been expected to assume the roles of wife and mother. Other ways of living have been considered less desirable, although today there are more different options for women than there used to be (Williams, 1987). However, there is still considerable societal pressure for women to conform to traditional roles. Violating others' expectations of sex-role behaviour creates role conflict and is a source of stress (Frieze et al., 1978). Related to societal approval of women in the traditional roles of wife and mother, is societal disapproval of the spinster. Discussing male and female aging, Sontag (1979, p.466) notes "For men there is no destiny equivalent to the humiliating condition of being an old maid, a spinster". Jeffreys (1985) provides an examination of the spinster's position between 1880 and 1930. She points out that "Any attack on the spinster is inevitably an attack on the lesbian", (Jeffreys, 1985, p.100). Societal encouragement of the traditional women's roles of wife and mother, and apparent disapproval of the role of spinster may particularly affect feelings and experiences concerning coming out to self.

Heterosexual relations may be seen as incorporating power inequalities between women and men. Rich (1981) discusses lesbian existence in the context of male power and 'compulsory heterosexuality', and suggests

heterosexuality needs to be examined as a political institution. The radical feminist approach described by Kitzinger (1987) analyses lesbianism and heterosexuality as political institutions, and rejects individual or personalized interpretations. Heterosexuality is seen as central to women's oppression. Lesbianism is perceived as "fundamentally a political statement representing the bonding of women against male supremacy" (Kitzinger, 1987, p.vii). Jeffreys (1990) takes this notion further. Examining the 'sexual revolution' of the 1960's, Jeffreys presents her perspective of its meaning and consequences for women. She develops particular understandings of 'heterosexuality' and 'homosexuality' which incorporate notions of power differences and equality respectively, and are not necessarily linked to the gender of those in the relationship. Thus, Jeffreys suggests 'heterosexual desire' may be seen in terms of eroticising power difference, while 'homosexual desire' eroticises equality. Like Kitzinger, Jeffreys sees heterosexuality "as a political institution through which male dominance is organised and maintained" (Jeffreys, 1990; p.3).

As Miller (1986, p.138) points out "...lesbian women by their very existence challenge the fundamental structure of women's dependence on men. Therefore, lesbians often have been the most viciously oppressed women..". Thus, it would seem most important in attempting to understand the coming out process to consider lesbians as women within a society in which there exist fundamental differences between the positions of men and women.

6.1.3 Gender and psychological theory

Generally, psychological research and theory have tended to neglect differences there may be between men and women. Frieze et al. (1978) describe the biases that may occur regarding women at different stages in research: from problem formulation, through

operationalization of hypotheses, choice of experimenter and subjects, and data collection, to analysis and interpretation of data. Unger (1985) considering why sex and gender have been ignored by social psychology suggests that implicit theories may have played a part due to confusion between notions of sex and gender. For example, only biological explanations may have been perceived as being necessary. A further implicit theory arises from the belief that gender identity is strongly associated with notions such as instrumentality and expressiveness. Other possible reasons Unger (1985) puts forward include previous neglect of the importance of the self, possibly arising from a behaviourist, positivist perspective; a general difficulty in psychology of examining "complex multi-dimensional interactive processes" (p.354) or in dealing with "large socio-cultural realities" (p.355); and neglect of cross-cultural investigations.

Feminist criticism of mainstream social science research has been related to its content, ideology, theory and methodology (Wilkinson, 1986). Thus, women have been neglected by mainstream research and their experiences have been misinterpreted. Further, Wilkinson describes how mainstream social science research is seen as failing to specify underlying assumptions, and incorporating male values rather than being value-free. Additionally, Wilkinson suggests mainstream research may be seen by feminists as ahistorical, or acultural, and as removing issues from the context of the real world. Further feminist criticisms described by Wilkinson include the notion of objectivity, and failure to consider interaction between researcher and subjects, and its effects.

Some of the problems associated with the general social psychological approach may also have arisen within feminist research. Hollway (1989) suggests that the approach of social psychology has been problematic

arising from its basis in 'individual-society dualism', and since much feminist research has incorporated this within its general approach, a similar problem has occurred. Thus, "The feminist social psychological approach to women's experience has come about through retaining a focus on the individual, rather than relations, power and difference" (Hollway, 1989; p.107). Hollway sees a focus on gender difference, rather than on women alone, as crucial.

The feminist approach has been described by Wilkinson (1986). She suggests there is a change of focus from content to purpose i.e. from research on women to research for women. Feminist theory, Wilkinson suggests, may be seen as emphasizing firstly, the social construction of meaning, and secondly, women's situation in society. Theory, it is suggested, needs to be based in women's experience. The researcher's own experience and perspective is seen as relevant to, and as an integral part of the research. Status of researcher and study participants is seen as equal. Further, Wilkinson describes how subjectivity is made explicit rather than assuming that research is objective and value free. Feminist methodologies, she suggests, tend to be varied, although "Where one method is preferred, it generally has subjective, experiential and qualitative elements" (Wilkinson, 1986, p.14).

Thus, Wilkinson (1986) describes two themes characteristic of feminist research:

"First, feminist research is based on an exploration of women's own knowledge and experience, in a disciplined, scholarly and rigorous way ... Second, many feminist researchers include, as central, an analysis of the role of power in determining the form and representation of social knowledge ..."

(Wilkinson, 1986, p.2)

Some studies have suggested ways of taking gender into account in psychological theory. Examples of these include Gilligan (1982) who looks at development in terms of attachment and separation; and Deaux and Major (1987)

who have proposed an interactive model of gender-related behaviour. Further examples are provided by Williams (1984) who relates gender differences to social identity theory; and Hollway (1989), Wetherell (1986) and Walkerdine (1986) who have developed versions of discourse analysis.

Gilligan (1982, p.1) looked at "different modes of thinking about relationships and the association of these modes with male and female voices". Her ideas are illustrated through three interview studies, all concerned with conceptions of self and morality, and experiences of conflict and choice. Considering the ideas of Chodorow (1974, 1978) on the masculine bias of psychoanalytic theory, Gilligan describes how femininity may be seen as defined through attachment, while masculinity is defined through separation. Female gender identity is threatened by separation, and male gender identity, by intimacy. Gilligan sees attachment and separation as anchoring the psychology of human development. Looking at the work of Levinson (1978), Vaillant (1977) and Erikson (1950) on adult development, Gilligan points out that descriptions of women's development are missing. She considers that descriptions of relationships progressing towards a maturity of interdependence have been omitted. While separation is recognized, connection tends to be lost. Gilligan suggests there is a need for adult development research to consider women's experience of adult life in women's own terms, in which case, experience of interconnection would be included within the concept of identity.

Gilligan's ideas have been criticised (e.g. Colby & Damon, 1983). Findings have not tended to support her theory (e.g. Friedman, Robinson & Friedman, 1987).

An interactive model of gender-related behaviour, suggested by Deaux and Major (1987), focuses on display rather than acquisition of gender-linked behaviours. It emphasises proximal or immediate influences rather than

distal forces such as shared cultural experiences or biological factors. Gender behaviour is perceived by Deaux and Major as taking place, implicitly or explicitly, within the context of social interaction. Theory and data from research concerning expectancy confirmation processes, and self-verification, and self-presentation strategies, provide a background to the conceptualization of the model.

The three key elements of Deaux and Major's model are a perceiver, a target individual and a situation. The perceiver will enter a situation with beliefs about the target, including both beliefs arising from past experience with the target individual, and beliefs based on categorical assumptions. The perceiver's beliefs may then be activated and influenced by target attributes and situational cues. This then leads to the perceiver acting toward the target. At the same time, the target individual enters the situation with beliefs about him/herself which may be activated, and influenced by situational cues. The target then interprets the perceiver's actions, and, in the light of certain modifying conditions, acts. The modifying conditions include firstly, characteristics of the expectancy, and in particular, social desirability of expected behaviour, certainty of perceiver's expectancy and situational context; and secondly, concerns of the target with self-presentation and self-verification. Finally, within the model, the perceiver interprets the target's action, and the target interprets his/her own action. Deaux and Major point out that previous models concentrating on distal aspects of gender behaviour are important in accounting for stability and differences in behaviour between the sexes. Their model however, concentrating on proximal aspects of gender-related behaviour, supplements traditional models allowing "a more complicated but more authentic view of gender to emerge" (Deaux & Major, 1987, p.384).

Looking at how gender difference is reproduced in adult relations, Hollway (1989) has developed an 'interpretive discourse analysis' within a framework that includes the notions of Foucault, Lacan and Klein; and a conceptualization of subjectivity as dynamic and perceived only through inter-subjective relations. Focusing on linguistic repertoire rather than the person as the unit of study, Wetherell (1986) suggests, permits understanding of contradictions and diversity which other psychological approaches have not allowed. Walkerdine (1986) has examined the family and school from a post-structuralist perspective within a framework based on Foucault's notion of power, knowledge and truth, which emphasizes the historical constitution of knowledge. She has attempted to demonstrate "that psychology is productive of the social positions and identities through and by which subjectivity is created" (Walkerdine, 1986; p.61).

Gender difference may also be viewed within the context of social or widespread beliefs (Breakwell, 1990). Breakwell suggests social beliefs about gender differences both specify what the differences are and describe why these differences exist. She points out that stereotype survival may rest on the purpose they serve within the social structure; and within our society's power structure, individual women who conform to the socially devalued stereotype are rewarded, making it in their interest, at a personal level, to maintain the social beliefs. Social beliefs, Breakwell suggests, may be seen as both determined by the social structure, and as influencing cognition and behaviour on the individual level.

These studies provide examples of some ways in which gender differences may be incorporated into social psychological theory. They indicate the fundamental nature and importance of such differences when considering issues of development and social interaction.

By focusing on gender, the intention is not to reinforce notions of sex difference, but to draw attention to the pervasive nature of socially constructed gender divisions within our society, and the power imbalances these incorporate. It would seem essential to examine the coming out process for lesbians within a framework that takes gender differences into account. These issues of gender, heterosexuality, and power differences form the background for the social psychological framework for the coming out process for lesbians.

6.2 SOCIAL IDENTITY

Coming out both to self and others may usefully be considered within the context of social identity theory (Tajfel 1981, 1982a, 1982b) or self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987). These provide both intergroup and intragroup perspectives, and links with stereotyping, attribution theory and social representations.

6.2.1 Social identity theory: definitions, assumptions and hypotheses

Tajfel (1981) defines a group in terms of "a cognitive entity that is meaningful to the individual at a particular point of time" (p.254). Such a group, therefore, does not imply "a face-to-face relationship" between people (Tajfel, 1981), but may be considered rather as a psychological group (Turner, 1982; Turner et al., 1987; Hogg & Abrams, 1988).

Social identity is seen in terms of certain consequences of group membership. Tajfel defines social identity as "that part of an individuals's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership", (Tajfel, 1981, p.255). Thus, Tajfel suggests that some aspects of the individuals' view of themselves arise through membership of particular social groups or categories. Further, some memberships will be more salient than others, and salience of a membership may vary over time, or with different social situations.

Conceptualization of the self-concept from the perspective of social identity theory has been elaborated upon by Turner (1982) and Turner et al. (1987). Based on Gergen's (1971) notion of the self-concept, Turner (1982) suggests a conceptualization of the self-concept as largely composed of the hypothetical cognitive structures of social and personal identity. Considering

stereotyping, Turner (1982) points out its applicability to ingroups and self as well as outgroups, and puts forward the idea of 'Referent Informational Influence' which is a "form of social influence produced by the cognitive processes associated with self-stereotyping" (p.31). He suggests this occurs in three stages. First, there is definition of self as a category member. Next, the stereotypical norms of the category are learnt defining behaviour of category members. Thirdly, individuals assign these norms to themselves, so that when category membership becomes salient, their behaviour becomes more normative.

A self-categorization theory is presented by Turner et al. (1987). The most basic assumptions of this theory define the self-concept in terms of cognitive representations available to an individual; suggest there are multiple concepts of self; and that their functioning is situation specific. Assumptions more specifically related to self-categorization theory include that cognitive representations of the self may take the form of self-categorizations; that these self-categorizations are hierarchically classified; and that levels of abstraction of self-categorization include the superordinate (human being), the intermediate (social/group), and the subordinate (personal). The interaction between characteristics of person and situation are thought to determine which self-category becomes salient and the level of abstraction.

The notion of social comparison is important. Tajfel points out that groups exist among other groups: "the 'positive aspects of social identity' and the reinterpretation of attributes and engagement in social action only acquire meaning in relation to, or in comparisons with, other groups", (Tajfel, 1981; p.256). Turner et al.'s (1987) self-categorization theory makes the assumption that it is through comparisons with the next higher level self-category members that self-

categorizations become salient. Thus, categorization and comparison are seen as interdependent. Further assumptions relating to self-categorization theory are that emphasis of inter-class differences and intra-class similarities arises from salience of a self-categorization; and that there is 'functional antagonism' between salience of different levels of self-categorization.

General hypotheses of Turner et al.'s self-categorization theory include, firstly, an inverse relationship between salience of social and personal levels of self-categorization. Further hypotheses concern 'depersonalization' which may be seen as the change to the social level of identity from the personal level. "Depersonalization refers to the process of 'self-stereotyping' whereby people come to perceive themselves more as the interchangeable exemplars of a social category than as unique personalities defined by their individual differences from others" (Turner et al., 1987; p.50). It is hypothesized that enhancement of ingroup-outgroup categorization salience increases perceived similarities between self and ingroup members, and differences between self and outgroup members. Thus, individual self-perception is depersonalized in accordance with the associated group stereotype. Further, Turner et al. hypothesize that depersonalization of self-perception may be seen as the fundamental underlying process of group phenomena.

The positiveness of a group's contribution to identity needs to be considered. Turner (1982, 1984) points out that initial group formation need not depend on attractiveness of group properties:

"... once individuals define themselves or are defined by others as members of a category, there will be strong motivational pressures for them to assume that its characteristics are positive and even reinterpret as positive those designated as negative by outsiders"

(Turner, 1982; p.27-28).

Consequences of group membership, Tajfel (1981) suggests, include individuals tending to wish to belong to groups that contribute positively towards identity; and tending to leave groups which do not, unless there are 'objective' reasons making this impossible, or leaving would conflict with values relating to acceptable self-image. Two possible solutions, suggested by Tajfel, where there is difficulty regarding leaving a group, are reinterpretation of a group's features so that they may be perceived as justified or acceptable; and/or social action to lead to a change in the situation. Thus, Tajfel (1981) describing conditions under which a group may be able to contribute towards positively valued aspects of a person's social identity, points out that where social change is concerned, some groups have to create positively valued distinctiveness.

The need for positive self-esteem may motivate positive evaluation of a category, and may help regulate intragroup and intergroup behaviour, Turner (1982) suggests. Hogg and Abrams (1988) describe how by differentiation of ingroup from outgroup on dimensions where the ingroup is towards the positive pole, positive distinctiveness and a relatively positive social identity is acquired by the ingroup. This, they point out, contributes towards "a relatively positive self-evaluation that endows the individual with a sense of well-being, enhanced self-worth and self-esteem" (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; p.23).

Salience of social categories is a further pertinent issue.

"By a salient group membership we refer to one which is *functioning psychologically* to increase the influence of one's membership in that group on perception and behaviour, and/or the influence of another person's identity as a group member on one's impression of and hence behaviour towards that person ..."

(Oakes, 1987; p.118)

Oakes' ideas on salience are based on Bruner's (1957)

theories of perception as well as Heider's (1958) notion of social perception. She is concerned with salience as psychological significance of group membership rather than perceptual prominence of cues or the stimulus' 'attention-grabbing' property, although she points out that this latter type of salience may be a causal antecedent of psychological salience. Oakes describes how Bruner proposed an interactional hypothesis relating 'accessibility' and 'fit' to determining categorization. 'Accessibility' applies to the relative readiness of a particular category to become activated. 'Fit' refers to how well stimulus characteristics match category specifications. Oakes relates Bruner's ideas to salience and the functioning of social categorizations. Factors determining relative accessibility may include importance of that group membership to a person's self-definition, as well as the attached value or emotional significance. Fit is defined in terms of the extent to which observed similarities and differences between people are seen as correlating with stereotypical division into social categories.

The social identity approach incorporates a notion of power differences. Thus, Hogg and Abrams (1988, p.14) emphasize that from this perspective "*society comprises social categories which stand in power and status relations to one another*". It is suggested by Tajfel (1981) that comparisons may be based on the perceived illegitimacy of the perceived relationship between groups. Thus, "the perceived *illegitimacy* of an existing relationship in status, power, domination or any other differential implies the development of *some* dimensions of comparability" (Tajfel, 1981; p.266). For example, comparisons may be based simply on the notion that 'all people are equal'.

Where there is extreme stereotyping and prejudice, delegitimization may occur (Bar-Tal, 1989). Delegitimization is described by Bar-Tal as a type of

social categorization in which the basis for categorization is extremely negative; the group is excluded from society; intense negative emotions are evoked; institutionalized norms support the delegitimization; the group is seen as threatening; and the delegitimizing group may feel obliged to protect itself with extreme negative behaviour towards the delegitized group.

6.2.2 Gender and social identity

Basic theorizing on social identity (e.g. Tajfel, 1981; Turner, 1982) has tended to neglect the possible impact of gender. Studies of social identity theory within the context of gender have suggested that the theory may be seen as 'agentic' as opposed to 'communal' (Williams, 1984); as neglecting emotion (Skevington, 1989); and as ahistorical (Condor, 1989). Many social identities have been found rather than a single social identity of women (Skevington & Baker, 1989). In order to examine the coming out process for lesbians within the context of social identity theory, it is essential to consider the issue of gender both from the point of view of its implications for the theory itself; and for its illumination of women's position in society.

Women may have a communal style of identification, and men, an agentic style; and this would have implications for understanding intergroup behaviour. Williams (1984) has suggested that social identity theory as proposed by Tajfel (1978), with its basis in social comparison and differentiation from others, may be seen as 'agentic'. Williams points out that it is possible that people may also define their identities communally, in terms of affiliations and attachment, as suggested, for example, by Gilligan. Skevington (1989) suggests that the relationship between communal and agentic forms of social identification may be more complex. An investigation of nursing by Skevington and Dawkes (1988,

cited in Skevington, 1989) indicated expression of communal and agentic social identification by both men and women. Sex role related to the occupation of nursing rather than the sex of the subjects was seen as determining the high level of communality and low level of agentic identification expressed by both women and men. A slightly greater level of agentic identification shown by the men was thought to arise from sex-role socialization.

Tajfel's social identity theory does not include an analysis of emotion, Skevington (1989) points out. Where there is intergroup behaviour, a range of emotions may be expressed, she suggests. Thus, Skevington suggests, the concept of communal social identity implies a dimension involving affect. Communality would be likely to involve positive affect; and agency, negative affect. A work situation where women are in the majority would therefore be likely to have greater positive affect than a situation where men form the majority. Skevington considers whether the greater positive affect arises from the women-oriented nature of the group or its low status. Citing Strongman (1987), Skevington suggests women are not more emotional than men, but they may attach greater importance to affective issues.

Considering approaches used in the application of social identity theory to the study of Women (i.e. the abstract social category 'Women' rather than particular members of the category), Condor (1989) points out a number of problems. These include assumption of objective gender categories of female and male ('gender-dualism'); concern with measurement of quantity rather than examining qualitative issues of Women's social identity, and thus neglect of flexibility of meaning and usage; and further neglect of flexibility of meanings by focusing on salience, and ignoring possible variation with context and interaction with other social identities. Condor (1989) considers whether Tajfel's

social identity theory provides a basis for historical analysis, and thus, for examining the changing status of women in society. She suggests that the theory is concerned with social cognitive change rather than ideological or social structure change, and further, that approaches using social identity theory are mainly ahistorical.

There are multiple social identities of women rather than a single social identity (Skevington & Baker, 1989). It is suggested by Skevington and Baker that it would be useful to look at how identification with gender group relates to a person's other group memberships such as class, age, or work groups. A further suggestion by Skevington and Baker is the future development of a version of social identity theory that allows investigation of different ideologies.

The notion of 'social identities' may be linked with social representations. Skevington and Baker (1989) suggest that both social categorization and social representations focus on collective representations in the social context. Duveen and Lloyd (1986) have suggested that social identity, seen in terms of the individual-social interface, may be understood as the construction of individuals, within their societies, in relation to their society's social representations. Gender, they point out, is 'ubiquitous', influencing all social interactions. It is a simple binary form of categorization, and belonging to a gender group is compulsory. Physical differences form the signifiers within a semiotic system, with social representations of gender as the signified. Social gender identity is seen as denoting recognition of belonging to a particular gender group, and not the 'lived experience' of being female or male. Thus, Duveen and Lloyd (1986) suggest that the psychic identity, or the uniqueness of an individual, falls outside this conceptualization, and its investigation might be by psychoanalysis. However, the

relationship between 'self' and 'identity' in Duveen and Lloyd's conceptualization of social identity is questioned by Palmonari (1986), as well as the suggestion that different approaches are needed for the investigation of psychic and social identity. Further, Emler (1986) has suggested that social identity as described by Duveen and Lloyd (1986) may not be the most basic way in which social life is ordered. He suggests that people participate within society as unique individuals.

6.2.3 Coming out as lesbian from a social identity perspective

Coming out to self

Definition of a group in terms of a psychological grouping rather than necessarily involving actual person to person contact is particularly pertinent to the coming out to self situation. Many women may define themselves as possibly lesbian before meeting other lesbians.

Looking at coming out to self from the perspective of salience of social categorizations as defined by Oakes, becoming aware of self as lesbian would be seen as a function of the interaction between 'accessibility' or the readiness of the category of lesbians to become activated, and the 'fit' between perception of self and the perceived categorical specifications of lesbians. Accessibility would depend not only upon awareness of the existence of lesbians, but also upon emotional significance of the categorization. Fit would be related to the match between self-perceptions and any stereotypical notions of lesbianism. Negative stereotypical perceptions of lesbians would possibly decrease perceptions of fit of self with social category characteristics.

In coming out to self, the social category of lesbians may be seen as becoming psychologically salient. Although the distinction between 'personal identity' and

'social identity' may be useful to make, 'personal identity' needs to be viewed as fundamentally social. Hence, these different forms of identity may perhaps best be considered as different levels of social identity - 'personal' identity relating to a level of social identity in which a particular group membership is not salient; and 'social' identity corresponding to a level in which a particular group membership has become salient. Thus, possibly rather than viewing coming out to self in terms of 'depersonalization' taking place, the process may be viewed more as moving from one form of social identity in which the particular group membership of the category of lesbians is not salient, to another level of social identity in which this particular categorization has become salient.

Initially, as a woman begins to become aware of herself as possibly homosexual, the group of lesbians may tend to be perceived negatively, and it would seem likely that there would be conflicting or ambivalent feelings regarding potential membership of the group. On the one hand, belonging to the group of lesbians/gay people would probably not be viewed initially as contributing positively towards identity. On the other hand, a woman may perceive herself as having no choice in being lesbian, and hence leaving the group on a psychological level is 'objectively' impossible. With defining of self as lesbian, women's perceptions of the category of lesbians would be likely to become more positive: "where some social category contributes to defining the self, the need for positive self-esteem should motivate a desire to evaluate that category positively" (Turner, 1982; p.33).

A woman's social identification as lesbian, and her identification as a woman, or member of a class/age/occupation group, for example, interact. Women as a group, in particular, would seem likely to be used as a comparison group.

The lesbian community

Within the context of a predominantly heterosexual society, lesbians may be seen as forming a negatively valued group. Therefore, initial coming out into the lesbian community would be likely to be approached with ambivalence. However, once contact is made with other group members, positive reinforcement for lesbian identity would be likely through interdependence, including for example, interpersonal attraction and satisfaction of needs, which is one of the features of psychological group membership (Turner, 1984). Of further possible relevance to lesbian community membership, perceptions of shared threat may enhance group cohesiveness where interpersonal relations are negative (Turner, 1984). 'Referent Informational Influence' (Turner, 1982) may contribute towards an understanding of why some women may conform to notions of a lesbian stereotype. Depersonalization (Turner et al., 1987) may be seen as occurring where women coming out into the lesbian community emphasize social identity over personal identity, and conform to the stereotype of lesbians.

If groups based on women reflect communal rather than agentic social identity (Williams, 1984; Skevington, 1989), and greater positive affect (Skevington, 1989), then the lesbian community may reflect these qualities. Ingroup (i.e. lesbians) and outgroup (i.e. heterosexual) perspectives may differ here.

The 'lesbian community' cannot be regarded as a homogeneous grouping which adds complexity to considering the issues involved. For example, Kristiansen (1990) has found that while gay movement lesbians may have an intra-group relationship with gay men, feminist lesbians may relate to gay men in an intergroup manner.

Coming out to others

In the situation of a lesbian coming out to another person, social identity as lesbian would be *made* salient. One possible scenario is that the lesbian has come to perceive her social identity as basically positive. Social identity as lesbian may be perceived as largely negative by the heterosexual person, and possibly threatening to the distinctiveness of heterosexuality (and/or gender roles). Further, for the heterosexual person, the lesbian's social identity may be completely unexpected, and may during the coming out interaction, become salient to the exclusion of previous perceptions of the lesbian's personal identity.

Stereotypical notions will be pertinent. Based on a study of perceptions of male homosexuality, within a social identity theory framework, Abrams, Carter and Hogg (1989) found an interaction between label (homosexual/heterosexual) and stereotype trait information.

The main comparison group for lesbians would be likely to be that of women generally, the next more inclusive, and positively valued group. Lesbians probably make comparisons with heterosexual women, regarding a variety of issues, and affecting coming out. (In certain circumstances, comparisons may also be made with other minority groups).

6.3 A SOCIETAL PERSPECTIVE: SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

6.3.1 Background and theory

A historical study of sexuality by Foucault (1979), taking a societal perspective, has suggested that contrary to the notion of 'an age of repression', during the last three hundred years, there has been 'a discursive explosion' around the issue of sex.

"What is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as the secret"

(Foucault, 1979, p.35)

Foucault describes how sex in the West became linked with the ritual of confession and the discourse of science; and discusses the underlying power relations involved. Such a perspective contributes towards an understanding of some of the background issues to coming out. The notion of social representations provides a social psychological perspective that permits taking into account the historical and cultural context.

Social representations are described by Moscovici and Hewstone (1983) as "cognitive matrices co-ordinating ideas, words, images and perceptions that are all interlinked. They are common-sense 'theories' about key aspects of society" (p.115). Common-sense knowledge is seen as accepted by 'everyone' and based on shared traditions: "Common sense comprises the images, mental connections and metaphors that are used and talked about by everyone when trying to explain familiar problems or predict their outcome" (Moscovici & Hewstone, 1983; p.103).

Moscovici (1984) describes social representations as having two roles. Firstly, they conventionalise persons, events or objects, and locate them in a category; and secondly, they are prescriptive. Moscovici's conceptualization of social representations is based on Durkheim's notion of collective representations, but he perceives social representations as occupying a position

between concepts and percepts, and as dynamic. Further, Moscovici (1984) makes the distinction between the reified universe in which the methods of science are used; and the consensual universe which may be understood through social representations. He suggests the purpose of social representations is to make the unfamiliar, familiar. Scientific notions are seen as becoming transformed into the common-sense knowledge of lay people or 'amateur scientists' (Moscovici & Hewstone, 1983). Psychoanalysis is used by Moscovici (1984) as an example of a social representation.

The processes or mechanisms that generate or create representations are anchoring and objectifying (Moscovici, 1984). Anchoring may be seen as classifying and naming something, putting it into a familiar context: "Things that are unclassified and unnamed are alien, non-existent and at the same time threatening" (Moscovici, 1984, p.30). Rather than classification by separate features and inclusion in the category with which there is most in common, Moscovici suggests classification is by comparison of normality in relation to a prototype. This perspective would imply that overcoming prejudice requires changes in social representations of, for example, 'human nature'. The second mechanism involved in creating social representations is objectifying. This process reproduces a concept in an image. Some words, Moscovici suggests, cannot be associated with images, as such images are not readily available, or they may be taboo. Moscovici provides the example of 'sexuality' as a term that remains abstract through taboo.

Moscovici and Hewstone (1983) suggest the social functions of representations include allowing communication between individuals or groups; guiding social action; and socialization of individuals.

Thus, in order to provide a social overview of the coming out process, social representations need to be considered. It has been suggested by Moscovici (1984)

that attribution theory may become more fruitful by switching from the restrictions of an individual frame of reference to the collective sphere. The mechanistic relation between man and the world needs to be abandoned, he suggests, and social representations re-instated as necessary mediators. Further, the attitude concept, and research on attitudes, have tended to be approached from an individual perspective, while the collective nature of attitudes has been overlooked (Jaspars & Fraser, 1984). Thus, Jaspars and Fraser suggest, it is useful to consider attitudes in terms of individual response dispositions that are based on collective representations.

Which social representations may be seen as relating to the coming out process? This is a fundamental question in considering the contribution of social representations to understanding the coming out process for lesbians. There seems to be some lack of clarity and agreement on what constitutes a social representation, and, for example, how common they are. It would seem, however, that social representations of human nature (Moscovici & Hewstone, 1983), and gender (Duveen & Lloyd, 1987), would be particularly pertinent to considering coming out as lesbian.

6.3.2 Gender and social representations

A possible link between social identity and social representations has been seen in the ideas of Duveen and Lloyd (1986). Emler (1986), however, questions whether this particular usage of social representations provides any gain over approaches using notions such as norms and stereotypes. He also suggests that Duveen and Lloyd (1986) have ignored Moscovici's ideas regarding process and content; and disputes their acceptance of cognitive development limiting access to social representations.

Social representations of gender have been further investigated by Duveen and Lloyd (1987). They suggest

that with additional elaboration of the concept, it is appropriate to analyse gender as a social representation. This, they suggest, involves distinguishing types of social representations, as well as a comparison of gender with the 'classical' representation of social representations. Comparing gender with Moscovici's social representation of psychoanalysis, Duveen and Lloyd (1987) point out that gender pervades society whilst the domain of psychoanalysis is bounded. However, they suggest, gender representations may be seen as part of the common-sense world. Regarding object, and association with particular social group, they suggest social representations of gender are similar to those of psychoanalysis. However, Duveen and Lloyd point out a contrast between representations of psychoanalysis and gender emerges when functioning is considered. Thus, while social representations of gender imply compulsory classification, those of psychoanalysis may be seen as voluntary.

Duveen and Lloyd (1987) suggest that there are competing representations of gender. Based on their research in schools, they suggest that it cannot be assumed that social representations of gender will be the same in different classrooms. They suggest there is reconstruction of gender identities with progressive internalization of social representations. When these representations have been established, they may form the basis for children to anchor further representations of social life.

Thus, it would seem that gender may be considered in terms of social representations, and may be seen as forming the basis for further representations.

6.3.3 Homosexuality and social representations

Underlying stereotypes, attributions and attitudes relating to lesbians there may be social representations of human nature and gender. A discussion of racialism by

Moscovici and Hewstone (1983) provides a possible parallel for considering social representations relevant to sexuality and heterosexism. Searching beyond stereotypes, attitudes and actions relating to racialism, a representation of human nature may be discovered, Moscovici and Hewstone suggest. This is seen as consisting of biological, psychological and religious elements, with views, for example, on what a 'normal' individual is, and why people are different. It would seem likely that just as racialism may be seen as corresponding to such a representation, heterosexism (or more generally, notions of sexuality) may be seen as corresponding to a similar social representation.

The deeper understanding that may be gained by looking at the representations implicit in attitude responses is illustrated by Jaspars and Fraser (1984) with the example of reporting of homosexuality in different countries (from a study by Newman, 1977). They suggest that to understand the different approaches in the countries, social representations of control institutions and criminal acts in each of the countries need to be taken into account.

If social representations underlie attitudes, stereotypes and actions, this has implications for possibilities of attitude change and dealing with prejudice (Moscovici & Hewstone, 1983; Moscovici, 1984; Jaspars and Fraser, 1984). An understanding of the underlying representations, and differences between representations held by different groups of people is therefore important. It may be that before coming out, certain representations held by some homosexuals are more similar to those of heterosexuals than after coming out. Or it may even be that certain representations held by some homosexuals are different to those of heterosexuals from an early age.

6.4 THEORIES OF DEVELOPMENT OF HOMOSEXUALITY

During the last century a number of theories regarding the origins and development of homosexuality have been suggested. These have included psychoanalytic, physiological, medical, psychological and sociological approaches. Some of these ideas may have infiltrated the common-sense world, contributing towards relevant social representations, and influencing attitudes, opinions, images and stereotypes etc. regarding homosexuality. In this way, the different theories may affect the coming out process.

In order to provide some clarification of the diverse approaches that have been taken in considering development of homosexuality, the theories/models will be considered under the headings of psychoanalytic; physiological; medical; psychological and sociological; and feminist. This grouping of theories does not provide mutually exclusive categories. The simpler division between physiological and environmental/social models of homosexuality is also problematic, however. Richardson (1981b, p.6) points out that such a dichotomy is "a false and meaningless one" as there must be interaction between biological and environmental influences. Plummer (1981) suggests a distinction between essentialist and constructionist perspectives of homosexuality. Essentialists perceive homosexuality as developed in early life through biology or psychodynamics. Constructionists suggest an individual's identity is socially created and maintained, and thus an individual learns to see him/herself as homosexual. There has been considerable debate concerning essentialist versus constructionist perspectives (Risman & Schwartz, 1988; Franklin & Stacey, 1988; Vance, 1989; Schippers, 1989; Weeks, 1989) and the usefulness of such a distinction may be questioned. Overall, it would seem that there are different forms of essentialism; different degrees of social constructionism; and that essentialism and

constructionism are not mutually exclusive: a perspective that incorporates both notions might be most useful. The groupings below are used only in an attempt to clarify the range of perspectives and they do not form distinct categories.

6.4.1 Psychoanalytic

Freud (1905) describes men whose sexual object is a man, and women whose sexual object is a woman, as 'inverts'. Those whose sexual objects are exclusively of the same sex, he describes as 'absolute inverts'; those whose sexual objects may be of either sex, are 'amphigenic inverts'; and those whose sexual object is of the same sex under particular external conditions, he terms 'contingent inverts'. Looking at the nature of inversion, Freud (1905) suggests reasons why inversion cannot be regarded as a degeneracy. Further, he examines the question of innateness, and suggests that the choice between innate and acquired may not be exclusive, or inversion may involve further issues. In a note added in 1915, Freud emphasises that homosexuals should not be separated from other people as a group of special character. Freud (1905, 1917) describes associations between neuroses and inversion/ homosexuality. He suggests that homosexual impulses are invariably discovered in neurotic people, and that paranoia arises through attempting to defend against such impulses. Freud (1915, 1917) also suggests that a narcissistic type of object choice tends to be associated with homosexuality.

Unresolved Oedipal conflicts have generally been suggested by the psychoanalytic perspective as the basis of homosexuality. The neo-Freudian perspective on homosexuality is focused on gender identity (Sternlicht, 1987). Debate continues on the nature of homosexuality from psychoanalytic perspectives. A recent example is that of Friedman (1988) on male homosexuality.

Stoller (1975) focusing on the issue of transsexuality provides some illumination on possible interpretations of homosexuality, and the notions of masculinity and femininity. He suggests different origins for male and female transsexualism. For males, Stoller sees transsexuality as a non-conflictual learning process, whereas homosexuality, he suggests, results from defence against trauma. For females, Stoller suggests transsexuality is closer to homosexuality in that it arises through defence against trauma. While for males, one form of homosexuality may arise through the late introduction of masculinity in feminine boys; for females, Stoller suggests, there may have been encouragement of masculinity for the daughter to help a depressed mother, where the father was not adequately supporting his wife. Stoller agrees with Freud's conceptualization of both masculinity and femininity being present in both sexes, but sees biological explanations as unnecessary.

There have been attempts to interpret psychoanalytical ideas from varying feminist perspectives (e.g. Horney, 1926; Mitchell, 1974; Hamer, 1990).

6.4.2 Physiological

Physiological approaches have looked at the possibilities of genetic or hormonal influences towards development of homosexuality. Genetic theories based on chromosomal sex and statistical genetics; hormonal explanations and pre-natal hormonal influences are described by Richardson (1981b). Feldman (1984) describes studies of monozygotic and dizygotic twins concerning possible genetic influences (e.g. Kallmann, 1952; Heston & Shields, 1968; MacCulloch et al., 1967), and secondly, studies concerning pre-natal hormones (e.g. Money & Ehrhardt, 1971; Dorner et al., 1975; Feldman et al., 1980).

Money (1987, 1988) takes a predominantly

physiological perspective of homosexuality, but incorporates cultural and socialization viewpoints into his theories. Based on animal experiments indicating prenatal influence of sex hormones on male/female dimorphism of the brain, as well as data on hermaphroditism in humans, Money perceives erotic orientation as depending on both prenatal hormonization, and postnatal socialization. Furthermore, he suggests that postnatal determinants may be seen in biological terms, in the way that learning/memory may be understood as biological. Thus, Money perceives social and psychological determinants becoming biologically incorporated into the brain.

There appears at the moment to be no conclusive evidence regarding a physiological basis for homosexuality. However, Bell, Weinberg and Hammersmith (1981) and Feldman (1984) both suggest there may be a biological basis for 'primary' homosexuality.

Ruse (1988) considers sociobiological explanations of homosexuality. Among the hypotheses suggested are 'balanced superior heterozygote fitness'; kin selection; and 'parental manipulation'.

6.4.3 Medical

The medical model of homosexuality has drawn on psychoanalytic and psychological ideas, as well as the physiological perspective. From the turn of the century there was strong influence from the ideas of the 'sexologists', particularly, Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis (Faderman, 1981). During the first half of this century, lesbianism has primarily been regarded by the medical perspective as abnormal and deviant, and as an illness (Williams, 1987). Modifications in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) illustrate changes of the medical perspective in more recent years. Homosexuality was listed as a 'sexual deviation' until 1973 when it was

removed from the DSM and 'ego-dystonic homosexuality' was included instead (Davison & Neale, 1982). Ego dystonic homosexuality refers to someone who is distressed by experiencing homosexual arousal and wants to become heterosexual. Predisposing factors are suggested to be internalized negative societal attitudes toward homosexuality. As well as this, there may be features associated with heterosexuality that are viewed as desirable, but incompatible with homosexuality. Davison and Neale (1982, p.364) suggest "The fact that "ego-dystonic heterosexuality" is not a diagnosis reflects a continuing implicit belief that homosexuality is abnormal. The difference between DSM-III and earlier nosologies is that the negative view of homosexuality is more subtle". Further, Ruse (1988) points out that although the American Psychiatric Association has removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders, it is still a disease in the International Classification of Diseases (9th ed., 1980).

6.4.4 Psychological/sociological

Many of the more recent psychological and sociological studies have been concerned with homosexual identity formation rather than the origins or aetiology of homosexuality. Examples of these include many of the stage theories of homosexuality and the symbolic interactionist approach. Such studies are discussed in the lesbian identity chapter. Some examples of further approaches, more directly concerned with aetiology, will be described in this section.

The social learning theory approach to development of homosexuality emphasizes processes of identification, observational learning or modelling (Richardson, 1981b). Specific learning experiences, suggested as important in the development of homosexuality, and described by Richardson, are heterophobia, the phobia or fear of heterosexuality; and seduction theories. Ruse (1988)

discusses the adaptational or phobic position, illustrated with studies by Rado, and Bieber et al. He suggests that this perspective has been extremely influential with its view of homosexuality in terms of illness.

Psychological theories concerning parental influences, and family position form further approaches to examining development of homosexuality (West, 1977).

Another approach to research on development of homosexuality has been the study of animal behaviour (West, 1977; Tyler, 1984).

The notion of people's psychosexual reactions and/or activities lying on a continuum, ranging from entirely heterosexual at one end, to entirely homosexual at the other, as opposed to forming a dichotomy, (Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin and Gebhard, 1953) has been very influential in subsequent thinking and research on homosexuality. DeCecco (1990) points out that the Kinsey reports reflected a conceptualization of sexuality as essentially physical. Cass (1990) suggests that Kinsey's model and scale of sexual preference is of limited use in understanding the experiences of lesbians today; and that stage of development in identity formation may provide more useful information. Emphasis now is on a multi-dimensional perspective of sexual orientation (e.g. Sanders, Reinisch & McWhirter, 1990; Coleman, 1990; Klein, 1990).

"Although nominal categories of heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual exist, the application of such labels reflects a complex set of social, political, and developmental factors and does not always accurately reflect actual sexual behavior patterns or erotic desire"
(Sanders, Reinisch & McWhirter, 1990, pp xix-xxvii)

Examples of some recent psychological and sociological studies illustrate some of the varied current theories on development of homosexuality.

A constructionist perspective is provided by Weeks

(1986). He suggests that what is known as 'sexuality' is "a product of many influences and social interventions. It does not exist outside history but is a historical product", (Weeks, 1986; p.31).

A model of development of sexual identity which takes into account interaction between a person's life experiences, the meanings ascribed to those experiences, and a person's self constructs, is suggested by Richardson and Hart (1981). Development of a homosexual identity and its maintenance and meaning for each person is seen as unique.

Bell, Weinberg and Hammersmith (1981) provide a model of sexual preference based on path analysis. They found childhood gender nonconformity to be strongly associated with later homosexuality. Although data from their study does not provide physiological evidence, Bell et al. speculate that their findings are not inconsistent with a biological basis for homosexuality, in particular for those who are exclusively homosexual. Similarly, Feldman (1984) considers the notion of primary and secondary homosexual individuals with biological influences probably being more important for the former group, and social learning influences for the latter group. Primary homosexuals are those who have never experienced heterosexual arousal, while secondary homosexuals are those who have.

A study by Green (1987) of two groups of young boys growing up provides further material for consideration of aetiological issues. Of the "feminine" group of boys, a large proportion became homosexual, in contrast to only one boy from the conventionally masculine group becoming homosexual.

6.4.5 Feminist

Within the feminist perspective, there are some differing views, and there are obviously overlaps with some of the other perspectives, in particular, with those

having a social emphasis.

Browning (1984) suggests the feminist perspective provides a social view of lesbianism. Thus, women's sexuality is seen as generally defined in male terms, and sexual inequality is seen as maintained by a patriarchal value system. Sexual preference from the feminist perspective is seen as a choice.

Providing a radical feminist viewpoint, Kitzinger (1987) suggests lesbianism must not be considered in individual terms, but must instead be seen from the political perspective. She suggests that the liberal humanist 'lifestyle' interpretation of lesbianism is as effective as the older 'pathological' model in individualizing and depoliticizing lesbian identity. Thus, from the radical feminist point of view, both lesbianism and heterosexuality are perceived as political constructions, and neither is seen in terms of being 'natural'.

6.4.6 Limitations of theories

Research concerning the aetiology of homosexuality has important limitations. Richardson (1981b) points out that the methodological and theoretical inadequacies of much of the research concerning theories of homosexuality needs to be recognized. West (1983, p.224) suggests "knowledge in this area remains at a primitive level. The problems of definition of homosexuality and above all the problems of sampling present serious obstacles to research". However, in this study, the main concern will not be with the validity of the research, but with the different ideas that have been suggested, since these may both underlie and reflect stereotypes and attitudes concerning lesbians, and thus affect the coming out process.

6.5 ATTRIBUTION THEORY

6.5.1 Background and theory

Attribution is defined by Hewstone (1983) in terms of 'common-sense explanation' and "how and why ordinary people explain events" (p.2). The theory has its roots in the common-sense or naive psychology of Heider (1958). This psychology is distinct from 'scientific' psychology, and applies to "the unformulated or half-formulated knowledge of interpersonal relations as it is expressed in our everyday language and experience" (Heider, 1958, p.4). Heider's approach was individualistic. The person was seen as the basic unit rather than the two person group, and 'interpersonal relations' mainly referred to relations between two people. Heider examines a reference person (p) perceiving another person (o), as well as investigating the other person as perceiver. Major early developments of attribution theory by Jones and Davis (1965) and Kelley (1967) were based on Heider's work, and also focused on the individual. More social approaches to attribution theory have been suggested by, for example, Deschamps (1983 and previous studies), Hewstone and Jaspars (1982), and Hewstone (1983, 1989a). These later studies have linked intergroup relations and social representations with attribution.

The theory is concerned with attribution of behaviour to disposition or situation; to internal or external factors.

"Of special importance for the interpretation of the social world is the separation of the factors located in persons, and those that have their source in the environment of these persons"

(Heider, 1958, p.297)

There are some problems with this terminology. Hewstone (1989a) describes how it may be useful to avoid confusing internal or personal causes with dispositional ones by using the distinction of internal-external. However, citing Miller et al. (1981), Hewstone describes four problems with the distinction of internal-external.

Firstly, there is the assumption of a hydraulic relationship (i.e. negative correlation) between internal and external causality. Secondly, the categories of internal and external causality are very broad and thus may lose meaning. Thirdly, there is the teleological confusion with the possibility of re-phrasing a statement to imply either external or internal attribution: the one statement implying the other. Fourthly, validity is low using different measures. Hewstone adds that combinations of internal and external attributions may be used. A further issue of terminology has been raised by Buss (1978, 1979) who argues for a distinction between 'causes' and 'reasons'. Causes, he suggests are "that which brings about a change", and reasons are "that for which a change is brought about (e.g., goals, purposes, etc.)", (Buss, 1978, p.1311).

Jones and Davis (1965) describe how a perceiver observes an action and decides which of its effects were intended. This decision is based on information or assumptions about the actor's knowledge and ability regarding the consequences of the action. Attribution of intention is seen as a precondition for inferences relating the action to disposition. Inferences made depend on perceived availability of alternative actions. Thus, Jones and Davis put forward a theory of correspondent inferences.

"When the perceiver infers personal characteristics as a way of accounting for action, these personal characteristics may vary in the degree to which they correspond with the behavior they are intended to explain. *Correspondence* refers to the extent that the act and the underlying characteristic or attribute are similarly described by the inference ... correspondence of inference declines as the action to be accounted for appears to be constrained by the setting in which it occurs"

(Jones & Davis, 1965, p.223)

"Operationally, correspondence means ratings toward the extremes of trait dimensions which are given with confidence"

(Jones & Davis, 1965, p.264)

Acts usually have multiple effects. Some of the possible effects of a chosen act may overlap with the possible effects of an alternative act that was not chosen. It is assumed that it is the effects that are non-common, rather than those effects that would be common to both acts, that would determine choice of action. Correspondence is seen as determined by the number of non-common effects of an action together with the assumed social desirability of these effects. A low number of non-common effects and low assumed desirability produce high correspondence. Importantly too, Jones and Davis examine the implications of an actors choice for the perceiver, suggesting that hedonic relevance for the perceiver; and personalism, which relates to the intention of the actor to benefit or harm the perceiver, both need to be considered. The centrality of power and status implications in benefit and harm was noted by Heider (1958).

Limitations of correspondent inference theory include the role played by intentionality. Attribution of disposition may sometimes be based on unintentional behaviour (e.g. forgetfulness: Eiser, 1986; Hewstone, 1989a). Further, perceivers may give little attention to non-occurrences/non-chosen behaviours, tending to focus on occurrences instead (cf Hewstone, 1989a).

Kelley (1967) used the notion of covariation, and presented an analysis of attribution akin to an analysis of variance model.

"The effect is attributed to that condition which is present when the effect is present and which is absent when the effect is absent"

(Kelley, 1967, p.194)

External attribution was seen as based on distinctiveness, consistency over time and modality, and consensus among observers. However, it is questionable whether such a process would take place outside laboratory conditions (Hewstone, 1989a). Kelley (1972) acknowledged that the ANOVA model was idealized and only

appropriate where a full causal analysis is carried out. For 'everyday' attributions, those based on partial information, or where fast analyses are required, Kelley (1972) suggested causal scemata may be used.

"A causal schema is a general conception the person has about how certain kinds of causes interact to produce a specific kind of effect. Each schema can be described in terms of a hypothetical matrix of data that summarizes the attributor's beliefs and assumptions about the distribution of the effect over various combinations of the causal factors"

(Kelley, 1972, p.151)

Thus, a causal schema is seen as "an assumed pattern of data" within the encompassing ANOVA model (Kelley, 1972, p.152). Different types of causal schemata may be distinguished by the presence or absence of causes, or the degree of strength of causes.

The studies of Heider (1958), Jones and Davis (1965) and Kelley (1967) formed the basis for many of the investigations of attribution that followed. Of particular importance were the findings relating to bias in attribution. The 'fundamental attribution error', originally noted by both Heider (1958 and previous study), and Ichheiser (1949), suggests that there is a tendency in making attributions to underestimate the effect of situational factors and overestimate that of dispositional factors (Ross, 1977). A further bias arises with actors tending to attribute their actions to situation, and observers attributing actions to disposition (Jones & Nisbett, 1972). Bains (1983), however, looking at explanations from the perspective of need for control, suggests that situational attributions may be made rather than dispositional ones, where the objective is to change behaviour rather than just to predict future behaviour. Hewstone (1989a) points out that the biases are based on the distinction between internal and external: a distinction that may be problematic.

Causality may be seen as multi-dimensional. Studies

by Weiner (cf Hewstone, 1989a; Wong & Weiner, 1981) have suggested dimensions of locus (i.e. internal/external); controllability; and stability. Wong and Weiner (1981) provide evidence suggesting spontaneous attributional search tends to occur particularly where an event is perceived as negative and unexpected; and it is the locus and control dimensions of causality that are focused upon. Some methodological issues relating to the conceptualization of causality in the Wong and Weiner study have been raised by Eiser (1983).

Three main functions of attribution have been described by Hewstone (1989a). These relate to control over events; self-esteem and self presentation. Hewstone suggests, however, that consequences of attribution may be more important than functions. These may include cognitive-judgemental, behavioural and affective effects.

Examining studies of attribution on the intra-personal level, Hewstone (1989a) concludes that although the cognitive perspective has made a major contribution to the study of causal attribution, a wider approach to investigation is required. On the interpersonal level, Hewstone considers firstly, social interaction generally, and secondly, close relationships. The latter involve interdependence, and raise the question of whether there can be generalization from attribution studies on strangers to attributions made in close relationships. Hewstone suggests studies of close relationships have indicated deficiencies in the dispositional/ situational dichotomy and suggested the possibility of different categories of attribution such as interpersonal or relationship.

While the early studies of attribution have been criticized as individualistic, some recent work on attribution theory has taken a more social perspective, and indicated that the theory may be interpreted within both intergroup and societal frameworks, in addition to intra-psychic and interpersonal approaches.

"...in a great number of situations we do not attribute to another personal or intrinsic qualities reflecting individual intentions, but rather characteristics of the group to which s/he belongs or to which s/he has been assigned. This is done as a function of the respective positions which the categories occupy and the relations between groups" (Deschamps, 1983, p.232)

Attributions, Deschamps (1983) suggested, need to be seen as influenced by multiple group membership. He questioned the dichotomy between the personal and the social; whether the actual nature of interpersonal and intergroup relations are different; and whether relations between individuals may be seen as "at least potentially or symbolically, relations between groups" (Deschamps, 1983, p.228). Further, he noted that different groups are not equivalent, and that in the context of interdependence between groups, power relations arise. Thus, Deschamps proposes firstly that the process of attribution may be seen as a function of the real and symbolic category memberships of an individual. Secondly, attribution is seen as a process in which representations are put into operation. Social representations are seen as structuring perceptions, obeying the cognitive laws relating to categorization; and as structuring relations between groups. Thirdly, Deschamps views the process of social categorization as fundamental to social attribution.

Attribution at the intergroup level, based on social representations and social categorization, has also been examined by Hewstone and Jaspars (1982). Additions to the theory of social attribution based on Deschamps' studies were suggested by Hewstone and Jaspars. These included incorporating the notion of actor-observer differences/ingroup-outgroup differences; extending Buss's (1978) reason versus causal explanations argument to speculate on the possibility that while observers may give reason explanations for ingroup members, they may give causal explanations for outgroup members; and the

suggestion that self-attributions may be made on the basis of social category membership. Also, of relevance, Hewstone and Jaspars discuss how defensive attribution (attributions aimed at reducing threat; Shaver, 1975) may be influenced by categorization.

Considering the 'foundations and consequences of intergroup attribution', Hewstone (1989a) looks at cognitive bases; expectancies and schemata; motivational bases; and emotional consequences. From the cognitive perspective, he suggests salience is of fundamental importance. Oakes (1987) has put forward the hypothesis that under certain conditions attributions will be produced relating to "*'persons' (people) as social category members* rather than to personality (or external factors), i.e., a qualitatively distinct type (or level) of person attribution" (p.135).

"The suggestion is that social category memberships can be treated not only as an *influence upon* the attribution process but as *attributions in themselves*, as a distinct type of 'dispositional property', relating to *social or collective* invariances in people's attitudes and actions, to which perceptual reference can be made. To perceive people as social groups (different from other social groups) is implicitly to explain their behaviour in terms of their shared, collective, societal properties and not in terms of individual personalities, but it is nevertheless an attribution to internal psychological (social-psychological) causes"

(Oakes, 1987, p.135)

Looking at expectancies and schemata, Hewstone (1989a) points to the relevance of stereotypes. From the perspective of motivation, Hewstone suggests the desire for a positive view of one's group in order to maintain self-esteem. However, self-esteem, he points out, may also be seen as an emotional consequence of attribution. Summarizing, Hewstone suggests that it is not yet possible to make a choice between motivational and cognitive explanations of attributional bias.

A five stage model of intergroup relations in which causal attribution and social comparison underlie both

maintenance of stages, and transition between different stages, has been proposed by Taylor and McKirnan (1984). At the first stage, there is a fixed dominant-subordinate relationship; stage 2 reflects individualistic ideology with stratification based on achievement; in stage 3 there is individual social mobility with some disadvantaged group members trying to pass into the advantaged group; stage 4 is that of consciousness raising; and stage 5 involves collective action.

Of particular interest, Hewstone (1989a) presents 'an attributional model of conflict maintenance and reduction'. The attribution of outgroup behaviour to stable or unstable factors is seen as the most important determinant of conflict maintenance and reduction. Outgroup behaviour that disconfirms expectancies may be attributed to unstable factors, maintaining conflict; or attributed to stable causes, but 'explained away' if the outgroup member is perceived as atypical. A generalized change of attitudes and reduced conflict may only arise where the individual is perceived as a typical outgroup member. The model indicates that "in two out of three cases where outgroup behaviour is perceived to disconfirm negative expectancies, conflict-maintaining attributions can be given" (Hewstone, 1989a, p.203).

In an examination of attribution at the societal level, Hewstone (1989a) points to the usefulness of social representations.

"The concept of social representations offers a means by which common sense can be reinstated into attribution theory, with a focus on shared social beliefs and knowledge"

(Hewstone, 1989a, p.211)

A societal perspective is also seen by Hewstone as emphasizing the need to consider the historical-temporal dimension of attribution.

6.5.2 Attributions and coming out

Attributions may be involved in the coming out process for lesbians in a number of different ways.

There is some evidence that sex (or possibly, gender) affects attributions: different explanations may be given for men's and women's behaviour (Hansen & O'Leary, 1985). Three categories of explanation for this difference are suggested by Hansen and O'Leary. Firstly, there may be a 'kernel of truth' in the sex-determined attributions. Secondly, they may be a reflection of other cognitive processes such as fundamental attribution errors, self-serving biases or automatic processing. Thirdly, sex-determined attributions may be serving "socio-political and economic goals of maintaining women's lower status" (Hansen & O'Leary, 1985, p.77). The effect of sex on attributions may be a "pervasive and fundamental phenomenon" (Hansen & O'Leary, 1985, p.93).

Reactions to stigmas may be analysed from the perspective of attribution (Weiner, Perry & Magnusson, 1988). Negative effects have been found to lead to attributional search (Wong & Weiner, 1981), and Weiner et al. (1988) suggest stigmas may be seen as representing negative outcomes and hence attributional analysis is applicable. Ten stigmas covering physical handicaps as well as mental-behavioural problems were presented to subjects for ratings of perceived controllability and stability, as well as affective reactions (pity and anger) and helping judgements. Physically based stigmas such as blindness were perceived as uncontrollable and stable; and as eliciting pity, little anger, and helping judgements. Mental-behavioural stigmas, which included AIDS, drug abuse, child abuse, obesity and Vietnam War syndrome, tended to be perceived as controllable and unstable (or reversible), and as eliciting much anger, little pity and low helping judgements (Weiner et al., 1988).

Thus, an attributional analysis of coming out needs

to take into account both lesbians as women, and homosexuality as a stigma. Attributions made may be of lesbians as women, and may be aimed at maintaining lesbians' lower status in society as female. Further, as a mental-behavioural stigma, lesbianism may be perceived as controllable and unstable, and may elicit anger.

Coming out to self may be considered from the point of view of what kind of cues lead to self-attribution as lesbian, and also, in terms of the relative importance attributed to internal and external cues. Perception of one's homosexuality as dispositional (e.g. as 'born' lesbian; homosexuality as predisposed/hormonally or genetically based; no choice) or as situational (due to circumstances/ environment; a choice) at the extremes may be seen as defining different lesbian identities: the 'traditional' lesbian versus the 'political' lesbian. Many women, however, might be expected to fall between these extremes defining themselves as lesbian on the basis of a mixture of situational and dispositional attributions.

There has been much debate regarding essentialist versus constructionist perspectives of homosexuality. The usefulness of such a distinction may be questioned, but where it is made, there may be implications to consider.

Attributions may lead to consequences regarding behaviour and affect. Thus, different explanations of the origins and development of homosexuality may result in differences of attitudes and behaviour, both for the lesbian herself, and for heterosexuals. Bell, Weinberg and Hammersmith (1981) point out that if a biological basis for homosexuality were found, it would have certain implications. For example, notions of homosexuality as unnatural would need to be reconsidered, and parents would be relieved of any guilt. Richardson (1981) describes how lesbianism seen as a permanent condition, as part of one's essence, has different

implications to lesbianism seen as socially constructed and something that may change. A possible interaction between heterosexuals' perceptions of the origins of homosexuality and their attitudes towards homosexuals has been suggested by Agüero, Bloch & Byrne (1984).

Thus, in the coming out to others situation, heterosexuals' perceptions of the reasons why people are homosexual may affect attitudes and reactions. (No distinction has been made in this study between 'reasons' and 'causes', and hence the terms are used here synonymously.) For example, if the heterosexual person perceives homosexuality as something one has choice over, s/he may expect the woman to reject that choice. If the heterosexual person perceives it as caused by certain situational factors such as upbringing, s/he may blame self, or expect that with a change in situational factors, the woman could change her orientation.

Attribution may be involved in coming out in some other ways too. One example occurs where a heterosexual person may make inferences regarding someone's sexual orientation based on perceived behaviour, rather than being told or the person coming out to them directly. A further instance arises where a woman is 'out' to a heterosexual person. In this situation, the heterosexual person may attribute certain characteristics to the woman arising from social category membership.

Social attribution, linking intergroup relations and societal context with attributions, must be seen as fundamental to a full understanding of the coming out process.

6.6 SELF-DISCLOSURE

6.6.1 Notions of self/self-presentation

In order to more fully understand the coming out process, it is necessary to consider the notion of 'self'. Many different conceptualizations of self have been suggested (Burns, 1979), but it is thought that the social perspective of Mead (1934) is most appropriate for considering self and coming out.

Mead (1934) presents a fundamentally social understanding of the self concept. He perceives self as originating and developing through social experience and interaction with others. Within social interaction, an individual may become an object to herself and take the attitude of others towards herself. Meaning, Mead suggests, is given by the response of the other. He puts forward the notion of 'the generalized other' which arises from the organization of the attitudes of others. Self, he suggests, may be seen in terms of 'I' and 'me', with 'I' corresponding to the response of the individual to the attitudes of others, and 'me' corresponding to the organized set of attitudes of others assumed by the individual. Mead's notion of self may contribute to a fuller understanding of the coming out process. For example, in perceiving oneself as lesbian, one is an object to oneself and takes the attitude of others towards oneself. Meaning is derived from the response of others. While coming out to self and before meeting other gay people, attitudes and responses of others are probably those of the heterosexual community, and may tend to be negative. During the coming out process, relative values of the 'I' and 'me' may vary, with the 'I' needing to be emphasized over the 'me' while coming out to self within the heterosexual community, but not requiring such emphasis once out within the homosexual community, as it would become closer to the 'me' or organized attitudes of others.

The distinction between 'expression' and

'impression' suggested by Ichheiser (1949) is pertinent when considering self-presentation. 'Expression' he suggested, may be seen as referring to the relationship between inner personality characteristics and external manifestation of these; and 'impression' as referring to the perceptions of these manifestations by persons observing them. (Expressive manifestations were seen by Ichheiser as including not only individuals' bodily movements, but as permeating perceptions and conceptions through, for example, art, culture and ideology.)

Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical framework provides a further perspective from which coming out may be considered. Here, human social interaction is presented in terms of performances. Actors appear before their audience in the front region. In the back region, the actor's front may be dropped. Goffman's main concern is with expressions given off rather than expressions given. He suggests that performers tend to offer the audience an idealized impression. They may attempt to conceal certain information from the audience. These ideas on self-presentation would seem to be relevant to a number of aspects of coming out/not coming out and passing as heterosexual. One example would be where a gay person passes as heterosexual in front of the heterosexual audience of family or work colleagues, but drops this front when backstage mixing with other gay people.

6.6.2 Self-disclosure and other minority group experiences

Coming out may be examined in terms of self-disclosure generally, and also in comparison with other minority group experiences. The notion of self-disclosure is relevant mainly to an understanding of the coming out to others situation, whilst comparison with other minority group experiences may illuminate issues of self acceptance and self-disclosure, with relevance both to coming out to self and to others. In particular, the

notion of coping with threat to identity (Breakwell, 1986) forms a framework for interpretation of coming out.

Self-disclosure

Self-disclosure has been defined and conceptualized in different ways. Cozby (1973) defined it in terms of information about self that one person communicates verbally to another person. D.V. Fisher (1984, p.278) has suggested the following definition: "Verbal behaviour through which individuals truthfully, sincerely and intentionally communicate novel, ordinarily private information about themselves to one or more addressees". Although, these definitions exclude non-verbal communication, it was recognized that this is an aspect of self-disclosure that requires consideration. Cozby sees self-disclosure as referring to a personality attribute as well as a process. He suggests three basic parameters of self-disclosure: "(a) breadth or amount of information disclosed, (b) depth or intimacy of information disclosed, and (c) duration or time spent describing each item of information" (Cozby, 1973, p.75). Studies in this field have looked at the relationship of self-disclosure with mental health; effects of non-disclosure; notions of 'appropriate' disclosure; self-disclosure and friendship formation; disclosure reciprocity; and revealing of deviant information (Chaikin & Derlega, 1976). Derlega and Berg (1987) have pointed out that decisions made about self-disclosure "determine the kinds of relationships the person has with others; how others perceive him or her; and the degree of self-knowledge and awareness that the person possesses" (p.ix). Berg and Derlega (1987) distinguished three themes within self-disclosure research. These included perspectives of self-disclosure as a personality factor; its role in relationships; and its role in counselling and psychotherapy. Findings relating to these different issues may contribute towards a fuller understanding of

the coming out process for lesbians.

Some methodological limitations, most applicable perhaps to the early studies in the field of self-disclosure, have been suggested by Cozby (1973) and Chaikin and Derlega (1976). Cozby criticized the self-disclosure questionnaire of Jourard and Lasikow (1958) as not accurately predicting self-disclosure. He pointed out there were low correlations between self-disclosure and other personality variables, and suggested this may be due to use of 'paper and pencil' measures of self-disclosure, which might instead be measured behaviourally, and used as a dependent variable. Chaikin and Derlega discussed 'unresolved issues', including the problems arising from laboratory studies and the advantages of naturalistic research; the need for a multivariate approach to investigation of self-disclosure; and ethical issues of privacy in self-disclosure research.

The importance of self-disclosure in psychological health has been emphasized in many studies (e.g. Jourard, 1971; Berg & Derlega, 1987). Jourard suggested that individuals with healthy personalities have the ability to make themselves fully known to at least one other person. He saw self-disclosure as a way of gaining a healthy personality: "...it is not until I *am* my real self and I act my real self that my real self is in a position to grow. One's self grows from the *consequence of being*. People's selves stop growing when they repress them" (Jourard, 1971, p.32). Jourard linked non-disclosure with stress and illness. Chaikin and Derlega (1976, p.180) suggested the appropriateness of self-disclosure as a central issue: "Self-disclosure may be inappropriate and self-defeating if it is not done at the correct time, in the correct context, and to the correct people". Appropriateness of disclosure was seen by Chaikin and Derlega as fundamental to the relationship between mental health and self-disclosure. A model

relating self-disclosure and psychopathology, focusing on interference/ competence has been suggested by Carpenter (1987).

Non-disclosure has wide implications ranging from its effects on psychological health and personal growth, to everyday interactions with others, friendships, and relationships. Jourard (1971) suggested people can only come to know themselves through disclosure to other people. Chaikin and Derlega point out:

"Self-disclosure is a vital and fundamental part of our interactions with others. Decisions about self-disclosure - whether to reveal one's thoughts, feelings, or past experiences to another person, or the level of intimacy of such disclosures, or the appropriate time and target persons for disclosure - are a constant part of the everyday life of all but the total recluse"

(Chaikin and Derlega, 1976, p.178)

In both the formation and maintenance of friendships, non-disclosure may be problematic, and reciprocity of disclosure plays an important role.

"In ordinary social relationships, disclosure is a reciprocal phenomenon. Participants in dialogue disclose their thoughts, feelings, actions, etc., to the other and are disclosed to in return. I called this reciprocity the "dyadic effect": disclosure begets disclosure"

(Jourard, 1971, p.66)

The phenomenon of disclosure reciprocity has been described by Chaikin and Derlega (1976) as a well established finding, and as probably having been investigated more than any other topic within self-disclosure research. These studies however tended to be laboratory based, and there was little investigation of reciprocity within long-term relationships.

One pertinent issue to consider is how revealing information about oneself may be evaded. Re-focusing conversational content and lowering information quality were the main tactics used to evade revealing information in a study by Berger and Kellermann (1989). If these

tactics became less efficient, presentation of a negative self-image or conversational control were sometimes used.

Self-disclosure may be a central strategy used in the development of friendship (Miell & Duck, 1986). A functional analysis of self-disclosure by Miell and Duck indicated it to be instrumental in development of a relationship, rather than something incidental. Within long-term relationships, Chaikin and Derlega (1976) have suggested the 'norm of reciprocity' (Gouldner, 1960), maintaining equity or equality (Adams, 1965) would probably operate. They point out

"Few friendships can survive a state of affairs characterized by A always revealing intimate information to B but B never revealing similarly intimate information to A"

(Chaikin & Derlega, 1976, p.200)

Long-term self-disclosure may be affected by variables such as liking, proximity or commitment, and power or status, Chaikin and Derlega suggest.

The role of the individual to whom the disclosure is made requires consideration. Miller, Berg and Archer (1983) found that some individuals ('high openers') tended to elicit greater self-disclosure from others than other individuals ('low openers'). This was measured on a ten item Opener Scale covering interest in listening to others, interpersonal skill and perceptions of others' reactions. Those who scored less on a self-disclosure index ('low disclosers') were found to disclose more to high openers than to low openers. High openers elicited more disclosure from friends as well as strangers; and were found to be liked more than low openers in long-term relationships. 'Responsiveness' was suggested by Berg (1987) to be of importance in considering self-disclosure. This was defined as relating to the way a participant's actions were addressed to the other participant's communications, behaviour, wishes or needs. Berg examined the part played by responsiveness in accounting for disclosure reciprocity, and disclosure

liking effects. It may also be relevant that (male) subjects have been found to perceive negative disclosures as more intimate than positive disclosures (Howell & Conway, 1990).

Considering 'the dilemma of distress disclosure', Coates and Winston (1987) suggested that future research might investigate those providing support rather than those receiving it. They described the dilemma in the following terms:

"If we do not disclose our distress, others do not know how upset we are or what is bothering us and so cannot help us very much. But if we disclose our distress too much or too intensely, others find it annoying and disturbing and will not help us very much"

(Coates & Winston, 1987, p.236)

The notion of self-monitoring (Snyder, 1979) was used by Coates and Winston to examine whether some people ('high self-monitors') may be able to express negative feelings and obtain support without alienating others. Snyder (1979) described high self-monitoring individuals as relatively situationally guided in their social behaviour, while low self-monitoring individuals were relatively dispositionally guided. Thus, high self-monitors are more concerned with situational cues, while low self-monitors tend to be guided by their affective states or attitudes. Coates and Winston did find high self-monitors expressed distress with less alienation of others, but they were found to have greater depression scores than low self-monitors for moderate and high disclosure levels. Thus, neither high nor low self-monitors were found to be successful in coping with the distress disclosure dilemma.

The hypothesis that an individual disclosing high intimacy information would be liked less where this was of a 'deviant' nature than where it was conventional was tested by Derlega, Harris and Chaikin (1973). In this experiment, the disclosures concerned a woman revealing that her mother had caught her in a sexual encounter with

a female friend or a male friend. The hypothesis was confirmed. Liking was not found to vary between a low disclosure condition and the conventional high disclosure condition. The study did not support a direct relationship between amount or intimacy of self-disclosure and liking. The 'reciprocity norm' that suggests amount of self-disclosure varies positively with level of disclosure input from the other person was supported, and was independent of liking. Chaikin and Derlega (1976, p.201) acknowledged "There may be some occasions when the disclosure of information indicating similarity is perceived as threatening and reacted to unfavorably".

Indicating that it may be important to consider particular relationships, using target specific disclosure measures, rather than general measures of disclosure, Miller (1990) has found no relationship between liking and disclosure at the individual level. Instead Miller's findings supported a dynamic interactional model with strong dyadic or relationship disclosure liking effects.

A variety of other possible variables affecting self-disclosure have been proposed. Stiles (1987) has suggested a 'fever model' of disclosure such that disclosure increases with intensity of distress. 'Private self-consciousness', a personality trait relating to a tendency to 'private self-awareness', has been suggested as affecting self-disclosure (Davis & Franzoi, 1987). The anticipation of future interaction may be a further variable affecting self-disclosure. This has been found to interact with gender differences (Shaffer & Ogden, 1986) and with self-monitoring (Shaffer, Ogden & Wu, 1987).

Findings relating to gender and self-disclosure have been inconsistent (Hill & Stull, 1987). Strategies used to explore these issues, relating to situational factors (including disclosure topic, sex of target and

relationship to target); sex-role attitudes, identity and norms; and self-disclosure methods have been discussed by Hill and Stull. Problems, they suggested were the complexity of self-disclosure regarding situational factors; methodological problems relating to measurement of sex-role attitudes, sex-role identity and self-disclosure; and conceptualization of self-disclosure as a unidimensional construct. Power strategies, they pointed out, may also be involved in gender differences in self-disclosure.

Self-disclosure has been viewed from a variety of perspectives, and different models have been proposed. Examples vary from the neuropsychological perspective of Chelune (1987), who described self-disclosure in terms of an interactive cognitive-behavioural activity with a biological basis in neural mechanisms, to the view of self-disclosure within a goal-based model of personality of Miller and Read (1987). This latter model has four components: goals, plans/strategies, resources and beliefs. Within these components, there will be individual differences. A general process model of personality and its interaction with social situation was then developed by Miller and Read. Considering self-disclosure from this perspective, they suggested differences in disclosing may be looked at in terms of different goals; differences in patterns of disclosure for different goals; and differing strategies, resources and beliefs for particular goals.

Self-disclosure and coming out as lesbian

The woman who thinks that she is lesbian and feels she cannot disclose this to anyone is probably under extreme stress; and the risks to her psychological health considerable. Non-disclosure will limit her understanding and perceptions of self; and effect her personal growth, everyday interactions with others, friendships, and family relationships. In both the

formation and maintenance of friendships, disclosure reciprocity will be problematic. She will need to employ tactics of evading revealing information about herself in everyday conversations. Disclosure of her lesbianism may well relieve many of these problems, but it carries considerable risks too, ranging through rejection or avoidance to alienation or decreased liking. Making decisions regarding whether or not to disclose that she is lesbian to significant others will almost certainly demand much emotional energy and may involve a high level of stress for the woman.

Possible variables affecting consequences of self-disclosure include tendency to high or low self-monitoring.

Miller and Read's goal-based model provides a possible framework for analysis of coming out to others as lesbian. However, although the model takes into account beliefs about the world, its emphasis on the individual, while illuminating some aspects of coming out, may obscure or give insufficient emphasis to some of the major determinants of the coming out process.

Examples of other issues that may be relevant to self-disclosure and coming out include privacy and embarrassment. The relationship between privacy, power and norms has been discussed by Kelvin (1973).

Much of the literature on self-disclosure tends to focus on the individual. When considering self-disclosure and coming out as lesbian, it seems important that the level of analysis is not confined to the individual or interpersonal. Issues of self-disclosure in coming out must be viewed within the social context of intergroup relations, gender relations, power inequalities, and dominant social representations relevant to sexuality, gender and human nature.

Comparison of 'coming out' with other individual/minority group experiences

There may be similarities between the experience of coming out for lesbians, or gay men, and the experiences of some other minority group members concerning self acceptance and self-disclosure. Possible examples might include the experiences of an alcoholic in coming to accept him/herself as alcoholic; and the experiences of the ex-psychiatric patient or religious minority group member in disclosing this information about themselves to others. It would seem useful to consider the similarities and differences of other individual/minority group experiences with the experiences of lesbians coming out.

The notion of stigma seems to provide a particularly helpful framework for looking at coming out. Goffman (1963) considers the blind, deaf and physically handicapped, ex-mental patients, religious minority members, alcoholics and ex-prisoners, as well as homosexuals, in terms of the 'discredited' and the 'discreditable'. Where the individual's differentness is evident or already known about, s/he is 'discredited'. Where the individual's differentness is not known about, and cannot be seen, s/he is 'discreditable'. While the 'discredited' individual has tension to manage, the 'discreditable' individual is concerned with information management. The notions of 'discredited' and 'discreditable' can be seen to be directly applicable to the coming out situation. Similarly, Jones et al. (1984), looking at stigma, discuss how individuals bearing a discrediting 'mark' may be 'markable' or 'marked'. They examine 'marked relations' - interactions between markable and unmarked individuals. This approach too is directly applicable to the coming out situation. The social control function of stigma, discussed by Page (1984), is also relevant to consider with respect to coming out.

Lesbian women have been studied by Brooks (1981) from the point of view of minority stress. Minority stress is seen as initially arising through the inferior status that is culturally ascribed to particular groups. Lesbians, through gender and sociosexual orientation, may be seen as members of a double minority. Brooks discusses coping resources, identity conflicts, and social disclosure for lesbians within the context of minority stress.

A further perspective on coming out may be provided by a model of identity, threat and coping which has been suggested by Breakwell (1986). Examples of identity threatening experiences cover a broad range. Included in Breakwell's examples are transsexualism, alcoholism, drug abuse and leprosy, and she examines, in particular, unemployment and sexually atypical employment.

The model of identity, threat and coping proposed by Breakwell (1986)

In Breakwell's (1986) model of coping with threatened identity, the identity structure is seen as consisting of a content dimension and a value dimension. The content elements each have a positive or negative value, and these values are open to revision. The identity processes are assimilation-accommodation and evaluation. Assimilation refers to absorbing new content into the identity structure. Accommodation is the adjusting of the existing identity structure to absorb the new content. The evaluation process concerns allocating meaning and value to new and old identity content. Identity principles guide the identity processes, specifying the desirable end states for identity structure. Breakwell suggests three identity principles: continuity, indicated by a continuation of some aspect of identity or behaviour across time and situation; distinctiveness, a sense of uniqueness, of being different from others, which may be positive or

negative; and self esteem, a sense of 'personal worth or social value' (p.24). Identity is seen as developing within the social context. A threat to identity arises when the identity processes of assimilation-accommodation and evaluation cannot comply with the identity principles of continuity, self esteem, and distinctiveness.

Intra-psychic, interpersonal and intergroup coping strategies are described by Breakwell. A coping strategy is any thought or action aimed at modifying or removing a threat to identity. Intra-psychic coping strategies include deflection and acceptance strategies which rely on the assimilation-accommodation process, and other strategies relying on the process of evaluation. Deflection strategies include denial; transient depersonalization; 'real selves and unreal selves'; fantasy; and reconstrual, and re-attribution. Acceptance strategies include anticipatory restructuring; compartmentalism; compromise changes; fundamental change; and modification of salience of principles. Strategies relying on evaluation include re-evaluation of existing identity content and re-evaluation of prospective identity content. Interpersonal coping strategies include isolation; negativism; passing; and compliance. Breakwell's suggestions of intergroup coping strategies focus on multiple group membership; group support; and group action. Limits to coping that determine strategy choice, Breakwell suggests, include type of threat - whether the threat originates internally or externally; social context; identity structure, including level of self-esteem; and cognitive resources. There may be phases in coping with a succession of different strategies used in response to a threat.

Lesbians' experiences of coming out may be viewed from the perspective of Breakwell's framework. Thus, for example, in the coming out to self situation, there may be conflict of continuity of experiencing lesbian feelings with the perceived negative distinctiveness of

lesbianism. The threat to identity that arises may be dealt with on the intra-psychic level by deflection strategies of denial or fantasy, for example; or maybe, acceptance strategies of compartmentalism or compromise change. Threat to identity related to coming out to others would often be dealt with using the interpersonal strategy of 'passing', as well as possibly, intra-psychic strategies such as compartmentalism, and maybe, intergroup support.

6.7 COUNSELLING/THERAPY FOR LESBIANS

6.7.1 Introduction

Counselling/therapy for lesbians needs to be considered in the context of issues that relate to therapy generally. Two issues are of particular relevance: emphasis on the individual; and differing perspectives of mental health related to gender. Thus, firstly, psychotherapy has tended to focus on the individual and inner feelings, neglecting the shaping of experiences on the personal level by social and cultural structures (Salmon, 1991). Pilgrim (1991) has argued that psychotherapy is socially blinkered, relating this to psychological reductionism (e.g. reducing actions within a social context to individual motives), and power issues of professionalism. Smail (1991) has suggested the need for an 'environmentalist psychology of help' taking into account interpersonal relations; and has emphasized the role of power. Secondly, there are general issues of perceptions of mental health/illness and gender differences. Over twenty years ago Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz and Vogel (1970) found that while clinicians' perceptions of a healthy man did not differ from their perceptions of a healthy, mature adult, their perceptions of a healthy woman were different. Gove (1980) using a definition of mental illness that makes a distinction between personality disorders and mental illness, and excludes, for example, alcoholism and drug additcion, suggested that women have a higher rate of mental illness than men. However, Johnson (1980) has challenged Gove's definition of mental illness and pointed out that it excludes categories in which men are predominant.

This section examines current ideas in counselling/therapy for homosexual people that relate to issues of coming out to self or others. In the past, homosexuality tended to be regarded by many as an illness (for example, the American Psychiatric Association's DSM listed

homosexuality as a 'sexual deviation' until 1973). Even today, there are those who regard homosexual behaviour as a deviation from the normal developmental process and something to be treated (e.g. Fine, 1987). However, most current counselling/therapy approaches tend to emphasize instead positive adjustment to one's sexual orientation, and helping the individual to overcome internalized 'homophobia' and cope with stigma. Some radical lesbian feminists have challenged the notion of internalized homophobia and questioned the appropriateness of therapy for lesbians (Kitzinger, 1987; Perkins, 1991).

There has tended to be neglect of gay and lesbian issues in counsellor training programmes (Dworkin & Gutierrez, 1989). There has been material available, however, on counselling of gay men and lesbians, for some years now (e.g. Woodman & Lenna, 1980; Moses & Hawkins, 1982). Some ways in which counsellor training may be provided have been suggested by Iasenza (1989) and Buhrke (1989). Emphasizing the need for training, it has been suggested that homophobia among non-gay counsellors may be a problem (McDermott, Tyndall & Lichtenberg, 1989).

Generally, therapeutic approaches suggested have varied with theoretical perspective adopted; perceptions of the nature of homosexuality; perception of the 'problems' to be dealt with; and therapeutic goals.

6.7.2 Theoretical perspectives

A variety of theoretical perspectives have been used in counselling or therapy for lesbians and gay men. Coleman (1987) suggested that the most effective and widely used treatment methods have included cognitive approaches and attitude modification; psychoanalytic approaches; group therapy; role play; and client centred therapy.

6.7.3 Perspectives on the nature of homosexuality

Perspectives on the nature of homosexuality carry implications for therapy, and may be viewed as ranging between essentialist and social constructionist views;

and as based on diverse theoretical perspectives e.g. biological determinism or psychoanalytic notions.

Thus, Mihalik (1988) has argued that gender-related and erotic functioning may be based on a pre-structured neurobiological core; and has viewed sexual diversity as deriving from the evolutionary processes underlying general biopsychological variability among human beings. Contrastingly, Richardson (1987b) viewed sexual identity as socially constructed and possibly changing over time. A distinction between 'true homosexuals' and heterosexual men who may be using homosexuality defensively has been made by Isay (1988). Viewing homosexuality from a different perspective, Golden (1987) has made the distinction between 'primary lesbians', who do not perceive their lesbianism as a conscious choice and often perceived themselves as different from other girls from an early age; and 'elective lesbians' who perceived their lesbian identity as consciously chosen. While the former group experienced their sexuality in essentialist terms as central and enduring, the latter group was divided between those who perceived their lesbianism in essentialist terms, and those who perceived it as something fluid and dynamic. Golden cautions against social construction of inflexible categories of sexuality.

Psychoanalytic interpretations of homosexuality described by Sternlicht (1987) included Adler's views of homosexuality as based on fear of the opposite sex and feelings of inferiority; Ernest Jones' focus on oral eroticism and sadism; and Melanie Klein's notion of oral frustrations in infancy. From the psychoanalytical perspective, homosexuality has often been seen as resulting from, or as a way of containing, anxieties (Socarides, 1981; Gershman, 1983; Krikler, 1988). It has been viewed as based on problems with individuation in early childhood (Socarides, 1981; Gershman, 1983). For Gershman "homosexuality represents a deviation in the

evolution of gender identity ... I do not consider it a normal variation of human sexuality" (p.137); and for Krikler, homosexuality is a 'perversion'. For Fine (1987) "homosexuality is a curable deviation from the analytic ideal" (p.87); and "the homosexual is a person who has not grown up" (p.93). The distinction between 'true obligatory' homosexuals and those who were homosexual based on situational factors was made by Socarides.

Whether homosexuality is seen as biologically based; determined by early experiences; of a deviant nature; as a response to anxieties or an immaturity; as 'curable' or modifiable; or as fixed and permanent, will obviously help determine the therapeutic approach selected, perception of 'problem(s)', and goals of therapy.

6.7.4 Some issues in counselling/therapy of lesbians

External factors that may lead to lesbians and gay men experiencing psychological problems have been summarized as follows:

"(a) the lack of an accepting and nurturing environment for homosexual expression, (b) myths and misinformation regarding homosexuality, (c) lack of information regarding methods for developing a positive self-identity and improvement of interpersonal functioning, (d) lack of survival techniques for living in a predominately heterosexual and heterosexually-biased society, and (e) lack of healthy role models"

(Coleman, 1987, p.1)

Some recent psychological or sociological studies of counselling or therapy of lesbians or gay men, may be seen as based upon 'gay affirmative' approaches, within a 'liberal humanistic' ideological context (cf Kitzinger, 1987). Issues pertinent to coming out that these studies have examined include firstly, identity development, and secondly, family conflict.

Underlying many of these studies has been the notion of 'homophobia', and in particular, 'internalized homophobia' (e.g. Sophie, 1987; Margolies, Becker &

Jackson-Brewer, 1987; Hanley-Hackenbruck, 1988; Forstein, 1988; Browning, 1987; Hall, 1985). In order to develop a positive lesbian identity, these studies have suggested a reduction in internalized homophobia as a basic therapeutic goal.

Reduction of internalized homophobia through therapy based on psychoanalytic conceptualizations has been suggested by Margolies, Becker and Jackson-Brewer (1987) and Hanley-Hackenbruck (1988). Margolies et al. described some of the ways internalized homophobia may be expressed and the underlying defence mechanisms. Examples included 'fear of discovery' which may be expressed in terms of a need to protect others, and uses the defence mechanisms of projection and rationalization; believing lesbians and heterosexual women to be no different, based on rationalization and denial; and only being attracted to unavailable women such as heterosexuals, using the defence of denial. Margolies et al. suggested that, internalized homophobia may consist of fear or discomfort based on sexuality (erotophobia), and/or that based on one's differentness (xenophobia). The latter may take the form of fear of rejection by family. Id and superego anxieties would require focusing upon. Hanley-Hackenbruck suggested that modifications are needed to the superego during three stages of the coming out process, in order to reach a positive, integrated identity. These stages, she referred to as 'must not', 'must' and 'choice'. During the 'must not' stage there may be confusion, depression or anxiety, and superego modification begins with dispelling myths about homosexuality. During the 'must' stage, further modification of the superego takes place, and the individual copes with the tasks of adolescence that may have been neglected at the appropriate chronological stage. Work on internalized homophobia needs to go on during the 'choice' stage, with losses and rejections continuing to occur as the person remains 'out'. Hanley-

Hackenbruck emphasized throughout that the problem lies not in an individuals's homosexuality, but in the homophobia of society and the individual's internalization of this.

Further studies of therapeutic approaches that have focused on reduction of internalized homophobia have incorporated different theoretical frameworks. Sophie (1987), taking a cognitive perspective, suggested examples of possible coping strategies in order to encourage self acceptance and reduce internalized homophobia include cognitive restructuring, self-disclosure, and meeting other lesbians. Browning(1987) considered therapy issues within an adult developmental context, viewing a woman's identity as emerging through her resolution of her perceptions of the discrepancy between her own identity, and the cultural definition of adult identity.

Adolescence or young adulthood is an important time during identity development. The stigma of homosexuality contributes towards psychological problems for adolescents (Coleman & Remafedi, 1989). Adjusting to a socially stigmatized role was seen by Hetrick and Martin (1987) as the major task of the gay adolescent. The seriousness of problems during adolescence for gay and lesbian young people is reflected in findings of approximately 20% reporting suicide attempts before the age of 20 or 21 (e.g. Trenchard & Warren, 1984). A survey of a sample of adolescent psychiatrists in the United States by Kourany (1987) found those who had worked with homosexual adolescents perceived them to be at greater risk of suicide than other adolescents. Hetrick and Martin found the most frequent problems among a group of 300 adolescents concerned isolation and difficulties with family. They suggested 'learning to hide' may be the most important coping strategy adopted by homosexual adolescents and discussed the negative effects this may have.

For some women, coming out to self may occur during adulthood rather than adolescence. For all gay people, the issues concerned with coming out to others continue throughout life, and may vary or have different implications for women at different stages of the life cycle. One issue is that an unmarried lesbian who has not come out is likely to be perceived as a single heterosexual woman, an assumption that is a source of conflict for the lesbian (Gartrell, 1981). There may be effects of having lived through a long period of concealing one's sexual orientation from others. Historical period differences need to be taken into account as well as the effects of aging itself when considering older gay people, (Kimmel, 1978). The effects of heterosexism and ageism may be interrelated for older gay men and women, but there are ways in which being homosexual may facilitate adjusting to old age (Friend, 1987). These functional aspects in coping with aging, suggested by Friend, included gender role flexibility; "crisis competence"; and the support of friends and community network.

Family issues include dealing with coming out or not coming out to parents and siblings, as well as possibly husband, children and more distant relatives. Difficulties with family may be associated with stigmatization (Hammersmith, 1987; Hetrick & Martin, 1987). Rejection is a possible result of coming out to family. For those who have not come out, there is fear of rejection and the associated psychological stress (Hammersmith, 1987). Coming out to parents is possibly the major source of difficulty. Zitter (1987) examined daughters coming out to their mothers from the perspective of intra-psychic considerations, family systems and sociocultural factors. Therapeutic concerns taken into account included that in some cases a decision to come out may not be the best course of action; the possibility of rejection; possible internalized

homophobia of both mother and daughter; and the mourning process the mother may go through. Zitter suggested it may be useful to consider coming out in terms of reworking earlier separations from the mother, and that from a family systems viewpoint, a clearer boundary between mother and daughter may develop, and family dynamics change. Understanding the position of the lesbian mother coming out to her children is of importance too (Kirkpatrick, 1987). A possible approach to easing the process of coming out to one's children has been described by Dunne (1987) in a study of gay men in which role play was used. Knowledge of availability of social support resources also seems important as families tend not to approach sources of support they might use in other circumstances such as friends and general community resources (Neisen, 1987; Hammersmith, 1987).

Conceptualizations of 'internalized homophobia' and of working towards a goal through therapy of a positive lesbian identity require further examination. Kitzinger (1987) has suggested that both the notion of homophobia and that of the 'well-adjusted' lesbian must be seen as liberal humanistic constructions, based on value judgements, and defining what heterosexuals and lesbians should think about homosexuality. The notion of homophobia, Kitzinger has argued, depoliticizes the oppression of lesbians, individualizing and personalizing a sociopolitical phenomenon. Further, Kitzinger has pointed out that it is not possible to objectively define prejudice against homosexuals: this may only be understood within the context of a specific ideological framework. Perkins (1991) examined cognitive approaches to therapy with lesbians, and argued that therapy may be seen as anti-feminist and anti-lesbian as it translates oppression into individual pathology.

The argument that lesbians should not be given therapy, but instead directed towards 'the lesbian community', makes at least two assumptions that may be

questioned. Firstly, it assumes that all lesbians' problems relate to lesbian identity within a society that oppresses lesbians; and secondly, it assumes that the lesbian community has the ability, resources and willingness to deal with these women, some of whom may be in a highly distressed state.

Thus, counselling and therapy for lesbians have reflected specific ideological contexts and theoretical perspectives in determining therapeutic approaches, 'problem' conceptualizations, and goals of therapy. It has been argued by some lesbian feminists that it depoliticizes and individualizes oppression of lesbians. However, intense distress and conflict may well be experienced relating both to coming out to self, and coming out to others, and while the aims and underlying assumptions of therapeutic interventions obviously require examination, for some women, counselling or therapy may be vital. It cannot be assumed that 'the lesbian community' is currently able to provide the support necessary for those experiencing extreme distress or conflict.

6.8 CONCLUSION

The coming out process may be interpreted from a social psychological perspective, incorporating notions of social identity and social representations, within the context of an understanding of gender issues. Further aspects that are useful to consider in an examination of the coming out process include the notion of self-disclosure; and implications of findings for counselling of lesbians. It is within this theoretical context of perspectives ranging from the intra-psychic level, through interpersonal and intergroup levels, to the societal/cultural level, and taking into account issues of gender, that the data emerging from the main study are to be interpreted.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE MAIN STUDY

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This study is designed to investigate the coming out process for lesbians, both in the sense of coming to identify self as lesbian; and in the sense of disclosure of this information to others. 'Coming out' takes place within a predominantly heterosexual society. Thus, it was thought essential to investigate not only lesbians' experiences and perceptions of coming out, but also heterosexual people's perceptions relating to homosexuality. In addition, coming out involves issues of self acceptance and self-disclosure, and may have some similarities to other life events or minority group experiences. Comparison with other life experiences may illuminate some aspects of the coming out process for lesbians.

'Coming out' requires investigation not only from the perspective of individual and interpersonal relations, but also from intergroup and cultural/societal viewpoints i.e. the four levels of analysis suggested by Doise (1978 cited in Doise, 1984).

Previous studies have suggested different lesbian identities (e.g. Ettorre, 1980a; Kitzinger & Rogers, 1985; Kitzinger, 1987; Golden, 1987) which could affect both coming out to self and others. Lesbians have been described as 'homoemotional' rather than homosexual (Wolff, 1973). Lesbian identity formation has been interpreted in terms of stages (e.g. Cass, 1979; Sophie, 1985) but pilot work has indicated general linear stage development to be unlikely. Threat to identity (Breakwell, 1986) may occur in coming out. The perspective of salience of social category/group membership (Oakes, 1987) also provides a framework for interpretation of coming out.

Few previous studies have focused upon disclosure of

homosexual orientation to significant others, yet whether or not to disclose one's orientation to family, heterosexual friends or work colleagues is a crucial issue for many lesbians. Some recent studies have looked at disclosure to parents by gay men (Cramer, 1985); disclosure to mothers by lesbians (Zitter, 1987); disclosure to family (Strommen, 1989); and the general issue of disclosure of homosexual orientation (Wells & Kline, 1987). The comparatively numerous studies that have looked at heterosexuals' attitudes towards homosexuals (e.g. Larson, Reed & Hoffman, 1980; Laner & Laner, 1980; Herek, 1984b; Kite & Deaux, 1986; Gentry, 1986; Jensen, Gambles & Olsen, 1988; Jowell, Witherspoon & Brook, 1990) have tended to indicate a predominantly negative view. These attitudes may be reflected in behaviour towards lesbians and gay men (Kite & Deaux, 1986; Gray, Russell & Blockley, 1991; Herek, 1989; Comstock, 1991), but this is an area that fewer studies have examined. Theory and research on self-disclosure (e.g. Jourard, 1971; Chaikin & Derlega, 1976; Derlega & Berg, 1987) provide an individual/ interpersonal level perspective that may illuminate some aspects of coming out. It is suggested, however, that intergroup issues (e.g. Tajfel, 1981), and a societal/cultural perspective, incorporating for example, social representations (e.g. Moscovici, 1984) are also necessary for understanding coming out.

Further, integral to any social psychological framework for interpreting coming out for lesbians must be an understanding of issues of gender: for example, gender inequalities generally; the notion of gender schema (Bem, 1981a); gender-related behaviour (Deaux & Major, 1987); the underlying part played by heterosexual relations in notions of gender (e.g. Bem, 1981a; Spence & Sawin, 1985), and the power differences heterosexuality incorporates (e.g. Kitzinger, 1987; Jeffreys, 1990).

The pilot studies indicated there is a stereotype of

lesbians, and sex role may be an important feature of this. The Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI: Bem, 1974) and the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ: Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1974) provide one approach to attempting to measure aspects of stereotypical masculinity and femininity. However, limitations of the notions of sex role and sex categorization (as described, for example, by Condor, 1987) need to be considered.

Sampling and methodology

Representative sampling of lesbians is not possible. A proportion of the lesbian population, of unknown magnitude, probably conceal their identity from all or most significant others, and do not participate in the lesbian community. This study was not designed to include any lesbians who had not at least come out into the lesbian community. Further, potential subjects probably needed to have reached a sufficient level of confidence in coming out in order to volunteer to participate in such a study. In addition, this study was not designed to investigate issues of race, class or disability, all of which would be likely to have some impact on coming out. Thus, generalizations to a lesbian population may not be made.

The heterosexual sample, composed mainly of undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as a 'snowball' sample of men and women volunteers from outside the student population also cannot be seen as representative of heterosexuals generally. (A criterion in selection of heterosexual subjects was that they should be unaware that the researcher was lesbian).

Communication group subjects were all volunteers from within LSE, but as with the LSE heterosexual group subjects, only a proportion were students. Others were office, library, administration and teaching staff.

Historical time period and age itself may affect experiences of coming out. Therefore, an attempt was

made to obtain a range of subject ages within the lesbian group, and corresponding age ranges within the heterosexual and communication groups.

Since coming out is a complex process, involving a multiplicity of issues, varying with cultural context, historical time period, individual variables, as well as social relations, and social context, a methodological approach was selected that would permit the complexity of issues to emerge, imposing the minimum of structural restrictions, while at the same time permitting a systematic, scientific approach. Thus, the main study is based on semi-structured depth interviews. The interviews are supplemented with the use of a short questionnaire and sex role inventories (the BSRI and the PAQ) for a particular focus on stereotyping.

The main hypotheses

It is essential that both coming out to self and coming out to others are viewed within the social context of relevant social representations, intergroup relations, and issues of gender. This context incorporates variation with historical time period, power inequalities, and rigid conceptualizations of gender.

Coming out to self

On the basis of the pilot studies, and consideration of previous studies, it is hypothesized that identification of self as lesbian is based upon primary emotional attachments with women. Additionally, awareness of lesbianism as an option, and a level of emotional acceptance of homosexuality are necessary for possible identification of self as lesbian. Coming out to self will generally be gradual, and while reconstruction of the past may or may not occur, for some women, feelings of differentness may reach back to childhood.

Coming out to others

Coming out to others is to be examined from the

perspective of initial circumstances, approaches taken in coming out, telling the other person, perceptions of reactions, and outcome. Issues contributing towards decisions on whether or not to come out may include perceptions of people's attitudes/stereotyping; perceptions of present ease/difficulty of communication; and generally, perceptions of possible gains and risks. Relative importance of such issues would be likely to vary. Approaches taken in coming out may range from assuming the other person 'knows' to telling them in a direct manner. Only selected others are likely to be informed. 'Testing the ground' first is a possibility. In telling the other person, influences may include personal understanding of the meaning of lesbianism/homosexuality; the social context reflected in perceptions of people's attitudes and stereotyping, as well as the heterosexual person's feelings about homosexuality, and the previous relationship between the two persons. Differences between lesbian and heterosexual subjects understanding of the meaning of lesbianism are expected. A lesbian stereotype is expected to reflect perceptions of masculinity and abnormality. Perceptions of reactions, will vary from positive to negative, and may change over time. Outcome is expected to depend upon perceptions of reactions; perceived gains and losses; and whether initial conscious and subconscious reasons for coming out have been satisfied. Some orderings of coming out experiences may be more satisfactory than others. For example coming out to other lesbians before coming out to heterosexual people would provide a background of support.

On the basis of the self-disclosure pilot study, there may be individual differences in communication; possibilities of planning approaches to communicating sensitive information to others; and perceptions of possible reactions of others may play an important role. Underlying issues relating to self-disclosure may be

loss, threat to self, and attempts to defend self.

Thus, in the main study, the coming out process for lesbians is investigated from three main perspectives: firstly, the perceptions and experiences of lesbians in coming out; secondly, heterosexual men's and women's attitudes towards homosexuality, and their feelings about the hypothetical situation of friends or family members coming out to them; and thirdly, women's perceptions of communicating with family and friends on topics perceived as difficult to talk about. Individual, semi-structured, depth interviews form the basis for all three parts of the study. The first two groups (i.e. the lesbian and heterosexual groups) also participated in a stereotype investigation. While the methodology focuses on the individual level, the study is designed to elicit perceptions of the social context such as stereotypes and perceptions of 'most' people's attitudes. Individual experiences related to coming out must be interpreted within a context of intergroup relations and the cultural/societal background.

7.2 METHOD

Subjects

Three groups of subjects participated in this study: The forty self-defined lesbian (/gay women) subjects (mean age: 35.23 years; standard deviation: 10.88; range: 21-63 years) were mainly from one London group. Most, but not all, lived in London. All were resident in this country: approximately 10% were from overseas. Of the thirty heterosexual subjects (15 female and 15 male; mean age: 33.97 years; standard deviation: 11.76; range 18-60 years) who participated in this study, approximately two thirds were volunteers from LSE, including students and office staff; and approximately one third were from outside LSE. The twenty women (mean age: 33.60 years; standard

deviation: 12.88; range 20-54 years) who participated in the study on communication with family and friends were volunteers from LSE. Approximately two thirds were undergraduate or postgraduate students. The remainder were office, library or teaching staff.

Materials

A cassette tape recorder was used for all interviews.

Semi-structured interview schedules, devised on the basis of the pilot studies were used - one for the lesbian interviews; one for the heterosexual interviews; and one for the communication interviews. See Appendix I for the three interview schedules and accompanying rationales. For the stereotype investigation (presented to lesbian and heterosexual group subjects only), there was a short questionnaire of open ended questions and sentence completion (see Appendix C); the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI: Bem, 1974) presented in the form of a sorting task using cards and envelopes; and the short form of the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ: Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1974).

Procedure

The lesbian study

Women at the London lesbian group were informed that the researcher was carrying out a study on women's experiences of 'coming out', both in the sense of 'coming out to self', and 'coming out to others'; and that she was just as interested in interviewing women who had not come out to family or friends, as in interviewing women who had come out. Confidentiality was emphasized, and an opportunity to ask questions provided. Potential interviewees were given the choice of the interview taking place at LSE; their own home; or the researcher's flat.

All interviews were individual. Subjects were informed that there was to be an interview first, and then this would be followed by a short questionnaire, and

some sorting and rating tasks. They were asked if it would be all right for the interviewer to use a tape recorder as this saved her from taking notes. Confidentiality was stressed. All interviewees agreed to the tape recording. Subjects were given the opportunity to ask questions before the interview began.

The lesbian interviews covered the following areas:

1. Terminology preference.
2. Personal definitions of 'gay', 'homosexual' and 'lesbian'.
Perceptions of differences between love and friendship.
3. Coming out to self (including first feelings; and first hearing and/or understanding of terms relating to homosexuality).
4. Perceptions of why some women are lesbian and some are heterosexual.
5. Relationship with men.
6. (a) Coming out to others (including first experience of coming out to another person; first meetings with other lesbians; coming out/not to family, heterosexual friends, work colleagues etc.; particular good/bad experiences.
(b) Perceptions of what woman had thought lesbians might be like before meeting others (this was directed towards investigating whether there had been awareness of a stereotype).
7. Perceptions of heterosexuals' feelings about lesbians.
8. Feelings about being lesbian.
9. Recall of any examples of the subject of homosexuality arising in general conversations.
10. Part played by women's movement in coming out.
11. Awareness of media/literature in early stages of coming out.
12. Any part played by religion.
13. Perceptions of comparable minority group/life experiences.

14. School experiences.
15. Changing feelings about coming out. AIDS.
16. Opportunity to raise issues related to coming out that had not been covered.
17. Perceptions of main benefits of coming out.

The interview schedule (see Appendix I) was generally followed unless a subject had already provided a detailed answer within a response to a previous question. In most such cases, it was acknowledged by the interviewer that the subject had already partly answered the question, and they were asked if they would like to add more on the relevant topic. In a small minority of interviews, the schedule was not followed closely: the subject having responded to an early question with their 'life story'! Interviews lasted on average, approximately an hour.

Subjects were then presented with the stereotype tasks: the questionnaire of open ended questions and sentence completion; the Bem Sex-Role Inventory for their personal view of lesbians; the Personal Attributes Questionnaire for perceptions of 'most people's' views of lesbians and heterosexual women (order of presentation being 'lesbians' first for half the sample, and 'heterosexual women' first for the other half of the sample); and lastly, the BSRI again, for the lesbian stereotype. For further details of presentation of stereotype tasks, see the Pilot Study, stereotype investigation, Chapter Four.

In an attempt to complete the session on a positive note, subjects were then presented with the question 'In an ideal world, how would lesbians be perceived?'. Finally, subjects were asked for demographic details, including information on age; occupation; level of education; and self-ratings on a seven point Kinsey scale ranging from 'entirely homosexual' to 'entirely heterosexual' for (i) sexual experiences, and (ii)

feelings/emotions. All subjects were then provided with time to ask the interviewer questions, and given opportunity for any further discussion.

The heterosexual group study

Potential subjects were informed that the researcher was carrying out a study on heterosexual people's views of gay men and lesbians.

Interviews were individual. The semi-structured interview schedule, designed to correspond where appropriate to the lesbian interview questions, covered the following areas:

1. Personal definitions of the terms 'gay', 'homosexual' and 'lesbian'.
Perceptions of differences between love and friendship.
2. Perceptions of how 'most people' would describe a typical gay man and a typical lesbian (thus, attempting to elicit any awareness of stereotypes).
3. Personal contact with gay men and lesbians.
4. Perceptions of 'most' heterosexual people's feelings/attitudes towards lesbians and gay men.
5. Section 28 (Local Government Bill, 1988).
6. School experiences.
7. Perceptions of why some people are homosexual and some are heterosexual.
8. Perceptions of feelings in the hypothetical situation of significant others 'coming out' to them.
9. Examples of the subject of homosexuality arising in general conversations.
10. Awareness of lesbians/gay men in media/literature.
11. Comparison of homosexuals with other minority groups.
12. Any further points.

Having obtained the subjects' permission, all interviews were recorded. The schedule was followed quite closely in the vast majority of the heterosexual interviews. Interviews lasted on average about three quarters of an hour. After the interview, presentation of stereotype investigation tasks followed a similar procedure to that described for the lesbian group subjects (and in greater detail in the Pilot Studies, Chapter Four). Subjects were presented with the final question on perceptions of lesbians in an ideal world; and corresponding demographic data to that of the lesbian group was also collected. Finally, all heterosexual subjects were given the opportunity to ask the interviewer questions, and to discuss the study.

The communication group study

Potential subjects were informed that the researcher was doing a study on communication with family and friends.

Before the interview, permission was obtained for tape recording. Confidentiality was stressed: the researcher informed the subject that no-one else would listen to the tape.

The individual interviews covered the following areas:

1. Topics subjects perceived teenage children might prefer not to talk about with parents.
2. Topics subject had found difficult to talk about with her parents/siblings/friends in her (early) teens.
3. Topics found difficult to talk about in childhood.
4. Topics found difficult, or avoided, in talking with family/friends, or at work, as an adult.
5. Coping, approach taken, feelings, perceptions of reactions related to whatever the subject had found most difficult to talk to others about (here, the subject was informed that it was unnecessary to tell the interviewer exactly what the topic was).

6. Other incidents/happenings found difficult to talk about to family/friends - feelings; coping methods; approach to telling; reactions.

7. Feelings having been able to talk to someone.

8. Anything more about communicating with family and friends not covered.

The interview schedule (see Appendix I) was followed more closely in some interviews than others, but often with this group of interviews, it was not appropriate to follow the schedule too closely. Interview lengths varied from under half an hour to over an hour. Subjects were given the opportunity to ask questions after the interview, and discuss anything further that they wished to.

Additional information

Interviews were carried out over the following periods:

Lesbian interviews: November 1987 to July 1988

Heterosexual interviews: August 1988 to March 1990

Communication interviews: April 1989 to June 1989

ANALYSIS

Analysis of lesbian and heterosexual interviews

All interviews were transcribed, some by the researcher herself, and others by two assistants. A proportion of the interviews transcribed by the assistants were checked by the researcher.

For the content analysis (Krippendorff, 1980; Weber, 1985) of the interview material, it was decided that the most appropriate recording unit would be the theme. Krippendorff defines thematic units as

"..identified by their correspondence to a particular structural definition of the content of narratives, explanations, or interpretations. They are distinguished from each other on conceptual grounds and are contrasted with the remaining portion of irrelevant material by their possessing the desired structural properties"

(Krippendorff, 1980, pp62-63)

A coding frame was developed for analysis of both the lesbian and heterosexual interview material. Initial development was based on three lesbian interview transcripts with each coding area framework reflecting both initial hypotheses and subjects' responses relating to the particular issue. The framework was then amended to accommodate three heterosexual interview transcripts, and additionally, a lesbian transcript from a woman with a political background. The framework was developed, adding more lesbian and heterosexual transcripts, and attempting to maintain the balance of reflecting both original hypotheses and range of subjects' responses. Interview transcripts coded on earlier versions of the framework were re-coded subsequently on to the basic working version of the coding frame that was developed.

All lesbian interview material was coded, but some parts of the heterosexual interviews were omitted. These omissions largely concerned heterosexuals' attitudes and feelings about gay men. Responses that did not fit into the framework were initially recorded on cards. The cards were dealt with later, all responses eventually being incorporated into the framework, modified where necessary. The final version of the coding frame covered 48 categories, each of which were divided further into subcategories (there was a total of 829 subcategories). Additionally, several of the categories covering 'coming out to others' were divided into coming out to parents/other family/friends or work colleagues, for the lesbian sample; and perceived reactions to the hypothetical situation of children/siblings/friends coming out for the heterosexual sample. Thus, in all, there was a total of 1043 variables. (See Appendix K for examples of sections of the coding framework).

Original recording of responses included indication of whether the response was directly stated or inferred from the text; and whether the response was given to the specific question asked for that item, or occurred in

reply to a different question.

A binary matrix was built up on the VAX system using the programme CODACT (devised by A. Wells), and the data transferred to use within the statistical analysis package SPSS-X.

Lesbian accounts were additionally analysed in the form of life span lines, and tables for each subject, describing coming out experiences to family and friends. (Examples are shown in Appendices L & M).

For some details of the lesbian and heterosexual group samples, see Appendix J.

Communication group interview analysis

All communication group interviews were transcribed by the researcher herself. Analysis was mainly on a descriptive level, focusing upon issues in communication with family and friends that might illuminate aspects of the coming out process for lesbians.

Stereotype investigation analysis

A coding frame was developed for analysis of the questionnaire responses as well as the interview material relating to a lesbian stereotype. This framework was based upon original hypotheses; the pilot work; and upon an initial examination of the responses. The coding frame covered 27 categories, each divided into subcategories. (See Appendix K for examples of sections from the coding frame). Subjects' responses were analysed in two ways: by number of subjects mentioning particular categories; and also by response frequencies (i.e. in the second case, where more than one response from a subject fell into the same category, this was recorded).

7.3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on analysis of the lesbian, heterosexual, and communication interview material, as well as the stereotype investigation data, 'coming out' is described and discussed. Firstly, the social context is examined. Following this are sections on 'coming out to self' and 'coming out to others'. Finally, the interplay of influences in coming out is discussed.

7.3.1 The social context of coming out

Both coming out to self and coming out to others take place within a social context that includes stereotyping, attributions and personal understandings based on underlying social representations of human nature/gender/sexuality, and reflected in, for example, the media. This social context was investigated by looking at subjects' understandings of the terms lesbian, gay etc.; perceptions of reasons why some people are homosexual and some heterosexual; stereotyping; heterosexual subjects' previous contact with lesbians; perceptions of how 'most people' feel about lesbians; and recall of media material on lesbians.

Personal definitions

Individuals' personal understandings of terms such as 'homosexual', 'heterosexual', 'gay', and 'lesbian' may be seen as arising from, and also contributing to, the social context in which a lesbian experiences coming out. Since society is predominantly heterosexual, heterosexuals' understandings, rather than those of lesbians, may reflect more closely the general understandings within our culture. Analysis of interview and questionnaire data indicated that heterosexual subjects were more likely than lesbian group subjects to define the word 'lesbian' in sexual terms only (interview: $\chi^2=15.63$, $df=1$, $p<0.0001$; questionnaire: $\chi^2=15.94$, $df=1$, $p<0.0001$). Over half the heterosexual

subjects responded with definitions in sexual terms only. Correspondingly, the interview data indicated that lesbians were more likely to include something more than sex in their definitions than heterosexual subjects ($\chi^2=4.17$, $df=1$, $p<0.05$). These further aspects included love/emotion; political/feminist; possibly celibate; general relationship; or lesbian community/predominant interest in women. Over 50% of the lesbian sample responded with such a definition. The questionnaire data also indicated that the lesbian subjects were more likely to include love or emotion in their definition of 'lesbian' ($\chi^2=7.95$, $df=1$, $p<0.01$). This difference between lesbian and heterosexual subjects' definitions did not emerge from the interview data. Significant differences between lesbian and heterosexual groups, however, were found from the interview data in the defining of the terms 'gay' and 'homosexual'. The heterosexual subjects were again more likely to respond with a definition in sexual terms only (gay: $\chi^2=6.96$, $df=1$, $p<0.01$; homosexual: $\chi^2=5.70$, $df=1$, $p<0.05$). There were no significant differences between male and female heterosexuals' responses.

Definitions relating to lesbianism thus constituted a fundamental difference in lesbian and heterosexual subjects' perceptions. Love or emotion was emphasised by lesbian subjects, and the sexual basis by heterosexual subjects.

Perceptions of reasons why people are homosexual/heterosexual

Explanations relating to why people may be homosexual form another aspect of the social context, and may underlie attitudes towards homosexuality, thus affecting the coming out process. Mutually exclusive categories of perceptions of the reasons in terms solely of nature; solely of nurture; or of a mixture of nature and nurture, were computed as three new variables from

the coded data. It was found that overall, just over a third of the total sample suggested a mixture of nature and nurture as the reasons why some people are heterosexual and some homosexual. Only six subjects (9% of the total sample) perceived the reasons solely in terms of nature. Half of the subjects perceived the reasons in environmental terms only. Heterosexual subjects perceived the reasons more in terms of a mixture of nature and nurture than lesbian subjects ($\chi^2=4.60$, $df=1$, $p<0.05$); and less in terms solely of nurture than the lesbian subjects ($\chi^2=4.73$, $df=1$, $p<0.05$). There were no age category differences among those perceiving the reason as either a mixture or only in terms of nurture. (Since so few subjects perceived the reasons in terms of nature only, no test for age differences was carried out on this).

A third of the heterosexual sample perceived homosexuality as generally not a choice that people made, while twenty percent of the heterosexual sample perceived it as a choice. Just under a quarter of the heterosexual subjects perceived it as a choice for some people and not for others. Five of the heterosexual subjects suggested that there was no choice as to feelings, but a choice of behaviour. Uncertainty regarding the question of choice was expressed by a quarter of the heterosexual subjects.

Distinctions between internal/external locus or dispositional/situational attributions were not always clear. For example, while 'upbringing' was coded as nurture (external/situational), it often referred to very early experiences of infancy and seemed to reflect an essentialist rather than a constructionist viewpoint. Thus, although attributions were made, and must be recognized as having a role in the coming out process, interpretation would seem problematic, reflecting some of the basic problems with the internal-external distinction (problems described by Hewstone, 1989a).

"I'd love to know if it was genetic or it was caused by experience, and my attitude to it would be very different if I thought it was caused in different ways" (S28, H.Grp.)

Stereotyping

Responses to the questionnaire indicated that the stereotype of a lesbian was perceived as predominantly masculine, abnormal and aggressive (e.g. see Tables 7.3.1 and 7.3.3). The stereotypical lesbian was also seen as unattractive or masculine looking, and as negative in relationship towards men. Chi-squared tests indicated no significant differences between lesbian and heterosexual group subjects in frequency of mentioning these categories (see Table N.1, Appendix N).

The heterosexual woman stereotype based on the questionnaire data for item III.1 (A heterosexual woman) was perceived by the greatest number of subjects as normal, attractive and feminine (see Table 7.3.8). There was no difference in frequency of mentioning these characteristics between lesbian and heterosexual subjects (Appendix N). The categories of 'maternal/family' and 'neutral in relationship to men', among the next most frequently mentioned categories, were mentioned more frequently by lesbian subjects than by heterosexual subjects (maternal/family: $\chi^2=4.45$, $df=1$, $p<0.05$; neutral in relationship to men: $\chi^2=4.25$, $df=1$, $p<0.05$). (The category 'maternal/family' indicates positive or neutral references to a woman's family role).

For both the 'typical lesbian' and the 'typical heterosexual woman' (items II.6 and II.5; see tables 7.3.7 & 7.3.10) the most frequently mentioned category was 'non-existent'. Apart from this, the typical heterosexual woman was described mainly in terms of her relationship towards men and family. Responses generated by both the 'typical lesbian' item and item II.4 'Compared with heterosexual women, lesbians are...' gave a more positive image of the lesbian than the other items

relating to lesbians which focused more on subjects' perceptions of 'most people's' views. Thus, although the category aggressive/assertive was most frequently mentioned in response to item II.4, eighty percent of the responses constituting the category in this case referred to assertiveness rather than aggression. This compares with all the responses given within this category for items II.2 and II.3 being in terms of aggression rather than assertion; and only approximately 10% of the qualities referred to within this category for item III.2 relating to assertion rather than aggression. Additionally, among the most frequently occurring categories for the comparison with heterosexual women item (II.4) lesbians were described as independent - although only by lesbian group subjects. The typical lesbian (item II.6) was described as positive in relation to women and political/feminist.

The perception of a lesbian stereotype based on the interview material was derived mainly from responses to the question 'Do you remember what you thought lesbians might be like before you met others?' for the lesbian subjects; and the question 'How do you think most people might describe a typical lesbian?' for the heterosexual subjects. It can be seen in Table 7.3.11 that the stereotype was described in terms of masculinity, unattractiveness and aggressiveness. Chi-squared tests indicated no significant differences between frequencies of lesbian and heterosexual group subjects mentioning these categories (see Appendix N).

"...butch - I hate that expression - that's the way that I've always thought of them as"
(S14, L.Grp.)

"A typical lesbian, she's a guy - she's more of a guy than most guys ... personally, I would think of [a lesbian] as someone who is very masculine"
(S3, H.Grp.)

"...the butch, the striding around in tweed skirts..."
(S24, H.Grp.)

"Physically strong and hard. Hard in physique, hard in personality" (S23, H.Grp.)

"..I just had this picture of all middle-aged women, all the butch types, and this terrified the life out of me!" (S26, L.Grp.)

The interview material on stereotypes, unlike that from the questionnaire, included a substantial proportion of comments, general observations, and personal thoughts and feelings. These accounted for 48% of the lesbian subjects' interview responses, and 28% of the heterosexual subjects' responses. The lesbian subjects most frequent comment was in the category 'quite true'/'a lot of women are like that' (mentioned by 35% of the lesbian subjects). Their most frequently mentioned general observation was that their impressions arose from the media/popular culture/books (mentioned by a quarter of the lesbian sample). Personal thoughts and feelings mentioned by lesbian subjects included that they had held a stereotype, been afraid of lesbians, or thought they might be attacked by them (43% of lesbian responses in this category); that the image had put them off coming out (15% of lesbian responses); and, in contrast, that they had had no idea what lesbians were like (32% of the lesbian responses regarding personal thoughts/feelings).

"The stereotype I suppose, of the..rather masculine...with very short hair, a bit loud, maybe. But that's just the way that the media and popular misconceptions puts it across, really. I mean there are a few [lesbians like that] - rather a lot as far as I can see..." (S21, L.Grp.)

"...I was terrified of them. I thought they were going to jump on me!" (S5, L.Grp.)

"..I thought they'd be dreadful. I mean I really was afraid of them" (S3, L.Grp.)

"I didn't think they were too different from anybody else" (S20, L.Grp.)

"I had no idea what they were like at all..." (S31, L.Grp.)

Heterosexual subjects' most frequently occurring personal thought or feelings were that lesbians were not spoken about, and that they were harder to describe than gay men. Each of these areas accounted for just over a third of their responses within this category.

"...I've never heard people describing a typical lesbian" (S21, H.Grp.)

"...they're somebody that you wouldn't perhaps come across" (S18, H.Grp.)

The idea that there may be two types of lesbian, one masculine and one feminine, was evident from the interview material, but not from the sex role inventory data, and less obviously from the questionnaire data.

"Well, frequently lesbians fall in my mind into two parts - one the female part and the other the male part. The male part is obvious by frequently the adoption of part of male dress: ties, severe haircuts and flat-heeled shoes, and striding steps, and plaid skirts" (S25, H.Grp.)

"...these very big, butch women who totally hate men. Short hair, deep voices and all that sort of thing. But - sometimes you get the odd one who's very feminine..." (S13, L.Grp.)

"...I knew there were two types. And then I heard about the butch and femme stuff..." (S19, L.Grp.)

Both the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ) and the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) data indicated that the lesbian stereotype was perceived as masculine. Cluster analysis of the BSRI lesbian stereotype variables indicated a two cluster solution that differentiated between masculine and feminine variables. Principal components analysis of the PAQ lesbian stereotype data with a criterion of three factors, and varimax rotation, produced a factor based on the eight female valued items, together with six of the sex specific items, while the male valued items were divided between the other two factors. Cluster analysis of the BSRI personal view of lesbians data suggested a more complex structure, with

the male heterosexual subjects' data indicating the strongest distinctions between masculine and feminine variables. In contrast to the lesbian stereotype, the heterosexual woman stereotype derived from the PAQ data was seen as feminine. Overall, some differences between lesbian and heterosexual groups; between heterosexual male and female subjects; and between younger and older subjects, were indicated. (See Appendix O for full details of BSRI and PAQ analysis.)

Previous studies have indicated some of the limitations in conceptualization and structure of the BSRI and PAQ. Masculinity and femininity may be multidimensional. Fundamentally, gender requires a far more complex conceptual basis. However, within these limitations, findings in this study indicated a particularly clear distinction between 'masculine' and 'feminine' variables for the lesbian stereotype on the BSRI; and significant correlations between the BSRI and PAQ masculinity scales, as well as between the two femininity scales, for the lesbian stereotype. Thus the lesbian stereotype was very clearly perceived as 'masculine' in terms of the characteristics the BSRI and PAQ define as masculine or male valued.

For items III.1 and III.2 it was decided to consider the ten most frequently mentioned categories, but as there was a tie, for item III.1 the first twelve most frequently mentioned categories have been shown.

For items II.1 to II.6 it was decided to examine the first six most frequently mentioned categories. Where ties occurred, the further categories forming the tie have been shown.

Table 7.3.1: Frequency of responses for the most frequently mentioned categories for the lesbian stereotype

Most frequently occurring categories	Total no. of responses	Lesbian Group n %R	Heterosexual Group n %R
4.2 masculine	132	82 17	50 17
8.1 aggressive/ assertive	82	42 9	40 13
1.2 abnormal	74	49 10	25 8
6.3 negative in relation to men	51	39 8	12 4
9.b unattractive/ masc. looking	47	30 6	17 6
15.a label - dyke/ gay/les(bian)	40	23 5	17 6
Total responses (over all categories)		469	298

Table 7.3.2: Frequency of responses for the most frequently mentioned categories for the heterosexual woman stereotype

Most frequently occurring categories	Total no. of responses	Lesbian Group n %R	Heterosexual Group n %R
9.1 attractive	64	22 7	42 18
8.2 gentle/ unassertive	43	26 8	17 7
1.1 normal	41	24 8	17 7
4.1 feminine	40	23 7	17 7
6.2 neutral in relation to men	39	28 9	11 5
10.1 maternal/ family (positive/ neutral)	34	27 9	7 3
Total responses		316	237

Table 7.3.3: Number of subjects, percentage of sample and percentage of responses for the most frequently mentioned categories on Item III.2, the lesbian stereotype

Category	No. of subjects	% Sample	% Responses
4.2 masculine	37	52	16
1.2 abnormal	26	37	10
8.1 aggressive/ assertive	18	25	12
15.4 dyke	18	25	6
9.b unattractive/ masculine looking	17	24	6
6.3 negative in relation to men	16	23	6
5* political/ feminist	11	15	4
3a self - negative	10	14	4
6.4 sexually in relation to men	8	11	3
13.2 cold/inadequate	8	11	3

* Category 5 excludes 5.4

Table 7.3.4: Number of subjects, percentage of sample and percentage of responses for the most frequently mentioned categories on incomplete sentence 'Many people think lesbians are...' (Item II.2)

Category	No. of subjects	% Sample	% Responses
4.2 masculine	29	41	25
1.2 abnormal	20	28	17
8.1 aggressive	12	17	10
6.3 negative in relation to men	11	15	9
5* political/ feminist	5	7	4
9.b unattractive/ masculine looking	5	7	4

* Category 5 excludes 5.4

Table 7.3.5: Number of subjects, percentage of sample and percentage of responses for the most frequently mentioned categories on incomplete sentence 'Lesbians are often described as...' (Item II.3)

Category	No. of subjects	% Sample	% Responses
4.2 masculine	26	37	29
1.2 abnormal	12	17	11
8.1 aggressive	11	15	13
6.3 negative in relation to men	10	14	10
15.4 dyke	8	11	7
9.b unattractive/ masculine looking	6	8	5

Table 7.3.6: Number of subjects, percentage of sample and percentage of responses for the most frequently mentioned categories on incomplete sentence 'Compared with heterosexual women, lesbians are...' (Item II.4)

Category	No. of subjects	% Sample	% Responses
8.1 aggressive/ assertive	10	14	11
9.b unattractive	8	11	9
7.a independent	7	10	7
4.2 masculine	6	8	7
1.2 abnormal	4	6	4
3.b self - positive	4	6	4
6.1.2 independent of men	4	6	4
17.1 basically no different	4	6	4
17.4 different (neutral)	4	6	4
24.2 not conforming	4	6	4

Table 7.3.7: Number of subjects, percentage of sample and percentage of responses for the most frequently mentioned categories on incomplete sentence 'The typical lesbian...' (Item II.6)

Category	No. of subjects	% Sample	% Responses
16.3 non-existent	18	25	17
4.2 masculine	9	13	10
21.1 positive in relation to women	8	11	9
5* political/ feminist	6	8	7
3.b self - positive	5	7	5
6.3 negative in relation to men	5	7	6
8.1 aggressive/ assertive	5	7	5
9.b unattractive/ masculine looking	5	7	6

* Category 5 excludes 5.4

Table 7.3.8: Number of subjects, percentage of sample and percentage of responses for the most frequently mentioned categories on Item III.1, the heterosexual woman stereotype

Category	No. of subjects	% Sample	% Responses
1.1 normal	30	42	13
9.1 attractive	25	35	14
4.1 feminine	23	32	8
10.1 maternal/ family (pos./neut.)	20	28	8
6.2 neutral in relation to men	14	20	6
8.2 gentle/ unassertive	14	20	6
6.4 sexually in relation to men	12	17	5
20 loving/caring	6	8	2
24.1 conforming	6	8	3
12.1 emotional	5	7	2
13.1 warm/vivacious	5	7	2
15.2 neutral label	5	7	4

Table 7.3.9: Number of subjects, percentage of sample and percentage of responses for the most frequently mentioned categories on incomplete sentence 'Women are often described as...' (Item II.1)

Category	No. of subjects	% Sample	% Responses
8.2 gentle/ unassertive	18	25	16
9.1 attractive	11	15	12
6.3 negative in relation to men	9	13	9
4.1 feminine	8	11	6
22.b of inferior intellect	7	10	5
6.4 sexually in relation to men	6	8	5
8.1 aggressive/ assertive	6	8	5

Table 7.3.10: Number of subjects, percentage of sample and percentage of responses for the most frequently mentioned categories on incomplete sentence 'The typical heterosexual woman...' (Item II.5)

Category	No. of subjects	% Sample	% Responses
16.3 non-existent	16	23	14
6.2 neutral in relation to men	12	17	10
6.1.1 positive in relation to men	10	14	10
10.1 maternal/ family (pos./neut.)	7	10	6
4.1 feminine	6	8	5
6.3 negative in relation to men	5	7	4
8.2 gentle/ unassertive	5	7	4
9.1 attractive	5	7	4
24.1 conforming	5	7	6

Table 7.3.11: Number of subjects, percentage of sample and percentage of responses for the most frequently mentioned categories¹ in the interview material describing a lesbian stereotype

Category	No. of subjects	% Sample	% Responses
4.2 masculine	36	51	14
9.b unattractive	27	39	14
8.1 aggressive/ assertive	17	24	8

¹. This excludes personal thoughts and feelings, comments, and general observations which are described in the text.

In summary, the stereotype of a lesbian - masculine, abnormal, aggressive and unattractive - emerged using the three convergent methods of interview questions, questionnaire tasks and sex-role inventories. This contrasted with the stereotype of a heterosexual woman who was seen as normal, attractive and feminine. Sex role generally seemed to be the most important aspect of the lesbian stereotype, but notions of abnormality and unattractiveness were also basic components. Thus, social representations of human nature as well as gender or sexuality are involved in people's perceptions of lesbians.

Notions of gender appear central to perceptions of a lesbian stereotype. The data suggests clear distinctions between perceptions of masculinity and femininity. It is perhaps this rigid categorization that forms the basis for 'compulsory heterosexuality' and underlies heterosexism. Coming out as lesbian may be seen as challenging heterosexual assumptions and as threatening the power structure of male dominance.

If gender boundaries were flexible and open to negotiation (Condor, 1987), and if the power imbalance between women and men ceased to exist, emphasis on heterosexuality might diminish, permitting lesbianism to be perceived simply as part of the diversity of human relations. A gender aschematic society (Bem, 1981a) is

probably unlikely to emerge, but greater flexibility in gender notions is a possibility, and may be seen, together with power equality between women and men, as essential for any decrease in emphasis on heterosexuality, and hence any reduction of heterosexism. As Condor (1987) pointed out, the gender boundaries approach allows for changes in social representations of 'male' and 'female'. It is change within these dominant social representations that is necessary.

Media

Responses regarding media were elicited by questions for the lesbian subjects focusing on recall of books/programmes etc. during their early stages of coming out. For the heterosexual subjects, the questions focused on whether they could recall reading any books or seeing any television programmes etc. about lesbians or gay men. Thus, the lesbian responses were focused on a particular period of time, generally in the past, and in some cases many years ago; and the heterosexuals' responses may have included any awareness of media coverage of homosexuals at any time.

A neglected/invisible group?

"...you don't actually see so much media interest in lesbianism. There aren't the same situation comedy and role playing on the television - and you don't really read very much about it either - it's not something as prominent as gay men"

(S22, H.Grp.)

Twenty percent of the total sample did not recall or mention any books (13% of the lesbian sample and 30% of the heterosexual sample). Over a quarter of the total sample did not recall or mention any newspaper or magazine articles (35% of the lesbian sample and 17% of the heterosexual sample). A similar proportion of the total sample did not recall or mention any television programmes (28% of the lesbian sample; 23% of the heterosexual sample).

"I haven't really had the nerve to go into a shop and buy a book because I'd be too embarrassed ... it's just as bad at the library because you have to take the books back! So, I've really avoided it"
(S13, L.Grp.)

Although, over three quarters of the total sample mentioned books, nearly a quarter of these subjects did not recall or mention anything about lesbians. Among the lesbian sample, just over half the subjects mentioned fiction, approximately a third mentioned general books, and 18% mentioned psychology/ psychiatry/sociology books.

"The first book I read which touched on homosexuality was 'Maurice'. I think I read that when I was 15 or 16. I was amazed - totally amazed by it"
(S8, L.Grp.)

Just under two thirds of the total sample reported having seen newspaper or magazine articles; and a similar percentage reported having seen some television programme(s) about lesbians or gay men. Over a quarter of the subjects who mentioned articles or television programmes, however, described those mainly or only about gay men.

"One's aware of the usual shock-horror things in the press"
(S23 H.Grp.)

There were no differences between the numbers of lesbian and heterosexual group subjects mentioning books or television programmes. However, 40% of the heterosexual sample did not recall or mention any books specifically about lesbians; and over 40% of the heterosexual subjects described television programmes mainly or only about gay men rather than lesbians. Significantly more heterosexual subjects than lesbian subjects mentioned newspaper or magazine articles they had seen ($\chi^2=7.956$, $df=1$, $p<0.01$), but half these heterosexual subjects had described articles mainly about gay men and/or had not mentioned lesbians specifically.

Altogether, 95% of the total sample mentioned some recall relating to homosexuals in books, articles, television or radio programmes, films, or plays.

However, 40% of the total sample described items mainly or only about gay men. Further, in a large proportion of the cases where a subject was recorded as having mentioned book(s), article(s), television programme(s) or film(s), it was either for a single instance, or a very small number of occurrences.

Just over fifty percent of the total sample mentioned some positive reaction to books, articles, television programmes, films or plays they had seen that included a lesbian or gay man as a main character. Approximately a quarter of the lesbian sample mentioned a strong positive impact on them by a specific programme/book/film.

"...I can remember, sitting there by myself, feeling absolutely dumb-struck seeing this [television play], and knowing at that point that there were women out there somewhere who were lesbians like me, and I had to do something about reaching out, about contacting them"

(S7, L.Grp.)

Forty percent of the total sample mentioned some kind of negative reaction towards a programme/book etc. These reactions ranged from reporting they had felt shocked/offended/repulsed/appalled; or disturbed/upset/uncomfortable; to not being interested or avoiding. There was no difference in the frequencies of lesbian and heterosexual group subjects mentioning a negative reaction.

"[lesbian films] always left me with a sense of sadness that I felt so alone..."

(S24, L.Grp.)

"I must say that if I realised a play was about homosexuality, I probably wouldn't want to go to it"

(S25 H.Grp.)

A quarter of the lesbian sample, and over a half of the heterosexual sample did not specify their reactions to all or most of the books/articles/ programmes that they described. A recorded reaction was often towards one particular book, film or programme, rather than towards books/films etc. about gay people generally.

No significant differences were found between older and younger subjects in mentioning either positive or negative reactions (positive reactions: $\chi^2=0.288$, $df=1$, $p>0.05$; negative reactions: $\chi^2=3.395$, $df=1$, $p>0.05$).

The media may be seen as both reflecting and contributing towards the relevant social representations. Perhaps, the main theme emerging from responses in this area is that of 'lesbian invisibility': little awareness of media material relating lesbianism, and/or little coverage of lesbian issues by the media. At the same time, however, responses indicated that particular books/television programmes etc. may have strong positive or negative impact upon individuals.

Contact of heterosexual sample with lesbians

"I know gay men, I don't think I know any lesbians" (S10, H.Grp.)

There had been little or no contact with lesbians for many of the heterosexual sample. Approximately half of them had no friends who were gay or lesbian. Almost three quarters of the heterosexual subjects knew or had known a gay man, while forty percent knew or had known a lesbian. Only three heterosexual subjects described having close gay male friends, and two subjects, close friends who were lesbian. While less than half the heterosexual subjects had either known a lesbian or had a lesbian friend, eighty percent of subjects had either known a gay man or had a gay male friend. Thus, again, responses may be seen as reflecting 'lesbian invisibility'.

"I've like encountered them, but I've never known them - you know what I mean - like in pubs and stuff" (S11, H.Grp.)

"I have acquaintances. They're not likely to be the sort of people I would make friends with" (S25, H.Grp.)

"I know several gay men. I'm not sure if I know any lesbians. I think I might, but it's not the kind of question you'd go to put to someone" (S29, H.Grp.)

"..I think I know some but I haven't asked them are they straight or not" (S19, H.Grp.)

Considering how heterosexual subjects had come to know that a person was gay/lesbian, just over a quarter of the subjects mentioned that the gay person had spoken about it in conversation or told them. However, a greater number of heterosexual subjects mentioned that someone else had (probably) told them (43%). Over a third of subjects suggested that it had been obvious, for example, from the way the person behaved; or that they had made the assumption that the person was gay.

Thus, direct self-disclosure by the gay person was not the most frequently mentioned way of coming out described by the heterosexual sample; and there was sometimes ambiguity or uncertainty relating to knowledge of a person's sexual orientation.

Perceptions of how 'most people' feel about lesbians or gay men

Perceptions of how 'most people' feel about gay people are a fundamental aspect of the social context within which lesbians experience the coming out process and heterosexuals form their attitudes.

In describing how they thought 'most people' perceived lesbians (or gay people generally), negative feelings were mentioned by over 60% of the total sample. These feelings included general fear/feeling threatened; suspiciousness; lack of understanding or acceptance; fear that homosexuality is catching; prejudice; and aggressive hostility. Feeling threatened was linked with the notion of normality, and perceived as occurring at both a societal level and a personal level:

"...society feels threatened because it's not normal ... it's a threat to the structure of society, and anything different has to be eliminated..."

(S13, L.Grp.)

"...anything that's different to the norm, the social norm, is regarded as an oddity, and therefore either ought to be shunned or watched very warily..."

(S14, L.Grp.)

"I think the general view might be it's an abnormality. It's not the norm, it's abnormal, it's strange, it's threatening"

(S23, H.Grp.)

"Angry. I don't know why. Possibly because like racial differences, physical differences, there's a disgust to deformity, there's an anger to non-conformity ... it's probably a fear of the unknown that produces the anger..."

(S24, H.Grp.)

"I think they're afraid... partly I think because of their own sexuality, and I think they, they haven't explored their own sexuality enough. Probably to do with ignorance, but I think they're afraid"

(S15, L.Grp.)

"not many people are very secure about their sexuality and..you can bring out their fears"

(S25, L.Grp.)

Some subjects suggested women's and men's feelings were different; class differences; generation differences; or just general differences between people's feelings.

"...women are more threatened by it [lesbianism] than men"

(S18, L.Grp.)

"I think it varies. I suppose - there are some people completely without prejudice here - there are some people who are just simply sympathetic - some..who just pity you - who say 'oh, they're just sick'; and there are other people who are completely hostile and think that it's an invasion of the devil ... an abomination in the sight of the Lord"

(S38, L.Grp.)

Taking into account perceptions suggesting negative men's feelings; negative women's feelings; negative perceptions of lesbians in comparison to gay men; as well as general negative feelings mentioned; just under three quarters of the total sample mentioned negative feelings. There was no significant difference in mentioning

perceptions of negative feelings between the lesbian and heterosexual group subjects ($\chi^2=0.796$, $df=1$, $p>0.05$). Just under 30% of the total sample mentioned positive feelings of some heterosexual people and there were no differences between the two groups for this either ($\chi^2=0.000$, $df=1$, $p>0.05$). A similar proportion of the total sample mentioned that some heterosexual people had neutral views. There was also mention of the invisibility of lesbians.

"I don't think people know much about lesbians, I think they're kind of invisible. Or if they are, they're kind of confused in the public eye with the images sort of strident feminist, sort of wearing Doc Martens, this idea of butch"

(S4, L.Grp.)

"...I think it would be quite safe to bring in that great British adage of apathy..."

(S20, H.Grp.)

"...most people couldn't care less"

(S7, H.Grp.)

"You are always going to get extremes - but I do think a lot of heterosexual people may ... have a more favourable attitude than meets the eye"

(S24, L.Grp.)

Considering whether attitudes towards gay people had changed, 37% of the total sample perceived attitudes had hardened or were becoming more negative, and 19% perceived little or no change. There were no significant differences between lesbian and heterosexual subjects in these perceptions. However, while a third of the heterosexual sample perceived attitudes as improving and more tolerance now, significantly fewer lesbian subjects perceived the situation in this way ($\chi^2=5.95$, $df=1$, $p<0.05$). There was no difference between heterosexual males and females in their perceptions of improving attitudes ($\chi^2=0.150$, $df=1$, $p>0.05$).

In considering changing attitudes, just under half the total sample mentioned AIDS, while less than 20% mentioned Clause 28.

"...I'm sure AIDS must have turned a lot of people
against homosexuality" (S35, L.Grp.)

Some saw perceptions of lesbians as affected by the issue
of AIDS, while others did not.

"in that lesbians are tarred with the same brush as
homosexual men..." (S8, L.Grp.)

"I see AIDS as being very much divorced from
lesbians..." (S7, L.Grp.)

It was also questioned whether AIDS had actually affected
attitudes:

"...I think it's an excuse to justify an extreme view
that probably already exists" (S23, H.Grp.)

Possibly reflecting the level of general awareness
of lesbian/gay issues, 43% of the heterosexual sample
either knew nothing about Clause 28/Section 28, or had
heard of it, but knew nothing about it. The other 57% of
the heterosexual sample mentioned that it was against the
promotion of homosexuality (43% of heterosexual sample)
and/or that it was to do with teaching/children/
education/libraries (40% of heterosexual sample); and/or
that it was to do with funding of homosexual groups/gay
rights/gay publications (mentioned by 20%). Asked what
they thought most people's views on Clause (/Section) 28
was, nearly a quarter of the heterosexual sample
suggested most people did not feel anything much, had not
thought about it, or did not understand it. Thirty
percent of the heterosexual subjects suggested some
people were against it, maybe viewing it as an attack on
civil liberties. A similar percentage suggested some
people would be in agreement with the Clause.

Further aspects of the social context

Additional points raised by heterosexual subjects
reflect further aspects of the social context, and
emphasize some issues that have already emerged. The
following points arose from responses to the question at
the end of the interview designed to elicit any aspects

about people's perceptions of homosexuals not already covered.

Lack of interest in the subject of homosexuality or the absence of any strong feelings about it were mentioned by 17% of the heterosexual sample. Twenty percent mentioned ambivalent personal attitudes. Over a third of the sample thus mentioned lack of interest or strong feelings, or ambivalent personal attitudes.

"Many people just don't want to think about it. Maybe some people would have to face ambivalence in themselves..."

(S16, H.Grp.)

"..I don't think people will ever really stop [discriminating] because I think people find it too threatening, that they might be that themselves.."

(S12, H.Grp.)

The notion of homosexuality as a threat was re-emphasised, either as a general threat, or a threat specifically towards children. This was mentioned again by approximately a quarter of the heterosexual subjects. A similar proportion further emphasized the negative nature of attitudes towards gay people.

Different explanations of homosexuality underlying attitudes towards homosexuals were mentioned by twenty percent of the heterosexual sample. These included notions of homosexuality as genetic or environmental; normal or abnormal; an illness; homosexuality as fashionable or trendy; homosexuality as fashionable versus something that cannot be helped; and homosexuality as existing through the ages.

Education may be seen as both contributing to and reflecting the social context. Only ten percent of the heterosexual sample recalled the subject of homosexuality being mentioned in lessons while they were at school, but thirty percent of the heterosexual sample reported the subject had arisen informally or indirectly in lessons. Sixty percent of the heterosexual sample reported having been unaware of gay/lesbian teachers or pupils while at school. There was no significant difference between

heterosexual and lesbian group subjects for this ($\chi^2=0.030$, $df=1$, $p>0.05$). While forty percent of the heterosexual sample reported having been aware of a possibly gay/lesbian teacher, only twenty percent reported awareness of a possibly gay/lesbian pupil. A fifth of the heterosexual sample suggested they would not have associated the words then or would have been unaware of homosexuality generally. Two thirds of the heterosexual sample suggested that homosexuality should be taught about in school, but over a quarter of the heterosexual sample reported some mixed feelings about it, and a similar proportion suggested schools must not promote or encourage children to become homosexual, or it should not be taught as a norm like heterosexuality. Thus overall, heterosexual subjects' responses reflected limited awareness of homosexuality both regarding the curriculum, and the possible orientation of other pupils and teachers. Although the majority of heterosexual subjects suggested homosexuality should be taught about in school, some ambivalent feelings about this were evident.

The women's movement may be viewed as an aspect of the social context relevant to some of the women's coming out experiences. Seventy percent of the lesbian sample perceived the women's movement in positive terms. This included perceiving it as supportive/ helpful to lesbians (mentioned by just under thirty percent of the lesbian sample). Four women suggested it had made their coming out easier or faster. Thirty five percent of the lesbian sample perceived the women's movement in negative terms. However, there was some ambivalence as eight of these women (20% of the lesbian sample) had mentioned both positive and negative perceptions.

A further aspect of the social or cultural background is religion. For approximately half the lesbian sample religion had been of some importance in connection with perception of self as lesbian, although

for half of these women it had only been of limited importance. Approximately a quarter of the lesbian sample mentioned negative issues such as conflict or guilt, and the incompatibility of lesbianism and religion.

"I consciously left Church because I couldn't handle feeling like this and going to church"
(S6, L.Grp.)

"..I think for a lot of people it's made things more difficult and it certainly did for me"
(S31, L.Grp.)

Positive experiences such as contact with the Catholic Lesbian Sisterhood, or the attitudes of other Quakers, were mentioned by four women (10% of the lesbian sample).

Summary

The social context in which coming out to self and others takes place may include a stereotype of lesbians as masculine, abnormal and aggressive; perceptions of most people's attitudes towards homosexuality as predominantly negative; and little or no actual contact with lesbians for many heterosexual people, compounded with minimal media coverage. The relevant social representations may be seen as reflecting notions of abnormality and threat, as well as lesbian invisibility. A difference was found between lesbian and heterosexual groups in personal understandings of the terms 'lesbian'/'gay', with more heterosexual subjects suggesting definitions in sexual terms only. Reasons for some people being homosexual were perceived mainly in terms of either a mixture of nature and nurture, or solely in environmental terms. Further aspects of the social or cultural background that were looked at, and may be pertinent to coming out, were education, the women's movement, and religion.

7.3.2 Coming out to self

Coming out to self needs to be viewed as taking place within the social context of predominantly negative attitudes towards homosexuality, stereotypical perceptions, and lesbian invisibility. The hypothesis that coming out to self may be considered in terms of an emotional basis of feelings directed towards women, together with awareness of lesbianism as an option, and a level of emotional acceptance of homosexuality was generally confirmed.

(In this section on 'coming out to self', use of the term 'women', in reference to sample or subjects, applies to lesbian subjects rather than female subjects from either of the other groups. Also, subject numbers indicate lesbian group subjects).

The emotional basis

Awareness of self as possibly lesbian was based firmly on strong emotional feelings towards girls or women. Falling in love/crushes etc. were mentioned by 88% of the sample. Recalling how they had felt prior to perceiving themselves as lesbian, 65% of the subjects mentioned having felt strongly about women/girls. Fifteen percent mentioned kissing or physical contact with other girls. Seven women (18% of the sample) mentioned having felt 'different'.

"...I'd already had crushes on school teachers and .. I'd read that this was perfectly normal for teenage girls ... But this one, having a crush on someone I knew who was young - that one hadn't been mentioned. A crush on older women, okay, yeah; a crush on a woman your own age, that one isn't talked about. And when this continued, and it carried on continuing right through my teenage years and into my twenties, then I began to think there is something considerably different about me" (S10)

Wolff's (1973) conceptualization of lesbians as 'homoemotional' rather than 'homosexual' is supported by these findings.

A gradual process

Some women perceived the origins of their lesbian feelings reaching back to early childhood.

"I just know I had these feelings always ..."
(S23)

"Yeah, it's a cliché, you know, 'I always knew I was different' sort of thing, but I didn't know why - you don't really know when you are five ... The way you look at things and the way you respond to things even then. I always knew I wasn't going to get married. I couldn't have said why ... I just knew that wasn't going to be me"
(S20)

This was in complete contrast to the perceptions of a small number of the sample who regarded being lesbian as a conscious choice they had taken during adulthood, and perceived themselves as previously heterosexual.

"...it was never really a question of feeling I might be a lesbian, but kind of seeing lesbianism as an option..."
(S18)

These findings provide some support for earlier studies that have suggested a distinction between two types of lesbian (e.g. Bell, Weinberg & Hammersmith, 1981; Golden, 1987).

Reported or estimated age at time of first lesbian feelings ranged from three years old to one case of possibly over fifty years old. Approximately one third of subjects' first feelings however were estimated as occurring between the ages of ten and fourteen years old, inclusive; and a further third of subjects' first feelings as occurring between the ages of fifteen and nineteen years old inclusive. For just over a quarter of the subjects, first feelings were estimated as occurring at the age of twenty years or over.

Personal definitions

Pertinent to identification of self as lesbian/gay are the women's personal understandings of the terms. Forty percent of the sample suggested that they preferred the term 'gay'; just over a quarter of the women

preferred the word 'lesbian'; and thirty percent of the women suggested they had no preference between the terms 'gay' and 'lesbian'. Seven women suggested they would prefer some other term. There were no significant differences between women aged thirty years or more, and younger women, in preference for either the word 'lesbian' or the word 'gay' ($p>0.05$).

"When I first came out, I didn't like the word 'lesbian' .. in fact I couldn't even write it down .. I couldn't watch myself writing [it]"

(S20)

Reasons given for terminology preference were that 'lesbian' has negative associations or was disliked (28% of sample); that 'gay' was associated with male homosexuality and 'lesbian' associated specifically with women (25% of sample); and that 'lesbian' has political or feminist associations (10% of sample). These latter reasons were given in support of both preferences for 'lesbian' and 'gay'. Generally, negative associations of lesbianism may be seen as part of the dominant social representations of human nature, gender or sexuality. From the perspective of social identity theory, the negative associations may be viewed as possibly affecting salience of social categorization through accessibility and perceived fit of category (Oakes, 1987).

Love or emotion were included within lesbian subjects' definitions of the term 'lesbian' by just under forty percent of the sample in their written questionnaire responses. Only six lesbian subjects gave a sexual definition only on the questionnaire. In the interviews, over fifty percent of the lesbian sample responded with definitions of the term 'lesbian' that included something more than sex i.e. love/ emotion; political/feminist; possibly celibate; general relationship; lesbian community/predominant interest in women. Some examples of definitions from the questionnaire responses are shown in Table 7.3.12.

Table 7.3.12: Some personal understandings of the term 'lesbian' from lesbian subjects' questionnaire responses (Item I.3)

"- women whose emotions/time/energies on personal and/or political level, centre round other ♀ - and who choose in various ways to act on this in their daily lives" (S39)

"Woman who loves and/or is sexually attracted to other women. She may well be celibate too" (S25)

"Love & friendship & possibly sex between women" (S15)

"Women loving women, a political state as well as emotional" (S3)

"A woman who identifies emotionally and sometimes sexually to other women" (S38)

"Following Sappho in caring about women, giving them validity, nurturing them, looking to them for intimacy and nurture, supporting them, furthering their perception of the world, etc etc" (S33)

Awareness of lesbianism as an option

Before identification as lesbian could occur, women had to be aware of lesbianism as an option. Thirty five percent of the lesbian sample were uncertain as to when they had first heard the words homosexual, gay or lesbian, or any other words relating to homosexuals. A quarter of the women suggested it had been at junior school age or that the word had always seemed to be there.

"Still in the junior school, sort of about ten or eleven - in the playground, that sort of thing" (S21)

For 35% of the lesbian sample, first awareness of words relating to homosexuality was at secondary school age. Three lesbian subjects reported not having been aware of the words until adulthood.

Forty percent of the women first heard the words at school or amongst other children. Five lesbian subjects (13% of the sample) mentioned first reading about it. For some the circumstances were rather different:

"I think it was probably when I got whisked off to the doctor's by my mother at fifteen" (S12)

Over forty percent of the sample were uncertain as to the circumstances of their initially meeting the words.

For approximately a third of the lesbian subjects, understanding of the terms occurred at about the same time as first meeting the words. For forty percent of the women, understanding was described as occurring during secondary school age; for 15% of the sample, at junior school age; and for 18%, in adulthood. For a quarter of the lesbian sample, age period of first understanding the words was not recalled, uncertain or not specified.

A quarter of the lesbian subjects mentioned being aware of the negative connotations of the terms, knowing it was something not to be discussed or being frightened. For 15% of the women, first understanding came from gossip or from the media.

Two thirds of the women had either held some kind of stereotype of lesbians, or mentioned feeling frightened of lesbians, before meeting others. This is described in the preceding section on the social context of coming out.

School has been seen as the context for the initial meeting of the words relating to homosexuality for a proportion of the women. While at school, 55% of the lesbian sample had been unaware of gay/lesbian teachers or pupils. There was no significant age category difference for this. Approximately, a third of the women had been aware of a possibly gay teacher, and just under half the women, of a possibly gay pupil. Three quarters of the women did not recall homosexuality having been mentioned in lessons at school. Just over half the younger subjects (aged under 30 years), and the majority of the older subjects (aged 30 years or over) suggested it had not been mentioned, but this difference was not significant ($\chi^2=3.472$, $df=1$, $p>0.05$). Only three women

suggested it had been mentioned. Four women mentioned the subject of homosexuality had arisen informally or indirectly at school (i.e. in subjects other than sex education or biology). There was general support for homosexuality being taught about in school with nearly ninety percent of the lesbian sample indicating they would like this, and almost a quarter of the women suggesting they felt very strongly about this and/or it would have meant much to them.

Only three women (less than 8% of the sample) had come to identify themselves as lesbian through their involvement with feminism. However, just under half the sample perceived the women's movement as having played a role in their coming out. Fifteen women (just under forty percent of the sample) perceived it as not having played any part in their coming out, while seven women (under twenty percent) suggested it had had an indirect influence on them. There were no significant differences between older and younger women in perceiving the women's movement to have played a part in their coming out, or not.

"..I always think of my number one identity as being..a lesbian, and my number two as being a woman , as opposed to the other way round"

(S7)

"I'm not sure whether I would have been a lesbian but for Women's Liberation..."

(S27)

In summary, women began to understand the terminology relating to homosexuality at different stages of their lives, often having experienced lesbian feelings previously without having labelled them. Awareness of the negative connotations attached to lesbianism was evident from many of the subjects' responses. Women's current personal definitions of the terms vary, but appear to emphasise the emotional basis of lesbianism, and that it is perceived as involving more than just sex. School experiences and the women's movement contributed in some measure to awareness of lesbianism as an option.

Awareness of lesbianism may be viewed as based on available social representations concerning human nature, gender or sexuality; and perceptions of the attitudes, stereotypes and attributions relating to homosexuality that these representations reflect.

Perceptions of reasons why some women are lesbian

Also relevant to coming out to self are the perceived reasons why some women are lesbian and some women are heterosexual. Some women reported that their ideas about possible reasons had changed.

"I used to have this wonderful theory when I was growing up, in my teens. My theory was that you could only be lesbian or homosexual if you were an only child, and if you had brothers and sisters: no"
(S7)

Thus, perceptions of possible reasons elicited during the interviews may not have corresponded to subjects' perceptions of reasons during the period when they were first becoming aware of themselves as lesbian. However, approximately a quarter of the lesbian subjects currently perceived the reasons in terms of both nature and nurture.

"Well, I think it must be a mixture of nature and nurture, and I don't know how much of each" (S8)

Over sixty percent of the lesbian subjects perceived the reasons solely in terms of nurture: circumstances/environment/upbringing.

"I tend to think that it's an environmental, emotional situation that happens through circumstances. I think we're all born able to be either or both"
(S34)

Only ten percent of the lesbian sample (i.e. four subjects) perceived the reasons in terms of nature only (i.e. born with tendency/predisposition; possibly genetic/hormonal).

"I think they were born that way. I don't really believe that society or their upbringing sort of pushes them in one direction. I don't know that you can make a heterosexual person gay. I'm not saying they wouldn't try it, but I think at the end of the day it's just the way you're born"

(S35)

A quarter of the lesbian sample expressed uncertainty regarding reasons.

Related to perceived reasons, were perceptions of whether being lesbian was a choice or not. Thirty percent of the lesbian sample did not perceive being a lesbian as a choice for themselves.

"No, it's not a choice, no, not at all" (S32)

"I don't really think it is [a choice]. I mean, I think it's part of your nature, you can't change the way you're born" (S4)

A quarter of the lesbian sample perceived being lesbian as a choice for some and not others. Twenty percent of the lesbian sample perceived being lesbian as not a choice generally, i.e. for self or others. Four subjects suggested there was no choice regarding feelings, but a choice as to behaviour.

"Well, if you're dishonest with yourself, then you've got a choice. You can live a lie as a heterosexual or you can be honest with yourself and live your life as you want to live" (S35)

"...I didn't choose ... I think it's in you and the choice is whether or not you acknowledge it and do something about it. I just don't see how you can choose" (S20)

Lesbianism was perceived as a general choice by thirty percent of the sample.

"Yes, very clearly, it is a choice" (S28)

Uncertainty was expressed by twenty percent of the women. In summary, over half the lesbian sample (58%) perceived at least some limitations to the notion of lesbianism as a choice. Perception of no choice, or restricted choice, was not necessarily linked to perception of reasons underlying homosexuality in terms of nature.

Nurture/upbringing etc. could be viewed as predisposing a woman to lesbianism.

Problems relating to terminology and definition of internal/external or dispositional/situational (cf Hewstone, 1989a) make interpretation of this material within the framework of attribution theory unclear.

Relationship towards men

"I suppose the only thing that [the relationships with men] did teach me was that I liked women"

(S35)

The women's relationship towards men was also relevant to their experiences of coming out to self. Forty percent of the sample had not been in any important relationship with a male. Two women were currently married; seven women (18% of the sample) had been married and were now separated or divorced; and just under a third of the sample had been in some other important relationship with a male. Thus, 55% of this sample had been in at least one important relationship with a male. (For two cases, relationships with men were not categorized).

For 45% of the lesbian sample, there was a period during adulthood when they had considered themselves heterosexual. However, nearly 45% of these cases mentioned that their relationships with men had been difficult or unsatisfactory. Five subjects mentioned the problem of inequality in relationships with men. In all, half of those who had considered themselves heterosexual mentioned either that their relationships with men had been difficult or unsatisfactory, or that there was the problem of inequality. Twenty percent of the sample had attempted heterosexual relationships, but perceived themselves as possibly lesbian. Two subjects suggested they went out with men or married to prove that they were normal/not gay.

In relating to men generally, just over half the lesbian sample suggested that they had good friendships

with men, got on well with them, or felt friendly towards them. Over sixty percent of these women also pointed out that they had no romantic or sexual interests regarding men. Forty five percent of the sample reported slightly negative feelings towards men. They suggested for example that they found it harder to get on with men than women; preferred female company; were uncomfortable, indifferent towards, or not interested in men; liked or respected few men; or that men played little part in their lives. Just under a quarter of the subjects responded both that they felt friendly or got on well with men, and that they felt slightly negative towards men. A similar proportion of subjects gave neutral responses such as that they did not hate men, or that some men are okay, some are not. Seven subjects mentioned they related more easily to feminine or gay men. Five subjects mentioned the problem of the patriarchy. Two subjects suggested they got on better with men than with women.

Becoming aware of self as lesbian

The minimum age of first identifying self as lesbian was ten years old. Approximately a quarter of the subjects identified themselves as gay/lesbian between the ages of fifteen and nineteen, inclusive. A similar proportion of subjects first identified themselves as gay/lesbian between the ages of twenty and twenty four, inclusive; nearly twenty percent of the subjects, between the ages of twenty five and twenty nine, inclusive; and the final 25% of subjects, at thirty years old or over.

For one subject, first identification of self as lesbian occurred during the 1950's, and for a further seven subjects, during the 1960's. A quarter of the subjects first identified themselves as gay/lesbian during the 1970's; and approximately a third of subjects did so during the first half of the 1980's. Just under a half of the subjects first identified themselves as

lesbian/gay during the last half of the 1970's or the first half of the 1980's. Twenty percent of the subjects were recorded as identifying themselves as gay/lesbian in 1985 or later.

"I mean looking back on it, in retrospect, I can see that I had feelings towards other women, and attraction towards other women, much sooner than that, but I don't think that I was really prepared to sort of acknowledge that in myself at the time, but, you know, now I can see it" (S41)

For twenty percent of subjects, the estimated length of time between first feelings and first identifying self as gay/lesbian was negligible (i.e. less than a year). For a further five cases, this period of time was estimated at between one and three years approximately. For just under half the subjects the length of time was greater than three years, but less than twenty years. Five cases were estimated as having a time interval of twenty years or more between first feelings and first identifying self as lesbian.

The process of becoming aware of oneself as possibly lesbian began for many with negative or conflicting feelings (see Table 7.3.13). It can be seen that over half the lesbian sample mentioned negative feelings related to self, and forty percent mentioned having repressed or denied feelings. No difference was found between younger and older subjects in mentioning these feelings.

Table 7.3.13: Feelings on coming out to self

Coding subcategory	Feelings	No. of subjects	% Subjects
4.1.1, 4.1.2, 4.1.X, 4.1.Y, 4.1.4 & 4.1.9	Negative feelings (re self) e.g. worried, frightened, panic stricken, desperate, isolated, lonely, suicidal thoughts, conflicting feelings, felt guilty, confused	22	55
4.2.1 to 4.2.7	Negative feelings in connection with others' attitudes or reactions	18	45
4.1.7	Had repressed/ suppressed/denied feelings	16	40
4.2.8 4.2.10 4.1.10	Problem of keeping secret/having to live a lie/felt couldn't talk to anyone	13	33
4.2.6 4.7	Aware of negative associations/stigma	11	28
4.1.3	Hoped/thought it was a phase	8	20
4.1.8	Positive feelings e.g. excited, relieved	8	20

Conflicting feelings arose from perceptions of how others such as parents might react, as well as from an awareness of the negative connotations attached to lesbianism within society.

"...it was terrifying at first because..I'd never heard anything other than the fact that it was abnormal and abhorrent which was why I tried to repress it, you know, for years..." (S32)

"..I felt absolutely awful and scared - mostly because of..my parents finding out - what the world would say" (S25)

"...my attitude toward the fact that I was gay - I was never in any doubt about it, I was never confused about it through that time, and that actual condition never worried me at all ... the only thing that did affect me was how other people seemed to perceive homosexuality.." (S7)

"Very worried. Frightened. I hoped it was phase .. I didn't think it was going to be - or after a bit I felt it wasn't going to be - and I think I felt isolated" (S8)

"I was very excited. I thought it was wonderful to think of, to have this wonderful relationship, and I really wanted to share it with everybody, but I knew I couldn't" (S15)

Some of the subjects were still in the initial stages of coming out to self at time of interview.

"At the moment, I feel as though I'm beginning to accept the fact that I am [gay] ... I suppose coming to terms with it, actually coming into an accepting state of mind. I'm feeling more relaxed than I have been" (S21)

Emotional acceptance of a lesbian identity was a gradual process for most of the women which may be understood from the perspective of Breakwell's model of threatened identity; and also within the context of salience of social categorization (Oakes, 1987).

Considering current feelings about being lesbian, both positive and negative feelings were mentioned by the majority of the sample. Generally positive feelings were mentioned by over 70% of the women; and generally negative feelings by a third of the sample. However, this included five subjects who mentioned both general positive and general negative feelings. Altogether, 90% of the women mentioned some aspect of being lesbian that they perceived positively; and 70% of the women mentioned negative aspects of being lesbian. Thus, having accepted self as lesbian, many women described their feelings in very positive terms:

"Well, I can say now I'm happy with myself..." (S35)

"I wouldn't change - completely positive" (S24)

Some further issues

The range of experiences of coming out to self described by the women in this study do not indicate support for a linear stage model of lesbian identity formation. They reflect instead a more complex

interaction between perceived emotional experiences; awareness of options, and emotional acceptance of homosexuality. Awareness of options is related to available social representations, and the beliefs, attitudes, images and attributions these reflect. Emotional acceptance of homosexuality may be understood in terms of threat to identity, and needs to be viewed in relation to the underlying social representations of human nature, gender and sexuality. Women come to identify themselves as lesbian at widely different ages, in different circumstances, having had a variety of different life experiences. It can be seen that it is not particularly meaningful to calculate average ages of first identifying self as lesbian, first lesbian experience etc. Instead, it may be more helpful to consider the social and cultural context that would facilitate women identifying as lesbian and minimize threat to identity.

Although some differences between lesbian identities have been indicated in this study, the evidence relates only to a difference in the way women *perceive* their identity and cannot be extrapolated to suggest, for example, physiological differences. Since the study has been based on retrospective accounts, re-interpretation or reconstruction of the past may - or may not - have occurred to varying degrees. Aspects of Kitzinger's five lesbian identities (Kitzinger & Rogers, 1985; Kitzinger, 1987) were reflected within these women's accounts. Generally, however, caution is necessary in making any categorical distinctions between lesbian women. Any category boundaries are unlikely to be clearly delineated, and need to be seen as overlapping, permeable, and possibly changing.

7.3.3 Coming out to others

Coming out to others, whether to other lesbians, or to heterosexual people such as family or friends, takes place within the social context described in section reflecting dominant social representations of human nature, gender and sexuality. Thus, whether a woman is contacting other lesbians for the first time, or telling a parent or friend about herself, she is acting within a context that is likely to include some awareness of a lesbian stereotype; notions of normality/abnormality; perceptions of generally negative attitudes towards homosexuality; and possibly some ideas relating to explanations of homosexuality as innate or environmental. Further, she is acting within a context in which other lesbians have probably been largely invisible.

Coming out to other lesbians

The interaction between the woman coming out for the first time to other lesbians and the social context described above is reflected in the experiences described by the lesbian sample.

"I had the standard image. I thought they were all built like bulldozers, all wore boiler suits and ripped jeans or whatever, spikey hair, as ugly as anyone could possibly be ... very much because I had that image in my mind of what a lesbian was like, and it probably put me off for quite a few years doing anything about it, coming out.."

(S7, L.Grp.)

Before coming out to others, 45% of the lesbian sample thought lesbians might be masculine or look like men. Over a third of the women suggested they had believed in or held a stereotype. More than 20% of them mentioned being frightened. This ranged from feeling terrified to being nervous. Fifteen percent of the lesbian subjects mentioned they were frightened of being attacked or seduced, or out of control, or that they thought lesbians would be predatory or aggressive. There was no difference between younger and older lesbian subjects in

the two thirds of the lesbian sample who mentioned one or more of these stereotypical perceptions. A quarter of the lesbian sample suggested they had been unaware of a stereotype; or had had no thoughts about lesbians, some not having wanted to think about them.

For almost a quarter of the lesbian subjects, the length of time between first identifying self as lesbian and coming out into the lesbian community was negligible. For many, the length of time was uncertain or could not be estimated. Estimated length of time between self-identification as lesbian and first coming out into the lesbian community for the remaining 35% of the sample ranged from one year to fourteen years (mean: 4.54 years; standard deviation: 4.01).

"I made a point of not joining the Gay Soc. at .. University ... I couldn't cope with it then" (S25)

The general invisibility of lesbians often means that a woman needs to take active steps in order to meet other lesbians. Stereotypical ideas of what lesbians may be like, and perceptions of generally negative attitudes within society towards homosexuality make it hard to approach doing this:

"..I looked in Time Out and saw all these clubs, and I thought, well, there's no way I can go to all these places on my own because I'd walk in, I'd just die, I think.." (S14)

"I was walking outside for a bit because I thought 'I can't do this!', I wasn't going to go in" (S26)

"I tried going to the ...Lesbian and Gay Society. I went up there, walked past three or four times, and scuttled down the stairs. I couldn't bring myself to walk in" (S9)

Over forty percent of subjects reported having felt scared or concerned at the idea of going to lesbian places on their own; going to the lesbian section in bookshops, or buying a lesbian book; or contacting a gay helpline. Thirty five percent of subjects did eventually

contact Lesbian Line or Gay Switchboard. Feeling isolated or that there was no one to confide in was mentioned by fifteen percent of the subjects. Thirty percent of the women had talked to a therapist or counsellor. Only five subjects had looked for support or advice from straight friends, and two subjects consulted a teacher or lecturer. Four subjects had joined a women's/feminist group.

The first lesbian meeting attended was vividly recalled by many subjects:

"...I just sat in a corner and couldn't believe my eyes - I was terrified!" (S5)

"...of course, it was completely different from what I'd imagined - they were perfectly ordinary women who you would never believe were lesbians, and it came as a complete shock - a bolt out of the blue for me to think that these women were actually lesbians - complete shock"

(S38)

"- a real feeling of 'it's okay' ... they're not all nutcases" (S16)

"...it was amazing actually - I thought I would be absolutely terrified - well, I was quite frightened, but it wasn't as bad ... so, that was the biggest step I felt I'd ever made"

(S8)

The relief reported at finding that lesbians were just 'ordinary women' may be interpreted as further evidence of the women possibly having been aware of stereotypical notions of lesbians. Fifty five percent of the lesbian sample describing their present perceptions of lesbians suggested that there were all sorts - no typical lesbians; lesbians were just people/like other women.

For some women, however, first experiences of meeting others supported images of lesbians as masculine or political.

"Lesbians there are very political ... they were very, very male lesbians ..you know, they were very butch. So, I did have that preconceived idea which seemed to be borne out by what I saw.."

(S32)

Over a third of the lesbian sample (38%) described their

present perceptions of some lesbians as masculine (28% of sample) or political (15% of sample). Perceptions of lesbians now were both positive and negative.

While approximately a quarter of the sample mentioned positive feelings about being lesbian that were related to the lesbian community or other lesbians, 13% of the sample mentioned negative feelings. Fifteen percent of the lesbian subjects mentioned lesbian relationships, or support or friendship from other lesbians, as a main benefit of coming out.

In the process of coming out to other lesbians, the effects of the underlying social representations of human nature/gender reflecting stereotyping of lesbians and generally negative attitudes towards homosexuality may be seen. From the social identity theory perspective, before coming out, lesbians are probably viewed as a negatively valued group. On meeting other lesbian women, however, there is likely to be positive reinforcement of lesbian identity.

Coming out to heterosexual friends or family

The initial circumstances

Making a decision on whether to come out to a family member or heterosexual friend is based on a complexity of issues. The social context, reflected in relevant social representations, as already described, involves notions of stereotyping; normality; perceptions of generally negative attitudes towards homosexuality; and the general invisibility of lesbians within society. Within this context, the lesbian makes her decision on whether to come out. Reasons given for not wanting to tell a family member or friend give some indication of the issues a woman may consider.

Over half the lesbian sample mentioned the need to protect the other person in some way as a reason for not coming out to them.

"...I can't bear the thought of them [parents]
feeling dreadful about it" (S8)

"...my parents, I could never have told - it would have killed them" (S32)

"I wouldn't tell him [grandfather] for the world - it would destroy him" (S24)

[re teenage children] "...at their age, they are coming to terms with their own identity and sexuality..." (S31)

"..I've got no business telling him [father] at ninety-two, unless I want to finish him off!" (S22)

Just under half the lesbian sample mentioned the negative views of the other person as a reason for not coming out. These ranged from the lesbian perceiving the others as viewing homosexuality as 'evil and wrong' or 'dirty and sordid', to perceiving the others as probably not understanding, or being very conventional heterosexuals, and the possibility of being cut off by them.

"They're [cousins] terribly right-wing fascists and real East-enders..." (S16)

"They'd [other students] probably gossip behind my back" (S9)

"She'd [friend] be afraid of being tarred with the same brush by association" (S31)

Reasons to do with self were mentioned by just over a quarter of the subjects. These included feeling guilty or afraid, or that it was only one aspect of themselves.

"They would see me as .. the queer ..and all the other things that they otherwise admire and value would be counted for nothing and invalidated" (S31)

That there was no necessity to tell the other person either because the subject was not close to them, or because the subject perceived no need to tell them, was mentioned by almost half the lesbian sample.

"my private life is my own business" [re flatmates] (S13)

"..heterosexual people don't go around saying 'Hey, I'm heterosexual!'" (S9)

"I don't see any point in it. We're not close" [re parents & sister] (S5)

Other reasons given for not coming out to parents, family or friends, included that the other may have guessed or already knew (mentioned by 33% of the lesbian sample); that the woman did not know what was stopping her/would tell when the circumstances were right (mentioned by 20% of the women); or that the woman could not find the words/could not get around to telling (mentioned by 10% of the sample).

"he probably does have an idea, but he wouldn't want the i's dotted or the t's crossed..." (S22)

Whether or not to come out to family and friends was a dilemma for many.

The initial circumstances in which women took the decision to tell family or friends about themselves were mainly of three types. Firstly, there was the context in which the woman was in a state/confused/ needed support; or had lesbian relationship problems. The former negative state was mentioned by a quarter of the lesbian subjects, and the relationship problems by approximately a third of subjects. In all just under half the lesbian subjects mentioned one or other of these categories.

"..I was in a desperate state at the time, and I rang both of them [friends] up on the same evening" (S8)

Secondly, there was the context where the woman felt guilty, or felt that she was leading a double life, and having to lie. She wanted to be able to speak freely and did not want people assuming her to be heterosexual. This context as part of the initial circumstances or reasons for wanting to come out was mentioned by 45% of lesbian subjects.

"..I'm the type of person that - I couldn't lead a double life, I couldn't - I mean, I knew my parents wouldn't agree to it, wouldn't like it, whatever, but there's no way I could go round trying to pretend that I was something that I wasn't" (S14)

The third major context involved essentially the woman feeling that the other person would not mind. She may have expected approval, felt close to the other person, or have always told them everything. 'If they're real friends, it wouldn't bother them.' This context was mentioned by a quarter of the subjects. Additionally, twenty percent of subjects mentioned something having happened so that it was appropriate for them to come out. This included one case of bereavement, and another of blackmail.

The interviews regarding communication with family and friends provided some examples of situations that may be compared with the initial circumstances of coming out. One subject had not yet told her parents of her involvement with religion and future career plans based on this.

"...really they should know because it's such an important part of me now, that they can't know me, because they don't know this part of me, and it's only right they should know ... they'll think it's a phase - they'll hope it's a phase ... I'm quite sad and I wish I could [talk about it] because I want to tell them. I want them to know all the different parts of me ... I'm thinking of a particular chance [to tell them] I had a few weeks ago .. they'd made a comment which was very against what I wanted to tell them, and I almost joked and laughed with them - making it the opposite of what I actually wanted to do"

(S2, C.Grp.)

Parallels with the coming out situation for lesbians include the issue being related very much to the subject's identity; her perceptions of the possible reaction of her parents; and her management of the situation through isolating self, or attempting to 'pass'. Perhaps the main difference of this example from coming out as lesbian lies in the nature of the issue involved - religion being part of the traditional establishment; and lesbianism associated with alternative culture. An example of another situation with some similarities to coming out was a subject's account of

telling her parents about a non-Jewish boyfriend.

"I mean like there was one major thing which I refused to talk about with my parents - it was the fact I was going out with someone who wasn't Jewish - and I felt this overpowering need to tell them. I wanted them to know so they could start to accept, because I was completely in love with him - then that was horrible, that was bad, that was really not a nice experience. They didn't accept. They never would have done"

(S1, C.Grp.)

Here, the similarities with coming out included the dilemma of the subject wishing to share her positive feelings about a relationship with someone, but perceiving the likelihood of a negative reaction. A main difference to the coming out situation is that the subject would not have been telling her parents anything about herself in telling them about the relationship. Contrasting with the situation of coming out was the example of subject 14 (C. Grp.) who as a child had been wrongly accused by a teacher and felt unable to talk to anyone about it. This incident had a profound effect on the subject, leading to her truanting from school for three days. It differs from the coming out situation in that the subject perceived the accusation as mistaken - it was not something that was actually a part of her identity that was being challenged.

In summary, for lesbian subjects, on the one hand, against coming out there were perceptions of negative attitudes towards homosexuality; a desire to protect others from being upset; and the feeling that it was unnecessary to tell certain people. On the other hand, in favour of coming out, there was need for support, particularly regarding lesbian relationship problems; there were feelings of guilt at not being able to speak freely, and being assumed to be heterosexual; and there was the feeling that the other person would not mind. Generally, where a decision not to come out was made, awareness of negative attitudes, and perceptions of some heterosexual people as vulnerable, or threatened by the

potential knowledge, predominated. Where a decision to come out was made, the lesbians' own needs were given precedence; and/or the perceptions of negative attitudes, or of homosexuality as a threat in any way to heterosexuals, were replaced by the perception that the heterosexual person would be able to handle it, would not mind, and may even approve i.e. a positive reaction was expected from the heterosexual person. Parallels from the communication study with the initial circumstances of coming out for lesbian subjects involved issues related to identity and a relationship, which were perceived as likely to provoke a negative reaction from others.

The approach to coming out

Almost three quarters of the lesbian subjects had told parents, family or friends about themselves in a direct manner.

"She [mother] was driving toward the traffic lights
and she went through the red" (S20)

Approximately a third of the subjects described situations in which someone had been told about them by somebody else, in some cases the subject having asked somebody to tell someone else. A quarter of the subjects mentioned situations where they had just assumed that another person knew, or they thought the person had guessed. Seven subjects (18%) described situations where the person was told when the subject had arisen naturally. A quarter of the subjects described occurrences in which the other person had asked the woman whether she was lesbian ('a friend forced it out of me'); or told them that they thought they were lesbian; or where there had been gossip that the subject was lesbian. Only four subjects were recorded as 'testing the water' before telling someone about themselves.

Indirect ways of coming out included 'I just act as I am' or not hiding that one was in a relationship. This kind of approach was mentioned by 20% of lesbian

subjects. Another approach was to avoid using the words 'lesbian' or 'gay', and to tell the other person that one was having a relationship with another woman, or 'attracted to women', or just not interested in men. Just over a quarter of the lesbian sample mentioned having used this approach. Three subjects had come out using the term 'bisexual' rather than 'lesbian'. Two subjects described how they avoided telling people directly because they perceived it as giving the issue false emphasis, or putting the onus on the other person to make a decision.

Where the approach taken in coming out has been indirect, and particularly in cases where assumptions have simply been made that others 'know', the situation must be seen as to some extent ambiguous. The other may or may not actually 'know'/understand that the woman is lesbian. This uncertainty would seem likely to affect the relationships concerned. In terms of Goffman's (1963) notion of discredited/discreditable individuals, or Jones et al.'s (1984) marked relationships, whether the woman perceived herself as 'discredited' or 'marked', or on the other hand, 'discreditable' or 'markable'; and whether she was perceived by the other as 'discredited' or 'marked', or not, would be uncertain.

Seven subjects mentioned having come out to someone by letter, but only two subjects had used the telephone in coming out.

Coming out tended to be on an individual basis. However, a very small number of subjects (four) described coming out to both parents at the same time, and in one case, a subject came out to a family group consisting of parents, brother and uncle.

Communication group interviewees described some planned approaches to discussion of difficult subjects with family or friends.

"I suppose I'd try to approach it in a very round about fashion, and see what kind of response I got. If they ... weren't embarrassed, or wanted to change the subject, then I'd probably go on and tell them a bit more, and a bit more, and so on.."

(S16, C.Grp.)

"I asked key questions to other people first so that I would have a clue as to how this other person would react. It's a very, very cold and calculating procedure. I completely distanced myself from it ... Planned out every single thing I was going to say in advance.. made sure nobody else was in the room, or coming into the room. I don't remember if I locked the door ..."

(S8, C.Grp.)

"Well, I would probably, if I decided that I wanted to talk to a particular person, I would make sure that there was an occasion where it would be easy to do so ... or more likely go for..a couple of days walking - that's always a good way to talk about anything..."

(S14, C.Grp.)

"Well, I'd make sure she's in a good mood to start with - I might drop a few subtle hints before ... I make sure either she's on her own, or if I want my dad there ... I'd wait for my dad to be there ... it's basically getting them in the right mood, and when they're not rushing around - when they've got time to sit and talk. It's pointless trying to start a conversation if they're trying to cook or clean or something!"

(S5, C.Grp.)

Some approaches, however, were less strategically worked out; or the opportunity to talk may arise naturally.

"The thing which I still can't do unless I'm totally drunk, is to talk about my feelings to a guyusually when I have something to say, I usually do really get drunk, and then I can say it"

(S4, C.Grp.)

"...it kind of fed in to that discussion ... I didn't just say I have something to talk to you about.."

(S10, C.Grp.)

"It just sort of happened. It was very much the moment and the person, and the conversation we were having I guess..."

(S1, C.Grp.)

In summary, lesbian subjects tended to approach coming out to others in a direct manner. Some of the communication interviews indicated the possibility and advantages of planning one's approach, and perhaps testing possible reactions.

'Out'/'not out' to family and friends

While just over three quarters of the lesbian sample were out to one or more members of their family, 85% of the subjects mentioned one or more family members they had not come out to. Sixty percent of the women had come out to their mothers, and the other 40% had not. A lower proportion had come out to their fathers (38%). The percentage of women recorded as not having come out to their fathers was the same as the percentage who had come out to them (i.e. 38%).

"I never really dared to mention it and he [father] never asked" (S2)

"Well, I went home once with the express intention of telling them [parents] - but I..I chickened out" (S8)

"..it was such a relief when it came out [to mother, sister and brother-in-law], and since then I've been able to go home with my friend, and talk about things I do, without hiding anything. It's great - because I now feel that I'm back in the family, and I feel that they can share my life, and I can share family life" (S35)

Out of the eighteen lesbian subjects who had sister(s), two thirds had come out to one or more of them, and one third mentioned they had not come out to one or more sisters. Of the fifteen lesbian subjects who had brother(s), one third had come out to one or more brothers, and just under two thirds or the women mentioned they had not come out to one or more of them.

"I told them both actually, my sister and my brother-in-law, and they were very receptive. We had quite a good conversation" (S8)

Nine subjects had, or had had, a husband. Of these nine, five had come out to the husband, while two had

not. Information relating to this on the remaining two cases was missing. Seven of the lesbian sample had children. Five of these women had come out to their children; two of them had not come out. All of these seven subjects with children had older children (i.e. of secondary school age, or adult). Two of the seven subjects also had children of primary school age. It was these two subjects who had not told their children about themselves.

"My husband, no problem, because I think he knew before I did .. I just told him as soon as I knew, and told him what I was going to do, because he knew that I wouldn't leave him, because we have such a close relationship ..."
(S32)

"The children are difficult. I still don't know what to do about the children"
(S32)

No subjects mentioned being out to a grandparent, but seven subjects (18% of the sample) mentioned not being out to their grandparent(s). Almost a quarter of the women had come out to an aunt or uncle, while 15% of subjects mentioned not having come out to aunts or uncles. Seven subjects had come out to cousins, but 20% mentioned not having come out to cousin(s). Approximately a third of the subjects mentioned other relatives they had not come out to.

While approximately a third of the sample had come out to most heterosexual friends; and approximately a third, to some heterosexual friends; almost a quarter of the sample had come out to few or none. Over a third of the sample suggested that many of their friends were lesbian/gay/feminist and/or that they had few straight friends.

"At first I didn't [come out to heterosexual friends] because I felt that I was something wrong you see ... then I sorted out the fact that there were certain people I couldn't come out to because I had to protect my family; then I worked out there were certain people I couldn't come out to because of my job; and then when I thought of the rest, I thought why can't I tell my friends - if I call them friends - if they're my friends - so I started telling them ... "

(S32)

In response to questions concerning whether there were people subjects would/would not like to come out to, over a quarter of the lesbian subjects mentioned they would like to come out to friends, and 15% percent mentioned they would like to come out to parents. Approximately a third of the sample mentioned that they would not like to come out to people at work.

Coming out or not at work

"..I'd like it if I was totally out, I think, but I'm not going to do it now"

(S3)

Only five lesbian subjects were out to most or all of the people at work. Thirty percent of the lesbian sample were not out to anyone at work. Just under a third of the sample were possibly out to one person or a few people there. Four subjects mentioned they were not out, but that they thought/assumed their colleagues knew.

"..they wouldn't like to know about it. They would not like to know!"

(S31)

Just over two thirds of the lesbian sample mentioned one or more reasons for not coming out at work. Thirty percent of the sample mentioned potential difficulties in relations with others: they suggested the other women might be concerned; it might shock or embarrass people; the others might not be able to handle it, or may see you as a threat. Fifteen percent of the lesbian sample suggested there would be difficulties with the men at work.

"I think the men would just start making stupid jokes. I think I might lose respect"

(S4)

The possibility of difficulties in relations with others at work, particularly with men, was reflected in some of the heterosexual subjects' responses to the question of how they would feel about someone at work being gay.

"..if she was the masculine type lesbian then she would become some sort of joke in the office anyway.." (S25, H.Grp.)

"I don't try to hide the fact that I don't find it agreeable ... I suppose you can't help despising them slightly for it" (S27, H.Grp.)

"Well, I'd accept them, but I'd probably find it difficult to be friendly with them, because I wouldn't know how to behave or what to say" (S1, H.Grp.)

Further reasons suggested by the lesbian sample for not coming out at work included that others did not tell them about themselves, or that the subject was not very close to the people at work (mentioned by 20% of the sample). Fifteen percent of the women suggested it might harm their career prospects to come out. Again, there was some reflection of these issues in some heterosexual subjects' responses.

"I don't see it having anything to do with work" (S12, H.Grp.)

"I certainly wouldn't engage anybody for appointment that I thought either gay or lesbian" (S25, H.Grp.)

Although some of the women from the communication interview group suggested they avoided talking about anything to do with their personal life at work, this restriction of discussion area did not exclude mentioning of husband or boyfriend.

"Well, I mean, I avoid talking about anything personal, except you know sometimes if you're working together with people..you talk about certain things: 'oh, I'm going out with so and so', and you talk about your relationship a little bit .. but you don't talk about anything overtly personal..." (S4, C.Grp.)

Other concerns, each mentioned by 10% of the lesbian

subjects, were the possibility of losing one's job; that there might be gossip, rejection or hostility; that the subject would be known as a lesbian rather than herself; and that the subject was scared/unsure of how others would react. Possibly lending some support to the notion of gossip at work, forty percent of the heterosexual sample mentioned the topic of homosexuality arising with work colleagues. The most commonly mentioned types of conversation regarding homosexuality, generally (i.e. not necessarily occurring specifically with work colleagues), were discussion (mentioned by 83% of the heterosexual sample); jokes, comments or derogatory slights (mentioned by 47%); and commenting or speculations about someone being gay (mentioned by 33%).

A further perspective on the concerns of the lesbian subjects is given by considering the heterosexual subjects' responses regarding, firstly, their personal views about someone at work being gay; and secondly, their perceptions of most people's views on types of employment that may be unsuitable for gay men or lesbians. Sixty percent of the heterosexual sample suggested that it would make no difference to them if someone at work was gay. Four heterosexual subjects suggested it would make no difference as long as the gay person was not directing their attention towards them. Over a quarter of the heterosexual sample suggested it would make some difference to them, and five subjects expressed their personal concern about gay men or women working with children/as teachers. Considering whether there were any types of employment 'most people' would regard as unsuitable for gay men or lesbians, over half the heterosexual sample suggested working with children/teaching. Forty percent of the heterosexual subjects suggested 'most people' would consider as unsuitable gay men or lesbians working as doctors, politicians. or in other responsible jobs, or high positions. The problem of AIDS was mentioned by twenty

percent of the heterosexual sample. A similar percentage of the sample suggested that there were no types of work most people would consider as unsuitable for lesbians or gay men.

Reasons in favour of being out at work, or general feelings regarding this, were mentioned by over forty percent of the lesbian sample. A quarter of the women mentioned 'being oneself': e.g. I don't like pretending to be something I'm not/denying something so important to me; I wish I didn't have to hide it when someone asks a question; it is a strain to lie; can talk freely.

"..at work now, it's awkward with the other girls talking about boyfriends and husbands all the time, because I can't talk about what I do"

(S11)

Other reasons mentioned included that one would become better friends with colleagues; or that it helped confidence/got rid of negative feelings.

Almost all subjects in the lesbian and heterosexual groups had had experience of either temporary or permanent jobs. Only two subjects were recorded as having had negligible work experience. Eighty percent of the lesbian sample and sixty percent of the heterosexual sample were categorised as having been in a permanent job, reflecting the larger number of students in the latter group.

First coming out experience to a heterosexual person

For the largest group of lesbian subjects, the first coming out experience to a heterosexual person had been to a heterosexual female friend (mentioned by 43% of the sample). A further six subjects had come out first to the (heterosexual) girl or woman they were in love with/attracted to/had a crush on. Thus, in all, 58% of the sample had come out first to a heterosexual female friend, or to a heterosexual female person the subject was attracted to. For five subjects (13% of the sample), their first experience of coming out to a heterosexual

person was coming out to parent(s); and for a similar number, the first experience was to some other family member.

Coming out to other lesbians before coming out to heterosexual people may provide some background support for women. Just under a quarter of the lesbian group had come out to other lesbians before first coming out to a heterosexual person. Just over a third of the subjects were in a relationship, or had been in one, before their first experience of coming out to a heterosexual person. Further, for 43% of the lesbian sample, the length of time between first identifying self as lesbian, and their first coming out to a heterosexual person was estimated as negligible. For a quarter of the sample, the length of this period was uncertain. The length of time between self identification and coming out to a heterosexual person for just under a quarter of the sample varied from one year to ten or eleven years (mean: 3.50 years; standard deviation: 2.99).

Perceptions of reactions to coming out

In the following description of material, reactions to coming out described by the lesbian subjects are based on their perceptions of friends' or family members' responses to the lesbian telling them about herself. Reactions described for the heterosexual sample are based on their perceptions of how they would react in the hypothetical situation of a friend or family member coming out to them. Responses were often a mixture of positive, neutral or negative reactions.

Eighty five percent of the lesbian sample described some kind of positive reaction to their coming out from friends or family. This included perceptions of the other as understanding, interested, sympathetic, supportive, or receptive. Seventy percent of the women described some positive response from one or more friends; just under a third of the women described some

positive reaction from one or more family members, other than parents; and just over a quarter of the women described some positive response from one or both parents.

"..it's just been thoroughly accepted that aunt is a lesbian and it hasn't made any difference"
(S36, L.Grp.)

Corresponding to the lesbian subjects' perceptions of positive reactions of family and friends, just over half the heterosexual subjects described some positive reaction to the hypothetical situation of a child, sibling or friend coming out to them. These hypothetical responses to the gay person coming out included that it would not bother them at all; they would be happy if the gay person was happy; they would try to understand, accept or be supportive; they would help with any problems. A third of the heterosexual subjects described some kind of positive response to the possibility of a friend coming out to them; a similar number perceived some positive response to a sibling coming out to them; and just under a quarter of the heterosexual subjects described some positive response in the hypothetical situation of a child coming out to them. The following quote illustrates a response categorised as both neutral and positive.

"...what you ought to do, I think, with any teenage child who says he or she is gay is to make it clear that, you know, there are alternatives, and that all sorts of things during a period of great sexual upheaval can happen. But I don't think you should say 'oh, this is dreadful..never darken my doors again' - you have to help them to try and understand their own sexuality"
(S16, H.Grp.)

A positive change in reaction over time by one or more family members or friends was described by 35% of the lesbian sample. Included in this were reactions such as 'is coming to terms with', or an improved relationship. Seven subjects described this positive change from parents, and four subjects from other family.

Twenty percent of lesbian subjects described a positive change over time in perceived reaction of one or more friends. Only one heterosexual subject was recorded as describing any positive change in reaction over time.

Overall, significantly more lesbian subjects than heterosexual subjects mentioned either an initial positive response or a positive change over time ($\chi^2=6.994$, $df=1$, $p<0.01$). Considering heterosexual group responses only, there was no significant difference between male and female subjects mentioning positive responses ($\chi^2=0.543$, $df=1$, $p>0.05$).

Table 7.3.14: Number of subjects and percentage of sample mentioning the most frequently occurring negative response categories

Category	description	no. of lesbian subjects	no. of heterosexual subjects	Total n	% Total
20.2.1	general negative	25	18	43	61
20.2.6	not easy to talk about	20	2	22	31
20.2.4	a distancing	5	12	17	24
20.2.12	prefer them to be straight /want them to have children	5	9	14	20
20.2.2	extreme negative	9	4	13	19
20.2.13	thinks/hopes it's a phase	9	3	12	17
20.2.9	concerned at what others might say /stigma	4	7	11	16
20.2.3	rejection	7	1	8	11
20.2.8	blames self	3	5	8	11
20.2.x	misc. negative	5	2	7	10

Some kind of negative reaction from one or more friends or family members was described by 88% of the lesbian sample. Correspondingly, some negative response in the hypothetical situation of a child, sibling or

friend coming out to them was described by 80% of the heterosexual sample. There was no significant difference between the two groups in frequencies of subjects mentioning some negative reaction ($\chi^2=0.272$, $df=1$, $p>0.05$). The most frequently mentioned negative response categories are shown in Table 7.3.14. General negative responses included: shocked, upset, disapproved, does not believe it, cannot understand, does not accept, sorrow or unhelpful. Extreme negative responses included: went mad, appalled, horrified, felt revolted, anger or extremely disappointed. These extreme reactions were described by almost a quarter of lesbian subjects, but only four heterosexual subjects. The lesbian subjects described such reactions mainly from parents and friends rather than siblings or other family. The heterosexual extreme reactions were towards children and siblings, rather than friends.

[re children] "I think I'd be very, very angry and annoyed, and go all out to find blame and that sort of thing" (S27, H.Grp.)

Seven lesbian subjects (18% of the lesbian sample) described rejection by a family member or friend (one case involved a parent; two, other family; and four, friends). Only one heterosexual subject suggested he would reject, and this covered children, siblings and friends. Altogether, just over a quarter of the total sample described one or more reactions categorised as either extreme negative, or rejection.

"And as I say, I have lost a couple of friends, people..who've just not approved, who've just sort of been judgemental .. I haven't missed them because I - after the original hurt - I thought, well..they weren't friends. There've been some who've stayed friends who say 'well I really can't understand it' ... - but there are still some friends that I know that if I came out to, I would lose them, and I like them too much to want to risk losing them ... and there are some again that I've come out to, and they've gone gulp, okay, and stayed friends, but it's not the same - there's a distancing, an awkwardness ... "

(S32, L.Grp.)

Considering the responses relating to social stigma, together with the neutral response of being concerned regarding society/societal pressure, it was found that heterosexual subjects were more likely to mention this aspect than lesbian subjects ($\chi^2=5.634$, $df=1$, $p<0.05$). Some form of social stigma or societal pressure was mentioned by 40% of the heterosexual subjects.

"..it's not just the individual, it's the immediate family as well that actually get affected..."

(S14, H.Grp.)

One of the major reasons given for wishing to come out was to be able to speak freely with others. However, just over half the total sample described reactions of either a distancing (awkwardness or strain long term; being wary; keeping one's distance; scared the person might be attracted to them) or of the subject not being easy to talk about now (long-term), or not having been discussed since coming out. The heterosexual sample tended to respond more in terms of the distancing category, and the lesbian sample in terms of the subject not having been discussed since. That the subject was difficult to talk about now, or had not been discussed since coming out, was mentioned by 30% of the lesbian sample in connection with parents; 23% of the lesbian subjects regarding other family members; and 10%, in relation to friends.

Almost a third of the total sample described reactions categorised as 'hopes it was a phase' or 'would prefer them to be straight/unhappy they couldn't have children'. Responses concerning blaming self/ wondering if it was their fault, mentioned by 11% of the total sample, were mainly concerned with the parent-child relationship.

Some kind of neutral response was mentioned by all the heterosexual subjects, and over 80% of the lesbian subjects. Responses categorized as neutral/mixed general (including: I don't really know what they felt/not sure

if they understood/I don't think I'd feel anything at all/is not a relevant issue/I wouldn't be for or against it/it wouldn't bother me too much/found it a bit difficult/concerned for me/don't think I'd feel bad) were mentioned by 77% of the total sample. Surprise was mentioned by just over a quarter of the total sample, while not being surprised/having suspected, was mentioned by 17% of the total sample.

"I just can't imagine that within the family you wouldn't have some gradual knowledge of it ... you wouldn't suddenly discover that your brother or your sister were gay..." (S16, H.Grp.)

Uncertainty as to how they would react or not being able to tell until the situation arises was mentioned by half of the heterosexual sample.

"..a lot would depend on the context in which they're telling me, like why are they telling me, why has it come to light etc." (S23, H.Grp.)

Sex differences were a further issue, although nearly three quarters of the heterosexual subjects mentioned one or more incidences in which their reactions would be the same for a male or female person coming out to them, and there were no differences between male and female heterosexual subjects for this (Fisher Exact test, two tailed, $p=0.682$). However, 43% of the heterosexual group mentioned one or more incidences of feeling less bothered or more understanding of a female coming out to them; and 27% of the heterosexual sample mentioned one or more incidences of feeling less bothered or more understanding if a male came out to them.

"It's terrible, I think I'm much more tolerant of men than I am of women being gay. I've thought about that sometimes and I think it's because since I like men, I can be sympathetic with anybody liking men..."

(S12, H.Grp. female)

For those feeling less bothered regarding a female coming out to them, there was no significant difference between male and female subjects ($\chi^2=2.172$, $df=1$, $p>0.05$). More

female subjects than male subjects, however, mentioned feeling less bothered about a male coming out to them (Fisher Exact test, one tailed, $p=0.018$). A confused or contradictory response, or a response indicating some other kind of difference regarding gender, was given by nearly a quarter of the heterosexual subjects.

For the communication group women, perceptions of possible reactions of others to issues they had found difficult to discuss were usually negative. Perceived possible reactions included that the other would not understand; would disapprove; would be upset or embarrassed; or that the other was not interested, or did not want to discuss it. Where the topic was eventually talked about, actual reactions of the other person were often perceived in positive terms.

"I would think that almost everyone would not understand what I was feeling"

(S10, C.Grp. re feelings about marriage, fidelity and trust)

"Very, very understanding. She couldn't offer much help, but she did listen and I think she did understand"

(S10, describing reaction)

With mixed feelings about the possible reaction of others, the subject may not have attempted to discuss the issue.

"I'm sure they would be fine .. I don't see why they shouldn't be. I'm just not brave enough - I haven't quite got the confidence and courage yet"

(S2, C.Grp. re having eczema)

Overall, perceptions of possible reactions to issues that communication group subjects had found difficult to talk about with family and/or friends, and the subjects' related feelings, were quite similar in range to the perceptions of possible reactions, and associated feelings, of the lesbian subjects in coming out.

The outcome: satisfaction/dissatisfaction with coming out

"So that's why I feel content with myself because the people that are important to me have accepted it" (S12, L.Grp.)

General feelings about having come out were reflected both in subjects' positive and negative feelings about being lesbian, and in subjects' perceptions of the main benefit of coming out. Thirty percent of the lesbian sample mentioned being yourself or being open as a positive aspect of being lesbian. Over a quarter of the lesbian subjects mentioned the negative subcategory that included wanting to be whole self/want to talk freely/hate to deny essence of me/weary of lies/fighting. Negative feelings about being lesbian that were connected with others' attitudes were mentioned by 45% of the lesbian sample.

Describing their perceptions of the main benefit of coming out, three quarters of the lesbian sample mentioned being yourself: being true to yourself, having credibility with yourself, being a whole person (mentioned by 65% of sample, with no significant difference between subjects aged under thirty years old and those aged thirty or more); or not having to pretend that you are straight or keep part of yourself secret (mentioned by 15% of sample); or feeling freer or more in control (mentioned by 15% of sample).

"Being yourself - it has to be" (S7, L.Grp.)

Benefits of coming out concerned with one's general relationship to others were mentioned by approximately two thirds of the lesbian sample. This included mention of the strain when friends do not know; being able to stop lying, pretending or covering up; or being more relaxed, having more energy for other things (mentioned by 35% of the lesbian sample); being able to share feelings with friends or family, not having to hide, being accepted by others as oneself (30% of sample); people stopping making assumptions of heterosexuality and becoming aware we exist (15% of sample); people realizing

we're not weird and possibly becoming more positive towards gays generally (mentioned by 18% of sample).

"..you can't live your life keeping a whole part of yourself a big secret. I think it's immoral to expect anyone to do that" (S34, L.Grp.)

"The nice thing, I find, about being able to be open with straight people is I can make jokes about myself!" (S31, L.Grp.)

"You simply cannot live your life until people deal with you and accept you for what you are" (S7, L.Grp.)

The emphasis emerging from the communication group accounts regarding feelings about having talked to someone about a difficult topic concerned relief or feeling better in some way. This was mentioned by almost all of the communication group subjects.

"I generally feel an incredible sense of relief" (S10, C.Grp.)

"I understand things - usually a lot clearer - a lot calmer; a lot stronger; more confident" (S6, C. Grp.)

'Relief' was mentioned by some lesbian group subjects, but their focus tended to be on authenticity and integrity as a person.

Some further issues

From a social psychological theoretical perspective, coming out to others must be seen within the context of social representations of gender and human nature, and their content of stereotypes, beliefs, attitudes and attributions relating to lesbianism. In any social interaction where the lesbian has not come out, she is perceived primarily as a woman, and gender-related behaviour as described by Deaux and Major (1987) may occur. Coming out as lesbian adds further complexity to interactions. From the viewpoint of social identity theory, when a lesbian tells a heterosexual person about herself, her social identity as lesbian, rather than her personal identity, becomes salient. This may threaten

distinctiveness relating to heterosexuality and/or gender roles for the heterosexual person. Further, the heterosexual person may make attributions about the lesbian based on social category membership. Ambiguous situations in which assumptions may have been made by either lesbian or heterosexual person, and may or may not have been perceived accurately by the other, also need consideration.

Issues that many studies of 'attitudes towards homosexuals' have failed to consider have included sex of subject and/or sex of target; variation with situation or social/ideological context; and that knowledge of a person's homosexuality may vary. Interpretation of findings of previous studies relating to attitudes towards homosexuals is thus somewhat problematic. Findings in this study indicated that it is essential to take into account such issues. There were some differences in male and female heterosexual subjects' attitudes and perceptions. Perceived reactions in the hypothetical situation of a family member or friend coming out sometimes varied with sex of target, relationship to target, and/or perceived situation. There were varying levels or ways of 'knowing' someone was homosexual. These ranged from speculation, guessing or making assumptions, to having been told in a direct manner; and also from having been told but not believing it, or perceiving it as a phase, to having been told and accepting it.

On an individual level, functions of attitudes (Herek, 1984a) may serve as a starting point for considering possibilities of changing attitudes. However, for more fundamental attitude modification, change would need to occur within dominant social representations of human nature and gender.

7.3.4 Interplay of influences in the coming out process

Interaction between different aspects of the coming out process

Although the results for coming out to self and coming out to others have been described separately for clarity, they do interact with each other, and this interaction is fundamental to any understanding of the coming out process, and requires examination. Further, their interaction needs to be understood within the general social context of stereotyping and attitudes towards homosexuals, and the encompassing social representations.

Coming out to self is an intrinsically social process. It is shaped by perceptions of the attitudes of others; of stereotyping within society; and of social representations of human nature, gender and sexuality. Whether the woman has been in an actual relationship or not before identifying herself as lesbian, coming out to self is based on her perceptions of her feelings directed towards other women. Her emotional acceptance of these feelings will be strongly related to her perceptions of the social context; and her awareness of lesbianism as an option will be firmly based within this context too.

Perceptions of self as lesbian are likely to be reinforced on coming out to others, particularly on coming out to other lesbians. Some women come out to other lesbians at a stage when they feel they might be lesbian, rather than having fully identified themselves as lesbian. On coming out to heterosexual friends or family, perceptions of self as lesbian are again likely to be reinforced whatever their reactions. This reinforcement is perhaps more obvious where the heterosexual person's response has been positive. However, a negative reaction from a heterosexual person may also serve to reinforce perception of self as lesbian.

The coming out process viewed from a life span perspective

Coming out needs to be viewed from the perspective of a process taking place over a woman's life span within the context of the cultural background specific to the historical time period, and interacting with particular events within a woman's life. Life span lines for each lesbian subject focused on coming out to self and others (i.e. occurrence of first feelings; initial identification as lesbian; coming out into the lesbian community; first coming out to a heterosexual person; coming out to family and heterosexual friends) in the context of the personal events, relationships, and emotions occurring within a woman's life over the historical period specific to her life. An example for one subject is shown below. (Further examples are shown in Appendix L).

Subject 35: life span line

	1962	'67	'72	'77	'82	'87	'88	Year
	0	5	10	15	20	25	26	Age in years
			FF		IL		COL	
					COHF		COP	
							COS	
Events					joined army		met partner	
Relationships					had boy- friends but no important relationships			
Emotions					took 3/4 years to accept self - felt confused, resentful, angry			

Key

FF first feelings
IL identified self as lesbian
COL came out into lesbian community
COHF came out to heterosexual friend(s)
COP came out to parent(s)
COS came out to sibling

From an examination of all the life span lines, it is seen that while for some subjects, first feelings, identification as lesbian, coming out to other lesbians and to some heterosexual significant others, have occurred within a very short space of time (e.g. subjects 4, 18, 25, 27 and 36), for most subjects these have taken place over a long timescale. Often, first feelings were traced back to teens or childhood, with identification of self occurring many years later. For approximately half the sample, identity of self as lesbian occurred before coming out into the lesbian community - in some cases, many years before.

Events happening in a woman's life at a particular time may provide opportunities for different aspects of coming out to occur. Examples of such life events include a marriage ending; starting work in an occupation, such as the services, where there are many lesbians; meeting an 'out' lesbian for the first time; moving to a different country; becoming involved with feminism; or going to university as a mature student. Other personal events may hinder aspects of coming out. An example of this would be getting married.

As a background to these personal events, there is the cultural context of the time period. Almost half the subjects first identified self as lesbian/gay during the last half of the 1970's and the first half of the 1980's. During this period there was a largely positive influence from the women's movement; equal opportunities initiatives; and in London, positive initiatives from the Greater London Council on gay and lesbian issues. It was before the main awareness of AIDS as a problem in this

country; and before the introduction of Clause 28. The period during the latter part of the 1970's and the early 1980's probably formed a more positive context for coming out to take place within than either the preceding years, or the more recent years.

Age itself may also be relevant. Approximately a quarter of the communication group subjects mentioned talking to others had become easier as they became older.

"..certainly as I've got older, I've got better at communicating"
(S16, C.Grp.)

Comparison with other minority group or life experiences

The questions for lesbian subjects concerning minority groups and life experiences focused on possible similarities with 'coming out'. Heterosexual subjects were asked a question focusing on possible similarities of other minority group experiences with those of lesbians and gay men. Thus, whereas the lesbian group questions were directed specifically to 'coming out', the heterosexual group question was not.

Minority groups were in some cases mentioned concerning similarities and in other cases concerning differences, or some combination of similarities and differences. Percentages of subjects mentioning these groups thus indicate minority groups mentioned in comparison, rather than those that were necessarily considered as similar.

Categories concerning race or religion (referring to for example, Blacks, Asians, ethnic minorities, racism; Jews; Christians; religious groups generally) were mentioned by over 70% of the total lesbian and heterosexual groups sample. Sexually defined groups which included gay men, paedophiles or rapists, transvestites, transsexuals or bisexuals were mentioned by just over 15% of the total sample. Just over 17% of the total sample mentioned minority groups generally/ many groups/any kind of social grouping. A similar percentage mentioned the mentally ill/mentally

handicapped or disabled. Women (or sexism) was mentioned by 11% of the total sample. Approximately a quarter of the total sample suggested there was nothing quite the same, no other similar minority groups, or that they were unable to think of any such groups.

Only the lesbian subjects were asked to consider if there were any individual experiences similar to coming out. Approximately a third of the women could not think of any or did not understand the question. Twenty percent of the women however mentioned change in political ideas, philosophical beliefs or religion. Fifteen percent of the lesbian sample mentioned knowing something that you think may adversely affect how others think or feel about you/telling something that you have hidden because you have not thought people would accept it. Possible events mentioned by small numbers of subjects included telling someone you are pregnant; telling parents you want to marry a black boyfriend; being politically active in an extreme group; and telling parents/others of career plans or that you do not want to go to college.

Comparisons between different minority groups or life experiences tended to be made considering discrimination or prejudice (mentioned by 64% of the total lesbian and heterosexual group samples) or by considering having to hide (mentioned by 43% of the this sample). The category of discrimination/ prejudice included mention of stigma; social acceptability; stereotyping; lack of understanding; being thought of as abhorrent/with horror or disgust; ridicule, persecution and pressure. The category concerning having to hide included mention of being unable to be open; invisibility; concealing or passing, as a difference or similarity between gay people and other groups or life experiences. Possibly as a function of the different questions used to elicit responses on this topic, more heterosexual subjects than lesbian subjects made

comparisons considering discrimination or prejudice ($\chi^2=4.512$, $df=1$, $p<0.05$); but more lesbian subjects than heterosexual subjects made comparisons in which having to hide or invisibility was considered ($\chi^2=9.626$, $df=1$, $p<0.01$).

General communication with family and friends

Disclosure of self as lesbian to significant others is often perceived as difficult or problematic. It may be helpful to consider what kind of topics generally may be difficult to discuss with others.

The most frequently mentioned topic in the communication interviews that teenagers found difficult to discuss with others was sex. This was mentioned by almost all the subjects, either in the general case of communication between teenagers and their parents, or relating to their own teenage years and communication with parents, siblings or friends. Other topics mentioned as difficult for teenagers to discuss included feelings about parents or siblings, and family problems; friends; school work; and drugs or alcohol, (see Table 7.3.15).

Topics that subjects mentioned having found difficult to discuss with others as adults included relationships and/or sex, mentioned by approximately two thirds of the subjects; career and money, each mentioned by a quarter of the subjects; and death and religion, each mentioned by twenty percent of the women, (see Table 7.3.16).

Table 7.3.15: Most frequently mentioned topics that teenagers might find difficult to discuss with others

Topic	No. of subjects	% Subjects
sex	19	95
relationship with parents/siblings, or family problems	8	40
school work	7	35
friends	7	35
drugs/alcohol	6	30

Table 7.3.16: Most frequently mentioned topics subjects as adults found difficult to discuss with family or friends*

Topic	No. of subjects	% Subjects
relationships	8	40
sex	7	35
career	5	25
money	5	25
death	4	20
religion	4	20

*Subjects were informed that for personal responses they did not need to specify the nature of the topic, therefore these figures indicate only those topics the subjects specified.

Issues or topics that the communication group subjects reported having found difficult to discuss with others may be seen as akin to aspects of the coming out process for lesbians in terms of relating to identity, personal relationships, or a different way of life; to threat, loss or stigma; and/or concerning the reactions of others. Examples in which there was potential threat to identity included inner conflicts; vocational aims related to religious beliefs and conflicting with family expectations; fear as a child that one was adopted; and concern with academic failings or fear of failing at work. In some of the issues where identity was threatened, stigma may have been involved too. Examples were a weight problem; and having a son in prison which the subject considered might lead others to view her in

terms of failure as a mother. Sometimes issues of identity were linked to a different way of life from others. This was the case where career aspirations conflicted with others' expectations; and where there was difficulty settling into living in a different country.

Communication about relationships also has obvious parallels with the process of coming out, and was mentioned as a source of difficulty by a number of women. Examples included telling parents about a non-Jewish boyfriend; telling others that one was leaving one's husband; marriage to a man not accepted by parents; and cases of choosing not to talk to others about affairs.

Some subjects mentioned choosing not to talk to others about topics they perceived might upset the other, or that they perceived the other did not want to discuss. Examples included a subject not discussing sex with her children because she suggested they did not want to talk about it with her; and a subject not discussing religion with work colleagues, but ready to talk about it if they wished to.

Loss and/or threat may be seen as relevant to difficulties in communication with others described by subjects relating to death. This was found difficult to talk about in different ways, which included planning for the future, such as parents making wills; experiencing bereavement; and talking to bereaved people.

The difficulty of talking to others about money would seem to have little or no connection with the issues involved in coming out. Possibly, for some however, it may be associated with identity.

Thus, comparison of topics reported difficult to discuss with others would suggest that those most akin to aspects of the coming out process may involve threat to identity and/or relationships. Threat to identity may sometimes be associated with stigma or a different way of life. Protecting others and loss were further aspects relating to difficulties in communication: the former has

been seen as a direct issue in the decision of whether to come out or not to others; the latter is associated in a more indirect manner. Loss may relate to the coming out process in terms of rejection and the potential loss of friends for example; or to the loss of the expected heterosexual future of marriage and family.

In an 'ideal' world

'In an ideal world, how would lesbians be perceived?' Responses to this question emphasized how lesbians would be seen as 'normal'; 'like everyone else'; or equal. Almost two thirds of the lesbian sample and over half of the heterosexual sample gave responses indicating this.

"- just as good - or bad; just as normal - or extraordinary; just as worthy - or unworthy; just as important - or insignificant; just as special, just as individual, as anyone else"

(S39, L.Grp.)

"In exactly the same way as everyone else i.e. they should be judged or valued on their acts and words, and not on their sexuality"

(S16, H.Grp.)

Thirty percent of the lesbian sample, but very few heterosexual subjects, mentioned positive qualities of lesbians.

"..perhaps, to some extent they could be seen as standard bearers for women believing that their qualities, traditionally regarded as weaknesses, such as emotional, gentle, co-operative, unaggressive, should be seen as qualities by society"

(S7, L.Grp.)

"As caring, compassionate, reliable, tolerant, friends"

(S22, L.Grp.)

Five heterosexual subjects, but no lesbian subjects, responded negatively.

"Misguided, possibly in need of help. To be discouraged"

(S25, H.Grp.)

"There would be no homosexual people. All people would be heterosexual..."

(S17, H.Grp. giving the religious view)

Approximately a quarter of the lesbian sample and a similar proportion of the heterosexual subjects mentioned equal rights for lesbians in an ideal world.

Some further issues

It is necessary to understand the coming out process within a context that takes into account interplay of phenomena at intra-psychic, interpersonal, intergroup and societal/cultural levels of analysis. No single social psychological theory seems sufficient by itself to explain the coming out process. A substantial part of the process may be understood from the perspective of social identity theory, but its view tends to be ahistorical. Social representations are crucial to the understanding of the coming out process, but do not provide an adequate basis for analysis at the level of the individual. Attribution theory is only relevant to limited aspects of coming out, and methodological problems in the conceptualization of the internal/external dichotomy restrict clarity of application. In addition to the positive contributions of social identity theory, social representations, and social attributions in understanding the coming out process, Breakwell's model of coping with threatened identity, has provided a useful analysis. It has also been helpful to consider coming out from the perspective of self-disclosure generally, and within the framework of the notion of stigma.

It is thought essential that coming out be examined from both the lesbian and heterosexual perspectives. This study has suggested some basic differences in the understanding of homosexuality between lesbians and heterosexuals which require further consideration.

Methodological concerns relating to sampling, interview biases and interpretation of qualitative data must also be taken into account in considering the findings.

Fundamentally, it is suggested that coming out is only an issue within a heterosexist society; and underlying heterosexism are inflexible notions of gender. Thus, any interpretation of the coming out process for lesbians must be based within the context of an understanding of gender relations in our society.

CHAPTER EIGHT
CASE STUDIES WITHIN
A 'THREATENED IDENTITIES' FRAMEWORK

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Breakwell's (1986) model of coping with threatened identity is used here as a framework for analysis of ten case studies. Lesbian subjects' accounts were divided into ten groups. Firstly, they were divided into three groups reflecting lesbian and heterosexual experiences/feelings. Those categorized as 'always lesbian' had been classified as indicating no heterosexual period, and no important relationships with men. Those accounts indicating a heterosexual background and perception of self as heterosexual at the time formed the second group. The third group was formed by accounts indicating heterosexual experience, but perception of self as possibly lesbian at the time. These three groups were then subdivided by age category of subject (under thirty years old; aged thirty years or over but less than forty years old; and aged forty years or over). Finally, three subjects' accounts in which a lesbian identity had been chosen through involvement with feminism were removed from the above groupings and formed the tenth group: lesbian women with a political background. These categorizations involved varying degrees of subjectivity, and division into groupings was not always clear. The groups therefore need to be considered as approximations rather than clearly bounded divisions. Three subjects were unclassified in the above groupings.

Table 8.1.1 indicates which subjects' accounts were included in the ten groups. From each of the ten groups, one subject's account was selected as most representative of that particular group, and case studies of these ten subjects are described below. (An additional case study of a woman (S13) in the early stages of coming out who fits particularly well into the threatened identities

framework is shown in Appendix Q).

See Appendix P for operational definitions used as guidance in analysis of the accounts.

Table 8.1.1: Subject numbers grouped according to lesbian/heterosexual experiences/feelings and age category

	'always' lesbian	heterosexual background	heterosexual & lesbian background
age less than 30 yrs.	2, 11, 20, 23 ^c , 24, 26	4 ^c	1 ^c , 9, 14, 17, 21, 35
30 to 39 yrs. old	7 ^c , 8	13, 19, 25 ^c	38 ^c
age 40 yrs. or over	10, 40 ^c , 41	5, 15, 16, 28, 31 ^c , 32, 33, 34, 36, 37	12 ^c , 22
political background		18, 27, 39 ^c	

c: case study for subject

8.2 THE CASE STUDIES

8.2.1 Women who perceived themselves as 'always' lesbian

Case study of a woman under thirty years old who has always perceived herself as lesbian

"From a very, very young age. I don't know, possibly as young as eight or nine ... at the time when my classmates say, or my friends, were noticing boys, I would be having those feelings towards girls ... when I realized what the word lesbian meant, I knew that that's what I was"

Subject 23 who was 22 years old, traced her initial lesbian feelings back to childhood, and had first become aware of the word 'homosexual' at about the age of nine or ten, and a little later, of the word 'lesbian'.

"..at first, and this might have even been pre-teens, but at first I thought that there was no way I could sort of live a life-style like men and women. I literally didn't realize there were other people like me. I literally went through that stage that a lot of people go through, I thought I was the only one, so I thought oh well, there's no future for me as far as that's concerned. I thought I'd have to live this lie for ever, and never be able to tell anybody, and just, you know, pretend that I liked boys and men. I thought I was unique!"

Thus, with the understanding of the term lesbian, there was some awareness of negative distinctiveness, and the need to use the interpersonal coping strategy of passing. Intra-psychic coping strategies employed were probably acceptance strategies rather than deflection strategies: possibly compartmentalism and compromise change. Conflict regarding a need for authenticity or integrity was also evident.

"..well, then a bit older, I realized there were people like that - like I did see documentaries on television and things like that ... I suppose I did come to terms with it. The only problems it gave me was that I would have pressures of ... keeping it secret ... wishing you were not any different from the others; but apart from that I didn't really have any hang-ups - I never felt that it was wrong or anything like that - just different ... that was probably in my early teens"

Subject 23 looked for information and attempted to make some initial contact with other lesbians.

"...when I was at school, I looked for information about it in the library, and when I was a bit older, well 15 or 16, I wanted to make contact I suppose with other people that were like me, and I was able to do that because I happened to find out about this contact magazine for lesbians ... also, I'd felt really isolated at times, so ..I rang Lesbian and Gay Switchboard a couple of times..."

The image of homosexuals portrayed by the media, and the influence of the women's movement formed part of the social context in which subject 23 was coming out to self.

"..anything about homosexuals really - in the paper or on television - I would make a point of trying to see"

"[The women's movement] literally gave them [lesbians] a voice, and gave them the opportunity to come out I suppose, and mix with each other, and the whole..offshoot really of it is lesbians being able to go on and form things like this contact magazine that I used as my first contact with the lesbian world, and helped to play it's part in making homosexuality more acceptable..."

Subject 23's perceptions of what lesbians might be like

before she met any indicated both some awareness of a stereotype, and some awareness of lesbians as ordinary women.

"..I thought that on the whole they would be less attractive than straight women, and more inclined, you know, to wear masculine clothes, and, you know, sort of appear quite masculine when you look at them ... a lot of women are like that actually ... pictures in newspapers and magazines, and things on television had given me that impression ... but they would be on the whole, no different from straight women, that's what I thought!"

The subject perceived heterosexuals as having varied views about lesbians, many not having met any, some having the idea they all look like men, and some people being open-minded. Subject 23's apprehensiveness about meeting other lesbians for the first time also reflected awareness of some negative associations of lesbianism.

"..I was quite scared to do that actually - I didn't know what it would be like meeting them, and how I would be able to cope with it"

The subject's perceptions of reasons why some women are gay and some heterosexual suggest both dispositional and situational attributions.

"...some are born to be gay or to be straight, and others are not forced into it, but others become that way through circumstances ... I think for myself it's this combination of the two really ..."

Lesbianism was not seen as a choice.

"No, I don't think you can choose really. You are or you're not.."

Subject 23 suggested her feelings regarding men were friendly, but not sexual.

"Well, I like men generally ... I just have no sexual feelings towards them whatsoever.."

Continuity of lesbian feelings and emphasis on the need for authenticity or integrity within herself were predominant over subject 23's perceptions of negative distinctiveness. Possible challenge to self-esteem was avoided with the interpersonal strategy of passing.

The subject's first experience of coming out to heterosexual people (an aunt and uncle) and her first contact with other lesbians occurred during a short time interval. Telling her aunt and uncle was not approached in a direct manner.

"...well, I didn't actually tell them, they'd guessed - and from what my auntie in particular was saying, I'd sort of guessed that she'd guessed, and she sort of made it clear that she had, and made it very easy for me to say 'Yes, I am' sort of thing"

Asked how they had guessed, the subject reported her aunt had responded 'we've known you since you were very young ... we could tell by seeing you and talking to you...' This could be interpreted as further evidence of continuity.

The subject was unsure as to whether her mother knew about her.

"...I think maybe that my mother could well have guessed, but I've never discussed it with her"

Other members of the family included a father, step-father, sister and brother-in-law, and step-sister.

"I've never really felt the need to tell them ... but just recently ... I thought that maybe I would do"

However there was evidence of some mixed feelings about telling her family.

"...I can't see that they would sort of cut me off really, but I don't know how they would react, and I just don't feel that I could find the words to tell them - but I do often think it would be easier if they did know really. So erm.. maybe I'm waiting for them to sort of ask me about it before I'm brave enough to tell them!"

Subject 23 had not been in contact with her straight friends for a while, but suggested she may tell them about herself 'if the circumstances are right'. She was not generally out at work either.

"..it does bother me that ... I have to live on this pretence - and also, I feel I've never really formed any lasting friendships through work, and I think partly it's because ..I don't feel I can with people that I'm not ..open with ..."

Thus, subject 23 was relying heavily on the interpersonal coping strategy of passing, with family, heterosexual friends, and work colleagues. Considering the main benefits of coming out, the subject commented: 'I just don't like all this having to pretend that I'm straight...'

In summary, there was strong evidence of predominance of feelings directed towards the same sex from an early age for subject 23. There seemed to be awareness of the negative distinctiveness of lesbianism arising partly from the media. Initial intra-psychic coping tended to make use of acceptance rather than deflection strategies. Self-esteem was then largely maintained through interpersonal support from her aunt and uncle, and early contact with other lesbians; as well as some indirect intergroup support from the influence of the women's movement. Continuity of lesbian feelings had predominated throughout. The interpersonal coping strategy of passing was used extensively by the subject. There were indications, however, of a growing need for authenticity and integrity in her relations with family and friends.

Comparison of case with other subjects in group

Other subjects under thirty years of age whose accounts were classified as falling into the 'always lesbian' group were subject numbers 2, 11, 20, 24 and 26. Some of these subjects had had relationships with men, but as these had been categorized as 'not important', the subjects were included in this group rather than the 'heterosexual and lesbian background' group. There was evidence of continuity of lesbian feelings in these subjects' accounts and all indicated first feelings as occurring around the time of the subjects' teenage years. Almost all suggested identification of self as lesbian before having had a lesbian relationship. The majority of these accounts indicated experience of threat to identity

and mentioned feelings of isolation or loneliness. Further, identity as lesbian was not perceived as a choice, and the women's movement was not seen as having affected coming out directly. Like subject 23, all showed some awareness of the negative distinctiveness of lesbianism, but generally this aspect was not emphasized in the accounts of this group of subjects. Nearly two thirds of these accounts described the main benefits of coming out in terms of 'being oneself', not having to pretend, or freedom; and thus may be seen as reflecting a need for authenticity or integrity.

Case study of a woman in her thirties who has always perceived herself as lesbian

Subject 7, aged 31, traced her lesbian feelings back to the age of about ten. She recalled strong feelings towards a girl in her class that she identified then as indicating her to be lesbian. Before that time she recalled experiencing fairly intense jealousies with changing alliances within a group of friends in her single sex primary school. After having experienced the feelings that had arisen at the age of ten for a couple of years, Subject 7 attempted to find out more about homosexuality through books.

"..I think that I almost knew that what I was feeling was a homosexual feeling before I'd even make a contact with that word. So maybe I had read it somewhere ... I can't remember that the word ever sunk into my consciousness. It always just seemed to be there".

Conflict arose during her teens, not from the feeling of being lesbian itself, but from other people's attitudes towards homosexuality, and the effects of this upon a relationship subject 7 was involved in. The possibility that this relationship might be discovered by others:

"was a daily fear - never out of my mind actually ... it was the most constant feeling in my life at that time - secrecy, fear of being found out, people's reaction to what we were doing, what was going to happen to the relationship if we were found out..."

Eventually the relationship split up, largely as a result of the pressure from others. Dealing with the reactions of others

"...I suffered all sorts of anger, upset, bitterness, sadness, jealousy - real emotional problems"

Continuity of lesbian feelings was given priority, in conflict with an awareness of the associated negative distinctiveness.

"So that was really what I went through most of my adolescence, my teens - a growing consciousness that I was, I suppose, outside the rest of society ... I felt isolated as well, not just traumatised by what was going on".

While growing up, subject 7 held a theory that you could only be lesbian or homosexual if you were an only child without brothers or sisters. Now, she sees lesbianism as probably based on a mixture of nature and nurture, possibly with more to do with the latter. However, she pointed out

"I've always said what's the point in having theories about it, it doesn't matter, either you are or you're not..."

She experiences her lesbian identity as 'a state of being' rather than deriving from choice.

"...it's something I feel I was born with and grew up into ... I never had the choice"

Overall, during this period of coming out to self, continuity of lesbian feelings was given priority throughout, producing challenges to both distinctiveness and self esteem. As well as this, there was fundamental damage to the subject's interpersonal connections and her need for affiliation. Coping strategies used were intrapsychic and interpersonal rather than intergroup. On the

intra-psychic level, the strategies relying on the process of assimilation-accommodation, tended to be those of acceptance rather than deflection. Interpersonally, the subject was certainly using the coping strategies of passing, and she may, at times, have attempted to use either isolation or negativism.

Intergroup coping strategies were not made use of until some years later. Subject 7 eventually came out into the lesbian community in her mid twenties. Awareness of a negative stereotype of lesbians probably played some part in delaying her meeting other lesbians.

"I had the standard image. I thought that they were all built like bulldozers, all wore boiler suits and ripped jeans or whatever, spikey hair, as ugly as anyone could possibly be".

At university, she chose not to join the gay society

"very much because I had that image in my mind of what a lesbian was like, and it probably put me off for quite a few years doing anything about it, coming out.."

During this period, the subject was coping with the possibility of further damage to self esteem, partly through the use of the interpersonal coping strategy of isolation. Generally, her relationships with others were coped with by using the strategy of passing.

Social context change formed the background to subject 7 coming out into the lesbian community. First of all, there was a growing awareness of the existence of other lesbians. For example, at the age of 24, subject 7 recalled watching a television play that portrayed a lesbian relationship. She described "sitting there absolutely spellbound" and realizing that there were women like herself who she should try to make contact with. Around this period, at the end of the 1970's, there would also have been greater group availability.

Group action, in the form of the women's movement, had provided a social context by this time, that subject 7 was able to make use of in facilitating her eventual

entry into the lesbian community. Subject 7 perceived becoming involved with the women's movement as a means of moving towards meeting other lesbians.

"...I'm not quite sure I could have just leapt out of being completely closeted, into coming out and being on the gay scene. I think I would have done if there had been no women's movement - I feel pretty sure that I would have done that eventually, but it was an easier way for me to be able to do that..."

Subject 7 was thus provided with new criteria by the women's movement for judging her lesbian identity.

"...I could begin to identify with women instead of having to perceive a mixed situation as being the norm - I could actually see an all-women group as being another norm..."

This enabled re-evaluation of identity content, aiding coping on the intra-psychic level. Looked at from the intergroup perspective, membership within the feminist movement helped to neutralize, to some extent, the effect of threat arising from membership of the gay movement (i.e. an intergroup coping strategy based on multiple group membership). Continuity of feelings was maintained throughout, and the conflict with self esteem gradually decreased.

Coming out to straight women friends took place for this subject mainly once she has begun to experience group support - initially, that of the women's movement rather than that of the lesbian community. This diminished the challenge to self esteem and distinctiveness, and facilitated the subject's need for affiliation. Eventually, it was affiliation that was given priority.

It was following the traumatic break-up of a relationship that subject 7 came out to her father. She described how she felt guilty about her parents not having been told, but that she had felt embarrassed about the idea of telling them. The 'fairly good reaction' would have provided some immediate support to self-esteem, as well as having longer term implications for

this identity principle.

Subject 7 perceived the main benefit of coming out as 'being yourself'. This need for authenticity and integrity, regarding herself and her relations with others, means that coming out affects her self esteem in a positive manner.

"I would find it very hard to have any credibility with myself if I hadn't come out. I don't blame people for not having come out, of course I don't, but I find it very hard to be able to deal with myself I think, and that's why I did suffer over telling my parents, because of this credibility gap that I felt that I was guilty of myself. I think that's all it is, that's what it's about. You simply cannot live your life until people deal with you and accept you for what you are, and to have the strength if you like, not to care or not to worry if they can't relate to you on that level. But until you've tested those waters, you don't really know, and the knowledge is the beginning of self approval, I think. Until you have that knowledge then you are not going to know whereabouts you fit in the greater scheme of things, and I think that's fundamentally important to your own well being."

Comparison of case with other subjects in group

There was only one other subject in this group. This was subject 8, aged 30 years old. This subject's account indicated that she had experienced considerable threat to identity during her teens and twenties. She had initially coped with the threat by predominantly using the intra-psychic acceptance strategy of compartmentalism rather than deflection strategies such as denial. The interpersonal strategy of passing was used with parents and at work. From heterosexual friends and a sibling, there had been some interpersonal support. This subject's account indicated that she was still experiencing conflict regarding lesbianism in relation to her work and religious beliefs. Some group support from meeting other lesbians was evident. A benefit of coming out mentioned was that others would stop making assumptions. This may be seen as indicating some need for authenticity.

Case study within a threatened identities framework of a woman over forty years old who has always perceived herself as lesbian

First thoughts that she might be gay occurred for subject 40 at the age of seventeen or eighteen. This subject, now aged 47 years old, also recalled having felt attracted to women while younger, with crushes on senior girls at school.

"...I was probably about seventeen or eighteen, although I guess it goes further back than that, because when I was at school, yes, I did feel attracted to women, but then at a younger age, I didn't know why ... Probably, if I'm honest, I perhaps thought it was only a phase..."

From her description of her feelings at this time, there is little evidence of conflict related to lesbianism itself.

"..I didn't have mixed feelings at all. It didn't worry me. I wasn't upset by it. I mean, I can't honestly say whether I thought it was normal or abnormal or anything. It just seemed to be right, I suppose, and I didn't think I was wrong in any way"

At eighteen years old, having left school and joined the services, subject 40 had her first affair. There was no conflict within herself about being lesbian, but there was an awareness of others viewing homosexuality negatively, and feelings of guilt arising from this. This could be interpreted in terms of continuity of feelings conflicting with self esteem.

"I haven't ever had mixed feelings. Not in the way I felt. I suppose the only other feeling I would have against - sort of in relation to it - would be the worry, possibly, of my parents finding out. I suppose not because I felt it was wrong, but I thought they would think it was wrong - and so you get this - I suppose guilt, really, because subconsciously you maybe think that you're letting them down, because we all accept that society evolves because heterosexuality is considered the norm"

The subject had had no important relationships with men. She reported generally getting on quite well with men,

but never having been interested in them sexually.

Subject 40's present feelings about being gay reflected a similar lack of conflict within herself regarding lesbianism, but an awareness of other's negative attitudes.

"Oh, very positive. I mean I'm not worried about the way I am. Well, I suppose I would be worried .. if I thought somebody was going to be nasty enough to 'phone work and create havoc for me, then yes I would be worried - but it wouldn't change the way I am"

During subject 40's early stages of coming out, there was little contact with books, and she could recall no films or television programmes. This probably reflected the comparative lack of availability of books, and low media coverage of gay issues, in the early 1960's.

"..I think the only book I ever read was The Well of Loneliness..."

Before meeting other lesbians, subject 40 suggested she had had no thoughts about what they might be like. Her first meetings were with her girlfriend and the friends they made together during the early 1960's. She suggested she had "never been much of a scene person". There would have been little availability of groups to attend during the period subject 40 was first coming out. Similarly, the influence of feminism at this time was comparatively small. Subject 40 perceived the women's movement as having played no part in her coming out as gay, or in her life as a gay person generally. Overall, probably partly due to limited availability, subject 40 had made little use of group coping strategies.

This subject perceived the possibility that homosexuality may be within everyone, and circumstances may influence 'which road one takes'. She did not, however, perceive that lesbianism was a choice for her.

"A choice? No, I am the way I am. End of story, really"

The subject's attributions relating to sexual orientation

were both dispositional and situational.

Thus, the early stages of coming out for subject 40 involved continuity of lesbian feelings predominating in conflict with some awareness of the negative distinctiveness of lesbianism. On the intra-psychic level, possibly the main coping strategy used was compartmentalism - the notion of lesbianism having been assimilated into her identity structure, but kept largely separate from other identity content. On the interpersonal level, the main coping strategy used at this stage was passing. Intergroup coping strategies were probably limited in availability, and little use was made of them.

Coming out to family members for subject 40 occurred mainly as a result of her need for support. Telling an aunt and uncle occurred when the subject was upset at being separated for a period of time from her girlfriend. The major need for support occurred later, when in the mid 1970's, the girlfriend with whom she had been in a long term relationship, suddenly died.

"..it was a tremendous shock, totally unexpected - and my mother just couldn't understand why I was in such a state"

Subject 40 chose to tell some old friends of her parents and have them tell her parents for her. Her sister was also told about the subject being gay at this time. The sister had 'known' before, but it had not previously been discussed. Thus, for subject 40, at this time in her life, the interpersonal strategy of passing was no longer adequate for coping with her situation, and had to be dropped. If the death of her girlfriend had not occurred, subject 40 suggested she would not have spoken to her family about herself, as they had accepted her relationship, and she did not think she had gained by telling them.

The issue of coming out to heterosexual friends was dealt with by subject 40 in a similar manner to her initial situation with family. She assumed that they

knew because they were aware that she lived with a woman, and seemed to accept this, but she had never actually spoken to them about it.

"Well - I say yes [I have come out to heterosexual friends] - no, I don't think I've ever sort of stood up and said 'you know I'm gay', not as blatant as that, but I think people are tuned in to it..."

At work, this subject was not out.

"I mean I wouldn't lose my job, but I'm not a hundred percent certain that I would be accepted as readily as I am, if they categorically knew. I mean, I may be totally wrong, but all the same I'm not prepared to take that risk"

The subject suggested that she perceived coming out as an individual issue.

"...I think it's an individualistic thing. I mean some people do it quietly, and if that's what they want to do, fair enough. Other people make a big scene about doing it, and equally, if that's the way they want to do it, again fair enough. But I personally would do it the quieter way"

Thus, this subject coped with the issue of whether or not to tell others about herself by generally assuming that they 'knew'.

In summary, continuity of lesbian feelings was predominant in subject 40's experiences. An awareness of the negative distinctiveness of lesbianism was probably indicated in her reluctance to tell others about herself. For some time, the intra-psychic coping strategy of compartmentalism and the interpersonal coping strategy of passing were successful in avoiding threat. However, with crises - in particular with the death of her partner - passing was no longer adequate for the needs of the subject, and this interpersonal strategy had to be dropped regarding her family. With most heterosexual friends, subject 40 tended to assume they 'knew' and perceived it as unnecessary to tell them directly. Subject 40 became aware of herself as lesbian during the early 1960's, a time when there was comparatively little media coverage of gay issues, and little availability of

group support. Her limited use of intergroup coping strategies may perhaps be seen as to some extent a reflection of the historical period during which her initial coming out occurred.

Comparison of case with other subjects in group

The two other cases in this group were subjects 10 and 41, both in their early forties. In both accounts, there was some evidence of continuity of lesbian feelings with the recall of crushes on other girls at school. Identification of self as lesbian occurred during subject 10's early twenties and subject 41's late twenties. Subject 10 reported having dressed in men's clothing which she suggested may have indicated her sexual orientation to others. She may have been using the interpersonal coping strategy of compliance. Subject 41 had chosen not to tell her family about herself, and therefore used the coping strategy of passing. She reported having told some heterosexual friends about herself. Both these subjects suggested the women's movement had played an indirect part in their lives, and both seemed to have derived some group support from the lesbian community. Subject 10's account emphasized her dislike of deception, while subject 41's account mentioned 'being true to yourself' as a main benefit of coming out. Thus both accounts indicated a need for authenticity.

8.2.2 Lesbian women with heterosexual backgrounds

Case study of a lesbian woman under thirty years old with a heterosexual background

Twenty three year old subject 4 had perceived herself as heterosexual until only a few months ago. She had had two serious relationships with men but neither had been satisfactory. She had been living abroad.

"Then, I thought, well, go out with a woman - and I thought no, no, you can't just think that, because your relationships with men don't work out, turn to women, that's ridiculous"

Soon afterwards, while still living overseas, she was staying in the flat of a woman,

"..I realized I was very attracted to her"

It was from this time that subject 4 began to perceive herself as lesbian. Looking back to earlier years, the subject described her perceptions of her feelings then:

"[My sister] started going out with boys, I was about eleven, and I was really upset. I don't know why, but I used to lie awake at night and cry. I sort of felt she was moving away.."

"..when I was about thirteen, I remember everyone suddenly got interested in doing their hair and everything, reading 'My Guy' magazine, and talking about boys. I didn't really go along with that - but then eventually I did, and sort of grew up, and went on diets, and all these kind of things"

"..when I was about sixteen..I never had a boyfriend. I used to think, sort of abstractly ...- not 'What if I am a lesbian' but 'What if I were a lesbian. What would I do, wouldn't it be awful. Oh G-d, never let me be a lesbian!' I'd sort of forgotten about that, until recently"

During this period there was certainly some awareness of the negative distinctiveness of lesbianism; and correspondingly, there was awareness of the general positive evaluation of heterosexuality.

"...it was a real status symbol to have a boyfriend"

When a radical lesbian feminist stood as a candidate in an election while the subject was at university, and went round canvassing, the subject recalled a friend warning

her about letting the woman into her room.

"...I think it's so embarrassing that I could have thought such a thing! You know, because I was eighteen years old, supposedly an adult, thinking things like that. As if you let a lesbian into your room, you would be contaminated - she sat on your bed, you might catch it!"

Thus, during the subject's teenage years, lesbianism may perhaps be seen as constituting a possible threat to her identity - a threat that was dealt with using the intra-psychic deflection strategy of denial. In this way self-esteem, need for affiliation and positive distinctiveness were maintained. To what extent any threat may have been present is difficult to determine. The possibility of re-interpretation of the past by the subject needs to be taken into account. However, it would seem that lesbian feelings emerged at a point in the subject's life where attempts to conform with heterosexuality were not succeeding. On the intra-psychic level there was probably re-evaluation of existing and prospective identity content. Lesbianism, it would seem, no longer constituted the threat that it had previously to this subject's identity.

The subject tended to perceive lesbianism in dispositional terms.

"..I think it's part of your nature, you can't change the way you're born. And I think that it is something that you've got or you haven't - even though some people don't really realize it till they're fifty or - you know. I don't think you can choose. It's like deciding what colour you want to be born, or something"

Little was recalled by the subject of books or media, relating to homosexuality, read or viewed, during her early stages of coming out. The women's movement, however, was perceived as influencing her life as a lesbian.

"...all the sort of events that I go to now, I don't think they would have existed...I think the women's movement sort of focused attention on women, and gave lesbians a voice as well"

Considering how 'most' heterosexuals feel about lesbians, the subject suggested lesbians either tended to be invisible, or seen as 'strident' feminists and butch. The social context of subject 4's coming out may be seen as reflecting both the general invisibility of lesbianism, and the more open aspects influenced by the women's movement.

Coming out to self, to other lesbians, and to some family and heterosexual friends all occurred for subject 4 within a very short time period. As she was not living in the United Kingdom at the time, telling some people was by post rather than a face to face conversation.

"I wrote postcards to all my friends in X, but they were very cryptically worded, sort of saying 'Hey, something wonderful's happened' ... they were postcards which definitely invited a response, which I got. I got all these letters back saying 'Would you mind telling me what's going on!'"

"I wrote and told [my brother] in great detail ... I remember after I wrote the letter I was sort of shaking all over"

Coming out to her brother was complicated by his relationship to the woman the subject was involved with. His reaction, she later heard, had been extreme.

"...when he got my letter, he reacted massively, and went storming around the house, sobbing and things, and ripped up my letter!"

Relations with her brother remain 'very strained'. The subject suggested his reaction may be partly based on his religious beliefs.

Subject 4 had not come out to her mother or sisters.

"..my mum would be the obvious next person to tell, but I don't know. I'm having all these arguments with myself ... If I don't see her that often, why should it matter anyway, we don't know very much about each other anyway. But then I've always prided myself on what, you know, my mother and my family talk about freely to each other"

Additionally, apart from one work colleague, the subject was reluctant to come out at work (teaching adults)

"..I think they would change their attitude towards me"

Thus, there probably has been some threat to identity arising from the situation regarding disclosure to family and coming out at work.

Back in her home town, the subject came out to friends.

"...[my friend] had sort of half twigged from the postcard and the things I'd said on the phone ... she just accepted it! But I was relieved that she did, and after that I didn't have to tell anyone because it went round on the grapevine. People were coming up to me at parties and saying 'How does it feel to be a lesbian?', people that I haven't seen for, you know, a year or so. So I just told [the one friend] and that was the [home town] people told, it went around"

This was an experience reported by very few other subjects. More usually, if a friend was told they did not tend to pass it on to others. Subject 4's friends all seemed accepting, and thus have provided her with interpersonal support for her new identity. This support was supplemented by the group support of the lesbian community. The support from these two sources had minimized potential threat to identity for the subject, but she still had to cope with possible threat arising from family, work and societal attitudes.

"..I get very annoyed about this assumption about, you know, universal heterosexuality, and generally things against women annoy me much more as well now ... I sometimes think, I feel so angry a lot of the time, wouldn't it be easier just to forget it, but I couldn't now"

Overall, however, the subject seemed positive about her lesbian identity, emphasising authenticity and integrity.

"It's just generally made me feel more positive, more me. I've learnt a lot about myself over the last few months, and now I feel I've got a lot stronger identity"

In summary, this subject had only relatively recently assumed a lesbian identity, having previously perceived herself as heterosexual. There were some

indications of earlier feelings possibly related to lesbianism, but there may have been some re-interpretation of the past. If there were lesbian feelings during her teens, these would have threatened her identity and been coped with using the intra-psychic strategy of denial. Unsatisfactory heterosexual relationships, together with awareness of lesbian feelings, prompted the subject to re-evaluate her identity. Within a social context of interpersonal support from friends, and intergroup support from the lesbian community and feminism, the potential threat of a lesbian identity has been minimized. Thus, in spite of awareness of the negative distinctiveness of a lesbian identity, self esteem was being maintained at a high level. Potential sources of threat regarding her lesbian identity, such as the family or people at work, have been dealt with by using the interpersonal coping strategy of passing.

Comparison of case with other subjects in group

The only other woman with a heterosexual background and aged less than thirty was subject 18 who had defined herself as lesbian through her involvement with feminism, and is therefore discussed within the 'political' group.

Case study of a woman, aged in her thirties, who has a heterosexual background

First acknowledgement of gay feelings for 35 year old Subject 25 occurred after some years of perceiving herself as heterosexual.

"..when I was at university, when I was 29, and I fell in love, all of a sudden, with another woman"

In retrospect, subject 25 perceived this lack of awareness of self as lesbian previously as

"a mixture of ignorance and severe repression"

There was one brief moment of possible awareness recalled:

"I suppose I could also say - and this is difficult even to admit now - that in my, say, early twenties (21/22) it did cross my mind, but I can assure you that I was so utterly repressed that it lasted only for a second, and I really knew very, very little about it - apart from perhaps what I read in the rubbish press..."

Underlying lesbian feelings may be indicated, during this heterosexual period, by the subject wondering why her relationships with men were not good, and why she had intense relationships with women friends.

Notions of what lesbians were like included

"butch, masculine women who wanted to be like men, and were sorry they weren't men"

Further, she suggested

"What I couldn't have coped with though was the idea of .. a "feminine" woman, you know, sort of very conventionally attractive, who was a lesbian"

A possible interpretation of subject 25's situation during this period of heterosexuality might be in terms of preservation of continuity of heterosexuality, and the associated maintenance of self esteem, with the avoidance of the perceived negative distinctiveness of lesbianism. This may be seen as achieved mainly by use of the intra-psychic coping strategy of denial. Stage one of this strategy would have been in use: denial that one occupies a threatening position.

This subject's adolescent experiences also reflected a basic sense of self as heterosexual, with the possibility of repressed lesbian feelings.

"I don't remember thinking 'Oh, I must be a lesbian or homosexual, or queer' - the word I would have unfortunately used in those days ... I can honestly say that - I certainly saw myself as, you know, wanting to have relationships with boys or men"

However, she describes how in her teens and early twenties she would have gone along with reactions to homosexuality as 'horrible' or 'evil' if she were with someone:

"In a pub and somebody says 'Oh look at him, he's queer' or taking the mickey of somebody like perhaps Larry Grayson, I would have certainly laughed loudest about that, which I think says an awful lot about me"

The subject's feelings on acknowledging that she had fallen in love with another woman were conflicting: a mixture of panic and suicidal feelings on the one hand, and on the other hand, excitement and relief. She was concerned about her parents finding out and "what the world would say", but was glad to feel sexual about somebody, having not felt this way about men. Summarizing her conflicting feelings:

"I felt, to begin with, pretty awful, suicidal, but ... quite elated"

At this stage then, there was acute conflict, with sudden disruption of continuity of perceiving self as heterosexual; awareness of the negative distinctiveness of lesbianism; and divided feelings regarding self esteem. Coping strategies were modified to deal with the new situation.

Subject 25 turned to others people for help, but not yet to the lesbian community. Her first experience of coming out to someone was to an older woman friend. At the time, subject 25 felt this woman tried to be kind and helpful, but looking back she perceives it as 'quite a nasty experience'. The woman suggested that maybe she was asexual. Subject 25 found this unhelpful:

"..in fact, I think, I felt quite screwed up after that for a long while"

Some time after this experience she reported that,

"I made a vow to be very careful who I told, and I suppose that's, you know, because I was terribly, terribly vulnerable"

Initial conflicts in coming out around this time were further illustrated. Subject 25 recalled that she tended to avoid literature about lesbianism. Her friend had recommended that she read as much as possible:

"..in fact, I didn't. I didn't take that advice. I was quite scared. I didn't want to do that because I thought I would be terribly influenced by it"

This avoidance may be interpreted in terms of fearing confirmation of her lesbian feelings (Troiden, 1989). Subject 25 also reported that she avoided joining the Gay Society at university as she could not have coped with it at that time.

Thus, subject 25 at this stage was experiencing acute challenge to continuity as heterosexual, as well as conflict regarding self esteem, and concern regarding affiliation. Intra-psychic coping strategies in use here may have included stage three of denial - recognition of the threat but denial of the need to modify one's identity structure; or possibly, compartmentalism, with the notion of lesbianism having been assimilated into the identity structure, largely without accommodation. Interpersonally, at this stage, there was some isolation, and a considerable amount of passing used in coping.

Subject 25 sought professional help.

"...all this lesbianism and sexuality, identity, stress with the work ..being a mature student..it all came on top of me..."

She went to see a counsellor, and afterwards to a psychotherapist. (She pointed out that this was concerned with issues other than lesbianism as well).

It was not until a couple of years after leaving university and living in London that subject 25 eventually made contact with the lesbian community. Her first experience of a lesbian group meeting was 'pretty scary'.

Coming out to her mother took place three or four years after acknowledging her feelings.

"It was a pretty horrendous experience - she was very, very upset about it. I did not come out to my father basically because she ordered me not to and she told me it would upset him. Unfortunately, he has since died..."

Her mother connected lesbianism with paedophilia and expressed concern that subject 25 might go into teaching. She also said that she was glad the subject's brother, who died some years before, was not around to know about this. Her mother would like her to marry and have children, and considered that everything would be all right "once I met the right man". This coming out experience affected subject 25 deeply: "...I'm tired of being unhappy and crying about it..." Such an experience would have increased the challenge to self esteem.

Subject 25 has come out to most of her friends

"...because I thought after a while the lying becomes difficult, and then you lie by silence. It's so difficult to keep on not using the pronoun he or she, and once you start to talk about your life and, you know, heartaches or whatever, it's just such a strain to let them assume that you're talking about a man..."

This appears to illustrate a need for integrity in her general relations with others. Where reactions are good, self esteem will be aided.

The women's movement has provided subject 25 with fundamentally important group support.

"...I don't know where I would be without it...yes, I think it's played an incredible part..."

She has some mixed feelings about the movement, however.

"...I suffer from lack of confidence like a lot of women in as much as I don't think I'm a very good feminist and I'm not sure whether I'm a 'real' feminist"

Subject 25 was also concerned about friction between heterosexual and lesbian feminists.

Subject 25 has assimilated a lesbian identity, but reports experiencing some negative feelings about it.

"I'm not in any relationship..but I feel I get all the bad things connected with being gay. I mean, i.e. horrible comments from my mother; horrible things when I look in the press, particularly the rubbish press; horrible things from this government; and I'm not too sure where any happiness lies in there at all. And they make it very, very difficult, you know, to live your life"

She no longer feels suicidal, but finds it a strain sometimes

"..the lies and deceit, and sometimes I think it would be nice to be married with a couple of kids and, you know, not to go through this. But that's because I'm perhaps rather conventional and get weary of the fight"

This may be seen as illustrating something of the continuing process of having to defend one's lesbian identity within our heterosexual society.

In summary, this subject's coming out experiences may be seen firstly in terms of initial acute challenge to continuity of self as heterosexual, with vital implications for self esteem and affiliation. Secondly, awareness of the negative distinctiveness of lesbianism had been present for many years, and the subject perceived herself as having repressed any contemplation of herself as lesbian throughout her teens and most of her twenties. In terms of Breakwell's model, subject 25 used the intra-psychic coping strategy of denial until this failed. Coping during the early stages of coming out may have included the use of further intra-psychic strategies as well as interpersonal strategies such as passing and isolation. This phase of coping was succeeded by increased interpersonal and group support - the latter based partly on the women's movement. Subject 25's need for integrity in her relationships with others was shown, together with the continuing strain she has experienced of coping with her lesbian identity within a heterosexual society.

Comparison of case with other subjects in group

Two of the cases falling into this group (subjects 27 and 39) had come to define themselves as lesbian through their involvement with feminism, and they are discussed in the group of women with a political understanding of lesbianism. Subject 13 who had only recently started to come out has been described in an

additional case study (see Appendix Q). The remaining subject, aged in her thirties, with a heterosexual background was subject 19. She was separated from her husband. Like subject 25, in this subject's account, lesbian feelings during the years she was living as a heterosexual were perceived as having been repressed.

Case study of a lesbian woman with a heterosexual background of over forty years old

Divorced from her husband, and in her early forties, subject 31 had three children ranging in age from eight to sixteen. Identification of self as lesbian did not occur until her mid-thirties. There was some evidence, however, of possibly lesbian feelings reaching back to teens and early twenties.

"I also had very intense emotional crushes on older women, that were completely asexual, but went on for a lot, lot longer than is normally supposed, right through my teens and early twenties"

The subject described how she had had no interest in boys except on a friendship level. Although subject 31 was aware of the words 'queer', 'poofster' or 'homosexual' being used by others while in the sixth form at school, they were used to refer to men only.

"...in the nurses' home was the first time that I was aware that this odd situation could occur between women"

"...I don't ever remember hearing the word 'lesbian' or knowing what it meant until by my thirties..."

It was while living in the nurses home that subject 31 briefly confronted the idea for the first time that she might be homosexual. There was a scandal and a nurse the subject had been friendly with was required to leave the hospital.

"..I went to the nurses' home where she was living, absolutely terrified that anyone would see me, in case I would be tarred with the same brush, and she was very, very upset. I can still see the scene now - I was sitting on her bed and she was sitting in her armchair - and I remember her looking across at

me and saying 'You know, there really isn't very much difference between you and me...' ... for a moment, it was yes, that explains it, but I couldn't cope with it and immediately I shut down on it, and I think from that point was determined to prove to everybody else, and me myself particularly, that there was nothing wrong with me and I was perfectly normal, and it was the following weekend that I started to become involved with one of the young fellows ... and we eventually married"

Thus, the possibility that she might be homosexual led to immediate conflict between continuity of feelings and self-esteem, arising from perceptions of negative distinctiveness. The intra-psychic coping strategies used were denial - at the first stage i.e. denial of the fact that one occupies a threatening position; and re-evaluation of existing identity content by focusing attention on heterosexuality and giving it increased value. Continuity of lesbian feelings was sacrificed to maintain self-esteem.

These coping strategies broke down when the subject was around the age of thirty years old. By this time, her marriage had become very unhappy and subject 31 was becoming very depressed. An older heterosexual woman friend was very supportive, and the subject became emotionally involved with her.

"...I began to be aware that I was having - as I termed it - 'unhealthy' thoughts about her.."

Threat to identity was intense at this point. Self-esteem was extremely low; continuity of sexual orientation was disrupted; and there were very negative perceptions concerning the distinctiveness of lesbianism: 'totally abhorrent, repulsive'.

"Now, I first began..to have some idea of my identity when I was thirty, it's only twelve years ago. Now, when I found out, I damn nearly killed myself, I was so horrified"

Suffering from depression, subject 31 was having psychotherapy.

"...I waited for about a year before I broached the subject with my psychotherapist, and then I said 'I think it's possible that I might be having bisexual feelings'"

The therapist suggested the subject contact a feminist group which included both gay and straight women. This may have helped subject 31 to begin to use the intrapsychic coping strategy of re-evaluation of prospective identity content, providing her with different criteria to judge the issue. Group support has played an important part in helping this subject to accept a lesbian identity.

"...I became aware of feminism and lesbianism more or less in tandem"

The process of accepting herself as lesbian was slow.

"Gradually, I came through to a sort of intellectual acceptance of it ... then I had to accept it at an emotional..level. That took quite a while too ... it took me, I guess, about ten years to come from the point of view of wanting to kill myself because of it, to a point where I value it as one aspect...of myself..."

At first, this subject avoided reading about lesbianism. She told a friend: 'Look, I want to find out who I am first'. When she later did start reading, she was able to identify with women described, and found it 'quite validating and enriching'.

Religion formed a very strong background to this subject's experiences. She perceived it as having made things more difficult for her.

Partly because she has custody of her children, subject 31 felt unable to disclose her lesbian orientation to certain people. In particular, she had avoided letting her husband or other family members know. Thus, she has had to rely quite heavily on the interpersonal coping strategy of passing. With some heterosexual friends, she also made use of this strategy.

Since her marriage broke down and her husband left home on a court order, the subject has had the

opportunity to mix more with other lesbians. Thus, she has had further group support, aiding self-esteem by lowering the negative distinctiveness of lesbianism, and diminishing the conflict between maintaining continuity of lesbian feelings and distinctiveness.

"I have never felt more at ease with myself. I have never felt more validated as a woman since coming to terms with myself as a gay person"

Subject 31 perceived coming out to self as of fundamental importance.

"I would reiterate that I think the important thing about coming out is coming out to yourself, coming to terms with yourself, and coming to accept yourself; and what you do to others, what you say to others, will very largely depend on how well you've come to terms with yourself..."

She remained apprehensive of heterosexual people's possible reactions to her disclosing her sexuality to them.

"... if they knew I was gay, I know that's the only label they would see. They would see me as [S31] the queer ..."

Using the interpersonal coping strategy of passing, however, was not easy.

"...[other people] have no idea of what it means to have to deny yourself, when it's taken so long to fight against yourself, to accept yourself as you are - and then, not to be able to do anything about it is very hard"

Thus, from a threatened identities model perspective, subject 31 may be perceived as having progressed from a position of extreme threat to which her main response was denial; through the breakdown of this intra-psychic coping strategy; and the subsequent use of interpersonal and intergroup strategies. The subject's marriage may possibly be seen partly as a response to the first awareness of the threat to identity of lesbianism, and as occurring during the period that the strategy of denial was being used successfully. However, this interpretation could be questioned as it rests upon the

subject's re-interpretation of her past experiences, as well as being an extrapolation of the reported perceptions. It is, nevertheless, one possible interpretation of the subject's heterosexual past. Potential threat has continued to be present in the subject's life as the interpersonal strategy of passing has had to be used quite heavily due to the subject's home circumstances and her having custody of young children. Group support was of importance for this subject, helping her to maintain a good level of self-esteem with continuity of lesbian feelings, in spite of some continuing perceptions of the negative distinctiveness of lesbianism.

Comparison of case with other subjects in group

Women with a heterosexual background and aged over forty years old formed the largest of the ten groups. Together with subject 31, there were subjects 5, 15, 16, 28, 32, 33, 34, 36 and 37. Like subject 31, six of the remaining nine subjects had been, or were still, married. In the majority of these subjects' accounts there was some tracing back of lesbian feelings as existing prior to, or during, the period in which they had led heterosexual lives. The majority of accounts also indicated awareness of lesbianism as having negative connotations. Approximately half of these subjects' accounts described their previous sexual relationships with men in positive terms, and indicated that lesbianism was a choice they had taken. Two other accounts suggested unsatisfactory heterosexual relationships and no choice regarding a lesbian identity. For three of the nine subjects, as for subject 31, there was some evidence of threat connected with identifying self as lesbian, dealt with mainly using intra-psychic deflection coping strategies such as denial. For other subjects in this group, threat tended to arise more from external sources such as conflicts with marriage or religion, or coming

out to others, rather than from accepting self as lesbian. A need for authenticity or integrity was indicated by most subjects in this group.

8.2.3 Lesbian women who had had heterosexual relations, while perceiving themselves as possibly lesbian

Case study of a woman under thirty years of age who had heterosexual relationships but perceived herself as possibly lesbian at the time

Subject 1, a twenty four year old nurse, recalled both trying to conform while at school, and her intense friendships with other girls.

"I remember trying very hard to do what my friends were doing, sort of following around boys ... and thinking 'I don't find these people attractive', but still trying very hard and going to parties with people, and, you know, sort of joining in the general feeling without really feeling it..."

"...I remember being really infatuated with her, I just wanted to be with her all the time ... after about a year, I suppose, I wanted to have more physical affection than this, and then her mother suddenly got very shirty about the whole thing, and virtually said I wasn't to see her daughter or anything else, because she felt that I was a lesbian - and I said 'I'm not, no'..."

The subject continued to have boyfriends at university, while also having close friendships.

"...the boyfriends that I had at school and university were very much me trying to prove something, trying to just lock myself into a role model. And I think for that reason - because I didn't particularly want to have a boyfriend - they were completely unsuccessful ..."

There was evidence of awareness of possible homosexuality.

"...you know universities usually have a lesbian and gay society ..I used to walk past, and look sneakily at the board, and not actually look at it, and that was the closest I got a university"

At this stage, therefore, there was emphasis on attempting to conform with others by trying to lead a heterosexual lifestyle. There was also some evidence to

suggest that lesbianism was perceived as having negative connotations and as threatening.

"I prefer 'gay' to 'lesbian'. Lesbian conjures up an image of a very ..butch, sort of angry feminist..."

"I remember thinking that they couldn't all be like the stereotypes ... somebody who was fairly butch, and sort of short hair, and, you know, very strong feminist..."

There was further evidence that there was conflict for subject 1 in the process of becoming aware of herself as lesbian.

"...I think when I first thought about it, I actually 'mourned', in inverted commas, the idea that I wasn't going to get married and have all the relatives saying 'Jolly good' and 'Isn't this wonderful?'. I think I - for a short while - was a bit sad about that..."

"The idea of coming out to yourself, and literally acknowledging to yourself that that's what's going wrong, rather than trying to give yourself other reasons for doing things, and actually realizing for yourself that that's what's going on. There's a huge stumbling block and sort of took years of fairly self-destructive analysis to acknowledge and to accept"

"...it must have taken me five or six years to come out to myself..."

Thus, lesbianism did initially constitute a threat to identity for subject 1. The threat was at first dealt with by use of the intra-psychic coping strategy of denial, and possibly by perceiving the lesbian feelings as not part of her 'real' self.

The social context seemed to provide little support for the subject's emerging lesbian identity. Until subject 1 came to live in London, she came across little reading material on lesbianism.

"...there was a huge lull while I was at university when I really didn't do much about it at all, and then suddenly coming to London and finding all this information, I then started to read in a big way, but during the early times 'The Well of Loneliness' was about the only thing I ever saw"

The women's movement was also perceived as having played little part in the subject's coming out as lesbian.

"...I think it almost had a negative effect, that I didn't want to feel that I was part of that idea"

Ultimately, coming to perceive herself as gay occurred for subject 1 in the context of falling in love with a friend.

"..so gradually with that particular friend it evolved, because we were both trying to work out whether we were or whether we weren't gay, and then we just sort of fell into being in love, and just suddenly looked at each other and realized that we were quite happy about it, and it wasn't such a big deal, and it just seemed exactly the right thing to do..."

First coming out into the lesbian community was eased by doing it with her girlfriend. By this stage negative distinctiveness of lesbianism had been minimized, and continuity of lesbian feelings could be allowed to predominate, not only without damage to self-esteem, but possibly even serving to enhance it.

The subject perceived heterosexuals' feelings about gay women as involving fear, but she suggested a positive approach may encourage them to respond positively.

"I think - they're frightened of something that I feel they perhaps don't understand, or they don't want to have anything to do with it, and therefore it represents quite an unknown ... but if you can present a positive approach they can then take it positively. If you present a negative approach, then it will be taken negatively - people can feel quite aggressive and quite threatened ... Given the opportunity, people will respond well..."

Subject 1's perceptions of reasons why some women are gay and some women are heterosexual have changed over time. At first she had thought it might have something to do with upbringing, but later dismissed this notion. She suggested that she did not perceive it as innate.

"It's just something that is, without actually coming from anywhere"

Her views on whether or not being gay was a choice seemed to suggest some kind of dispositional attributions.

"...the pain and anguish of coming to accept and enjoy it, I don't think anyone would ever choose to go through that ... as far as I'm concerned, I don't see that it's a choice for me, it's something that I feel is right, and I've chosen to accept it"

Acknowledgement of self as gay led subject 1 to want to come out to others.

"So, I think I'd actually been gay for about - or at least acknowledged and enjoyed it - for about two months I suppose, and then I was so full enjoying it all that I wanted to tell everybody..."

The subject's experiences of coming out to friends and family have generally been positive. Before coming out, the subject found herself having to tell her mother 'half-truths'.

"...and I just thought 'This is ridiculous, this is my mother and I don't want to lie to her, and I'd quite like to let her enjoy what I'm enjoying'..."

Coming out to her mother was very successful.

"...and she just sort of took it all in her stride, and gave me exactly the sort of affection and response that, you know, one dreams about ... and the overriding thing was that my mother was just concerned that I was happy, and that I was going to be happy, and that's the way it happened"

The subject's father was told by her mother. Her father has found it difficult to believe and does not talk about it much. The subject was unsure whether or not her brother realizes, but did not seem concerned about this. She decided not to tell her grandparents - 'partly because I didn't want to upset that [high] opinion of me, and also I just didn't feel that it was something that I needed to say to them'. All the subject's close friends know and have responded positively. At work she had come out to some people, but was generally quite cautious about disclosing the information about herself in the work situation.

"...I don't think I'd make a definite statement, because I think it would influence how I got on..."

For this subject, reactions to her coming out have been

generally very supportive, and she had obviously gained in self-esteem from not having to make heavy use of the coping strategies of passing or isolation. On the interpersonal level, she had derived considerable aid in minimizing any threat to identity. She had also begun to make more use of intergroup strategies.

"..having met more women, and I suppose grown up a bit anyway, and realized that there is a lot more to feminism than an angry feminist, I think [the women's movement is] beginning to play an increasing part in what I do"

Thus, for subject 1 being gay was largely no longer perceived as negatively distinctive; her self-esteem was high; and there was little challenge now to continuity of lesbian feelings for her. Overall, threat to identity for subject 1 is now minimal in comparison to the period during which she was coming out to self, as she indicated by her perceptions of the main benefits of coming out.

"..a large amount of self-esteem. Once you've come out to yourself, I think if you still carry on denying it to other people, it's still sort of denying it to yourself. And then you can enjoy the fact that other people are happy because you're happy ... as I say, it's brought me quite a lot of good friends..."

Comparison of case with other subjects in group

The other subjects in the group of women under thirty years old who had had heterosexual relationships, but had perceived themselves as possibly lesbian at the time were subjects 9, 14, 17, 21 and 35. Three of these subjects were in the early stages of coming out to themselves and/or coming out into the lesbian community. Like subject 1, all reported some dissatisfaction in their previous relationships with men. For all these subjects too, there was some evidence of continuity of lesbian feelings with reports of such feelings traced back to teenage years, or in one case, the age of ten years old. There was some evidence of possible threat to identity from most of these subjects' accounts. For the

majority of subjects in this group, there was little evidence of use of the intra-psychic coping strategy of denial at Breakwell's first level - denial of occupying a threatening position - but denial at one of the higher levels may have been used. Most of these subjects' accounts indicated a need for authenticity or integrity.

Case study of a woman aged in her thirties who had heterosexual relationships but perceived herself as possibly lesbian at the time

"..from what I can remember..I've always found girls, women, females, much more appealing to be with than boys or men really. I have to say girls because that's when I go back to the first thing I can remember which is about three I suppose"

Subject 38, who was 33 years old, traced her lesbian feelings back to childhood. She first became aware of terms relating to homosexuality around the age of eleven, and realized that the issue might relate to her. She described her feeling about it during her teens.

"..you know it's there and you know you feel it ... and there's absolutely nothing you can do about it. But at the same time you are on the other hand denying it - certainly not doing anything - well, I didn't do anything about it ... there was such a stigma attached to it, and I'm sure that if anything was suspected, I would have been immediately ostracized ... it was terribly difficult to be different"

The subject described her view of the situation during the period in which she was having heterosexual relationships.

"...I think I sort of held back [from having a relationship with a woman] simply because of the constrictive ideas of society on sexuality and lesbianism. But I went on even though I was seeing men, being attracted to women. I'm sort of what they call a born lesbian I think..."

Thus, there seems to have been continuity of lesbian feelings throughout. This conflicted with an awareness of the negative distinctiveness of lesbianism. Self-esteem was maintained by employing the intra-psychic

coping strategy of denial, at the level of recognizing the threat, but denying the need to modify her identity structure.

The subject's heterosexual lifestyle and denial of lesbianism were challenged when at the age of twenty four she unexpectedly became involved in a relationship with a married woman.

"...it came out of the blue when I wasn't really looking for it ... It was only after that happened that I began to have to admit to myself that there was something more that I was feeling. Even though I still wasn't prepared to actually say to myself 'you are a lesbian, face it and do something about it' .. eventually when I did..finally disappointed with men ... nothing would ever be the same with men after this, then I started to do something positive about it..."

Thus, with the challenge to her coping strategy of denial, the subject came to re-evaluate existing and prospective identity content, eventually devaluing her heterosexual identity and reconsidering lesbianism in the light of her recent experience.

"I couldn't reconcile wanting to be my own person and having to be submissive to a man..."

"I think initially, when I first admitted it [being lesbian] to myself, I went through all the arguments that are put against - moral sort of... and I found an answer to all those things and justified it. It made me feel much happier that all the arguments against it were actually groundless and rooted in prejudice"

The subject's awareness of the negative distinctiveness of lesbianism was evident at this time.

"...when I knew I had to end this relationship, I thought well, I've got to do something about it, I have to meet other women, and I thought I can't possibly - all those dreadful women. I mean, I had the stereotyped idea of tweeds and ... the usual Radclyffe Hall type of idea..."

This view of what lesbians might be like made it harder for subject 38 to contact others.

"I couldn't have rung Lesbian Line at that stage because I thought that I would speak to the types of women I had in mind. Rather off-putting to put it mildly"

There was some awareness of both positive and negative images of lesbians in the media. The subject's perceptions of most heterosexual people's views of lesbians ranged from the sympathetic to those who regard it as an abomination. Additionally, she pointed out the possibility of physical assault if one wore badges relating to being lesbian.

Both situational and dispositional attributions were reflected by subject 38's perceptions of reasons why some women are lesbian and some women are heterosexual; and whether lesbianism is a choice.

"I think it's sometimes that people want certain things from life, if you like, and if having children and having security, and having status, and having social acceptability is the most important things to you, I think that you would get married, whether you are a lesbian or not"

"..I still don't think that I've made a choice, I think it's something that I've come to because it's me"

First contact with other lesbians was made through Sappho magazine. The subject reported "complete shock" in meeting "perfectly ordinary women". This provides further evidence that subject 38 had held a stereotypical view of lesbians.

Coming out to family and heterosexual friends, subject 38 used the approach of telling them about her relationship rather than stating that she was a lesbian. The first person told was a friend.

"..even when I had a relationship with a woman, she was still, as far as I was concerned, a one-off thing ... I didn't actually come out and say 'I'm a lesbian' - it was far too traumatic a thing to say"

The subject had become very depressed after the relationship.

"...I became so depressed about it that it began to show in various different ways, until my mother actually demanded to know what was wrong, and it just simply came out that I'd been involved with another woman"

Concern was expressed at the reaction of her mother.

"..that was about, I suppose, about seven years ago, and she hasn't mentioned it since. She doesn't want to know, which I find very disappointing, because if she's my mother, and I need her, she should try and understand, but if she doesn't want to know, I see no point in upsetting her ... and the same reaction from my sister..I mentioned it to her at that time, and she's never mentioned it since, so I haven't mentioned it since ..and..my father doesn't know"

"Occasionally, something might crop up on the television ... and [mother] might say something like ... 'I can't stand that woman' - primarily because she's a lesbian. But that's about the only reference to it at all"

Both family and heterosexual friends seem to have perceived the relationship as a 'one-off' occurrence, and have not accepted subject 38 as lesbian. Thus, support from heterosexual significant others has been limited. The subject had chosen not to come out at work in the Civil Service.

There has been some group support for subject 38 since coming out into the lesbian community. The women's movement, however, was initially perceived as a negative influence.

"I had a very bad introduction to feminism which put me off for a number of years. I was introduced to feminism .. by two revolutionary radical feminists who, as far as they were concerned, my hair was too long, I had a flashy car, and you shouldn't shave your legs ... and if you weren't right on, you were right off ... [now] I've come round to feminism in my own way, under my own steam, in a different way, and I would say, in the last year or so that feminism has helped me put views in much more perspective again"

Thus, feminism is now providing the subject with some group support.

Benefits of coming out expressed by subject 38 focused on aspects of authenticity and integrity.

"The good thing that has come out of it, of course, is that I've actually begun to find out who I really am ... The very core of one's being is there, whereas before when I was just sort of a shell - a shallow sort of existence - trying to be what you really are not"

"...giving back to yourself, finding out 'this is me'..."

Thus, in summary, there seemed to be strong evidence of continuity of lesbian feelings for this subject. During her teens and twenties there was awareness of the negative distinctiveness of lesbianism. This was initially dealt with by denial and the assumption of a heterosexual lifestyle. After an unexpected lesbian relationship at the age of 24, there was re-evaluation of a lesbian identity, and ultimately, acceptance of self as a lesbian. On the interpersonal level, subject 38 told heterosexual friends and family about the one relationship, but not that she was lesbian. This could be seen as a partial form of passing. Support on the interpersonal level for subject 38 tended to be from other lesbians rather than from family or heterosexual friends. Group support was playing an increasingly important role. Self-esteem was being maintained with continuity of lesbian feelings, and awareness of satisfying needs of authenticity and integrity, outweighing remaining perceptions of the negative distinctiveness of lesbianism.

Comparison of case with other subjects in group

Subject 38 was the only subject in this group.

Case study of a woman of over forty years old who had heterosexual relationships but perceived herself as possibly lesbian at the time

When subject 12 was fifteen years old, she had a lesbian relationship with a school friend.

"...probably about the January of that year, my mother found a letter which she had written to me, and obviously my mother didn't like what was in this letter, and said, you know, 'What's going on?' and 'What's it all about?' and everything. We had an inquisition, and my friend had to come over, and all the letters that had been written between us, and cards, and bits and pieces, all had to be burnt in front of my mother. So that upset me quite a bit. My mother then rushed me off to the doctor's..."

The subject had been unaware of any labels relating to such feelings.

"..I think having then been sat in the doctor's surgery, while the doctor started telling my mother about homosexuality, I think that was probably my first hint as to what it was all about. Even though I had these feelings, even then, I still didn't really know what it was called or that I was - there were thousands of others like me, I just sort of - you know -"

Initial threat to identity, thus, probably occurred with the perceptions of others' reactions, rather than during the time of her affair with her friend. Perceiving the reaction of her mother would have made subject 12 aware of the negative distinctiveness of same sex relationships and challenged her self esteem.

Feelings possibly connected to her later lesbian identity were traced back by subject 12 (aged 46 years at the time of the interview) to the age of eight or nine years.

"So even at that age, I sort of - I mean obviously, as I say, I don't know what it was, and I wouldn't say that that was when I first discovered it, but there was always something there"

At sixteen years old, on leaving school, subject 12 attempted to conform with others.

"...I left school and went to work, and started mixing with other people, and other friends who were going out with boys. So, I thought, well, I'd better go along with them"

She had several relationships with men, but mostly not on a serious level, and not involving sex.

"I mean one or two, I was very fond of, but when it came down to the sort of nitty gritty, as it were, I didn't want to know"

"So, all this time, I was getting older, and it was building up in my mind what I really wanted"

During her early twenties, subject 12 saw an advertisement for the Gateways (lesbian club).

"I remember that very first time when I went down to the Gateways ... I mean I was petrified, absolutely petrified ... I did wonder what they were going to be like. I don't think I'd built up any sort of picture in my mind at that stage, but yes, I just wondered"

Thus, although subject 12 had not held a stereotype picture of lesbians, there were indications that she was aware in some ways of negative associations connected to lesbianism. Her present personal understanding of the term 'lesbian' also reflected awareness of negative connotations.

"I don't like the word lesbian and I never have ... I think probably because it puts a label on you. I know perhaps 'gay' does, but in not such a serious or harsh way, I don't think, as 'lesbian'"

Further, she perceived heterosexual people's feelings about lesbians as involving fear.

Subject 12 was unsure of the reasons why some women were gay and some heterosexual, but suggested that "homosexuality is in all of us" and as people are "conditioned to play the heterosexual role", they must be of reasonably strong character to go ahead with homosexuality. She was unsure of whether being gay was a choice.

"I don't know whether I chose to be like that, or whether there was something within me. I think I really believe that it must be something in you ..."

Thus, her attributions regarding homosexuality were partly dispositional.

Apart from reading 'The Well of Loneliness', subject 12 could not recall having read any other books during her early stages of coming out; and could not recall having seen any films or television programmes during that time.

Visiting the Gateways was a positive experience for subject 12. She was still living at home, however, and for a while did not tell her parents about where she was going out.

"I didn't actually lie about where I was going, I was just a bit evasive, saying I was sort of going out to meet friends, but not actually saying where or what. And of course I used to dress up. I mean, I've never been the type of person who's worn men's suits, things like that. I mean, I've worn men's trousers and men's shirts in the past ..as I used to then. So therefore, I used to have to be careful how I dressed and not to let my mother see that"

Thus, for a short time, subject 12 used the interpersonal coping strategy of passing. in dealing with her parents. This became a strain.

"I went out a few times, and I thought, I can't go on like this, because I was living two lives and it was becoming a bit stressful ... so I told them"

Her mother was "very distraught", particularly as subject 12 was an only child.

"- again, I was sort of sent to the doctors, as it were, to see if anything could be done; and I went to see one or two psychiatrists, but I knew deep down that I didn't want anything else anyway, so eventually, I accepted it, and eventually - a few years later - my mother accepted it"

Subject 12 also came out to a good friend she had had since the age of five. This friend and the friend's family all accepted without problem.

"..we've been the greatest of friends ever since ... so that's why I feel content with myself because the people that are important to me have accepted it"

Acceptance by family and friends obviously has positive implications for self esteem. One straight friend,

however, appeared not be so accepting.

"..she was still friends with me afterwards, but she gradually grew away, and gradually sort of drifted off, and lost touch, so obviously she didn't really accept it..."

Subject 12 described how she tended not to tell people directly.

"I mean, I don't go round to people and say 'I'm gay, hey look at me!' - I just behave as I am, and I just talk about my friends as they are, and I say 'we' if I'm with somebody. It just comes so natural to me that I don't even think about it"

She had told some people at work: a male colleague who wanted to go out with her; her boss, when upset over the break up of a relationship directly before she had been about to move into a new home with her girlfriend; and one other girl in the office. Others at work had not been told. Being out to some in the work situation may be seen as relieving some of the strain of having to use the coping strategy of passing.

Thus, the process for subject 12 of accepting herself as gay was gradual, and involved dealing with the initial negative reactions of her mother. Although she had boyfriends over a period of time during her teens and into her early twenties, and was fond of some of them, her relationships with males tended not to be of a serious or sexual nature, and she gradually came to perceive herself as gay. Intra-psychic coping strategies would seem to have ranged from the deflection strategy of denial of herself as lesbian, when attempting to conform and have boyfriends, to acceptance strategies of anticipatory restructuring, and eventually re-evaluation of identity content and fundamental change. During the time when subject 12 had boyfriends, the negative distinctiveness of lesbianism was probably predominant. Afterwards, as she came to identify herself as lesbian, and came out into the lesbian community, continuity of lesbian feelings was given priority. Group support at this stage aided maintenance of self esteem. On the

interpersonal level, acceptance by significant others minimized potential threat. Thus, for subject 12, threat to identity was probably at its maximum during her early stages of coming out to self. Having come out to significant others, and been largely accepted, the interpersonal strategy of passing could be used less, and potential threat to identity was reduced overall.

"..I think one of the main benefits [of coming out]..is being able to relax and be yourself, quite frankly, because otherwise, if you don't come out, you are living two lives, and it can be awful stressful at times"

Comparison of case with other subjects in group

The only other subject in the group of women, aged forty or over, who had had heterosexual relationships, but had perceived themselves as possibly lesbian at the time, was subject 22. At 63 years old, she was the oldest lesbian subject. Her account indicated that she had had heterosexual relationships which she had 'thoroughly enjoyed' but did not find 'emotionally fulfilling'. Feelings possibly connected with being gay were traced back in the subject's account to a woman she had been attracted to when she started work at the age of fourteen. There seemed to be little evidence of threat in the account related to coming to perceive herself as lesbian: 'I've never really been burdened with any sense of guilt'. However, subject 22 had not told most of her straight friends about herself, and reported that she did not think most of them had realized. Further, she described how before meeting other lesbians, she had thought they would be like men, and she would be frightened of them. Thus, there was some awareness of negative associations of lesbianism, and evidence of some conflict.

Case study of a woman who perceived her lesbian identity in political terms

Subject 39 did not define herself as a 'political lesbian', and would probably not be perceived as such by others. However, her understanding of lesbianism emphasized a political perspective; and she had initially defined herself as lesbian within the context of involvement with feminism and women's groups. Thus, this subject provides an example from the small group of women within this lesbian sample who had a fundamentally political understanding of their lesbian identity.

This subject defined 'lesbian' in terms of putting women first:

"...[It] has to do with priorities and who you prioritise; whether you are prepared to give a lot of emotional and/or sexual energy to men or not, or whether you want to reserve that for women"

Further, subject 39's perceptions of reasons why some women were lesbian and some heterosexual, reflected situational, rather than dispositional, attributions:

"...opportunity, choice, knowledge, those sorts or reasons"

First awareness of lesbian feelings occurred for this subject while at university

"...I can actually remember an evening sitting in my room and having these thoughts about this woman, and thinking 'gosh, that means I'm a lesbian'..."

The subject suggested that she could not trust her memory regarding whether or not she had had 'schoolgirl crushes' before this time; and further, she questioned whether such experiences would be connected with lesbian sexuality. She was 'dubious' about people claiming to be lesbian from an early age.

Following her first awareness of lesbian feelings, she "buried that notion completely for a while" and "went off and got married".

"...obviously I'd absorbed subconsciously from all sorts of places that it was 'bad' ... so it was just a totally negative thing that you just shut the door on"

In terms of the threatened identity model, this could be interpreted as conflict between the subject's self-esteem and her perceptions of the negative distinctiveness of lesbianism preventing assimilation of a lesbian identity; and leading to the use of the intra-psychic coping strategy of denial.

It is not clear whether subject 39's marriage was or was not partially a reaction against her lesbian feelings.

"Well, I did - as I say - I did get married, and in fact it was weird. It wasn't having thought .. 'this means I'm a lesbian, oh no I'm not going to be', [I] didn't actually very consciously say 'I'm going to get married, I'm going to find someone'. I was actually in love with a bloke and got married, and it was sort of 'normal' in that sense..."

The marriage came to an end, but exactly when this occurred was not clear from the interview.

It was through involvement with feminism and women's groups that subject 39 eventually came to perceive herself as lesbian.

"...I was living in XX at the time and started to get involved with the Women's Centre and various women's groups - not specifically lesbian groups, and not mixed gay groups either. What I felt was that what I was doing was making a decision about being involved with women and spending my time with women, and my energies..."

Regarding the part played by the women's movement in her coming out as lesbian, subject 39 emphasised that she perceived coming out and defining one's sexuality as a continuing process. Of the women's movement she suggested:

".. it's a context. Without that context, and in a different context, I would, no doubt, either not be a lesbian, or feel differently about it in various ways"

From the perspective of the threatened identities

model, the change in social context, arising from subject 39's involvement with the women's movement, may be seen as having provided group support; diminished her perceptions of the negative distinctiveness of lesbianism; and hence, reduced the conflict between distinctiveness and self-esteem. It was no longer necessary for subject 39 to use a coping strategy of denial. On the intra-psychic level she was now able to re-evaluate prospective identity content. There was association of the prospective new identity content of lesbianism with the more positively valued, feminism.

Within a feminist environment, much of the threat posed by lesbianism may be removed. However, within the larger context of heterosexual society generally, potential threat remains. Subject 39 described her experience of working in 'a very heterosexist, racist, bigoted institution'.

"...I was getting really fed-up with being in the closet at work because I felt very much that it was distorting how I was feeling about myself and about my lesbianism ... if you're having to spend quite a lot of your life in some way, however implicitly, denying something that matters to you, it's going to affect how you think about yourself..."

In her present work, subject 39 was able to be open about herself.

"I think what's good is having spent time, particularly at work, not being open, it's very important to me to be able to and not to have to split things up or shut things off; and I feel that I've, by doing that, I've got rid of a lot of - not guilt - a lot of negative feelings about my way of life in general, and that includes my sexuality"

Subject 39 had told her mother about herself.

"I think she must have been a bit thrown because there were lots of very contradictory reactions very quickly, one after the other"

The subject has never told her father as her mother did not want her to, but she suggested he must be aware of it. Her brother lives overseas, and she has little to do with him. With heterosexual friends, subject 39 reported

that she tended to assume people knew she was lesbian, and avoided telling them directly as this put 'a false emphasis on things'.

"It doesn't actually mean anything to anybody without some context, and I'm not sure that people have that context of what I do and where I live, and who I'm involved with, and how I'm involved with them"

Generally, subject 39 seemed to find it easier to cope with being out than with concealing her lesbianism.

"...being in the closet is damaging to your identity and self-respect"

"... lying of any sort, deception of any sort, makes things more complicated because you've got to remember what you said, and who you said it to, and you've got to keep up the act ... I just find it tiresome. I've got more energy to do other things"

Thus, subject 39 preferred where possible not to have to use the coping strategy of passing. She emphasized a need for authenticity and integrity. In terms of Goffman's notion of stigma, subject 39 may be seen as preferring to occupy the position of the 'discredited' in which she has the social situation to manage, rather than occupying the position of the 'discreditable', where she has control of information to deal with.

To summarize, there was some evidence to suggest that first awareness of lesbian feelings may have initiated a threat to identity for subject 39, with self-esteem challenged by negative distinctiveness, and thus leading to the use of the coping strategy of denial. A few years later, however, within the context of her involvement with feminism, subject 39 was able to re-evaluate the prospective identity content relating to perceiving self as lesbian. Now, she perceived being lesbian "very much as choice". Thus, accepting awareness of herself as lesbian, was within a social context providing group support. Subject 39 did not perceive continuity in her lesbian feelings. However, as has been seen, there was some evidence of possible repression or

denial. On the interpersonal level, subject 39 preferred not to use the coping strategy of passing. A need for authenticity and integrity was emphasized.

Comparison of case with other subjects in group

The other cases of women falling into the group of those who had come to identify themselves as lesbian through their involvement with feminism were subjects 18 and 27. Within these accounts, attributions regarding lesbian identity were situational and lesbianism was perceived as a choice. The accounts indicated that all had previously had sexual relationships with men and had perceived themselves as heterosexual at the time. There was little or no evidence of previous lesbian feelings from these subjects' accounts. Thus, continuity of lesbian feelings did not seem to have been an issue for these women. One subject's account indicated some conflict of feelings during the time she had taken the decision to stop having heterosexual relationships, and before she began to have lesbian relationships. The other subject's account reflected very positive feelings during this period, but indicated later conflict in dealing with the 'shock' of having coming out as lesbian. This latter subject also mentioned conflict regarding continuing sexual feelings for men. The accounts for all three of the subjects in this group indicated threat, or awareness of potential threat, arising from coming out to heterosexual significant others.

8.3 A comparison of the groups investigated within the coping with threatened identities model

All the subjects' accounts indicated some evidence of threat to identity occurring at various stages of the coming out process, and being coped with through the use of different intra-psychic, interpersonal or intergroup strategies. There was variation in intensity or type of threat, and in choice of coping strategy.

Accounts from the 'always lesbian' groups, in comparison to the accounts from those subjects who had had heterosexual relationships, indicated considerable threat during subjects' teenage years and early twenties. For these women, lesbianism tended not to be seen as a choice, and the women's movement was generally perceived as either having played no part or as having contributed indirectly rather than directly. In most cases, the accounts of the 'always lesbian' subjects indicated perceptions of continuity of lesbian feelings from a relatively early age. There was also usually evidence of some awareness of the negative distinctiveness of lesbianism within these accounts. This was often associated with perceptions of others' attitudes rather than with feelings that lesbianism itself was wrong. Intra-psychic coping strategies occurring during the coming out to self period for these women, tended to be acceptance rather than deflection strategies; but where Breakwell's strategy of denial may have been used by these women, it would have been at one of the higher levels rather than the first 'layer' of denying that one occupies a threatening position. None of the 'always lesbian' women's accounts had been classified as indicating evidence of repression, suppression or denial (of Breakwell's layer one type) of feelings on coming out to self. In contrast, just over half of the accounts from the two groups of women with heterosexual backgrounds had indicated this (see table 8.3.1).

Table 8.3.1: Number of subjects' accounts indicating use of repression, suppression or denial (layer one) during coming out to self

	'always' lesbian	heterosexual background*	heterosexual & lesbian background
no repression/denial indicated	11	8	4
use of repression/denial	0	9	5

* this group includes the 'political' background women

Combining the two groups of women who had had heterosexual relationships, a significant difference was found between the 'always' lesbian group and those who had had heterosexual relationships in use of the coping strategy of repression/denial (layer one) (Fisher Exact test, two-tailed; $p=0.0022$).

Use of the interpersonal coping strategy of passing was indicated in a number of accounts of the 'always' lesbian group. The majority of these accounts also indicated a need for authenticity or integrity. For the women in this group, self esteem was maintained, and continuity of lesbian feelings allowed to predominate, while perceptions of the negative distinctiveness of a lesbian identity often tended to be minimized. Others' attitudes and reactions towards lesbianism, rather than the lesbian identity itself, tended to be perceived in negative terms. Initial identification of self as lesbian had occurred at an older age for some of those in the 'forty or over' age group; and these women had also probably experienced less group support than the younger women.

The accounts of the majority of women who perceived themselves as having been heterosexual in the past, indicated some continuity of lesbian feelings. This tracing back of homosexual feelings may have been a re-interpretation of the past; such feelings may or may not have occurred at the times suggested. Approximately a third of these subjects perceived their relationships with men in positive terms; the remaining two thirds suggested their relationships with males had been unsatisfactory. There were indications of some quite strong perceptions of the negative distinctiveness of lesbianism, and as has been described, about half of these accounts of women with a heterosexual background were categorized as reflecting initial repression, suppression or denial of a lesbian identity. Some of

these women's accounts indicated experience of considerable threat on becoming aware of self as lesbian. Others, however, seemed to indicate little threat from internal sources, but greater threat arising from external issues such as conflict with marriage. Intergroup coping strategies were used by many of these women. The majority of women in the heterosexual background group, like those women from the other two groups, suggested that being oneself/not having to pretend/freedom was a main benefit of coming out.

For the group of women who had a heterosexual background, but had perceived themselves as possibly lesbian during that time, accounts reflected at least some continuity of lesbian feelings. For the majority of women with this background, there were perceptions of their heterosexual relationships having been unsatisfactory. This contrasted with the proportion of women within the group of subjects who had perceived themselves as completely heterosexual who viewed their relationships with men positively. There was some evidence of threat to identity occurring on coming out to self from many of these subjects, and just over half had been recorded as having initially repressed or denied lesbian feelings. All but one of the women's accounts in this group indicated 'being yourself'/not having to pretend/freedom as a main benefit of coming out. Thus, a need for authenticity or integrity was evident across the groupings.

With the addition of an identity principle relating to need for integrity/authenticity, and possibly a further principle relating to need for affiliation, Breakwell's model of coping with threatened identity provides a basis for analysis of coming out. Need for affiliation may be seen as underlying both decisions to tell significant others about self, and decisions not to come out to others. In the first case, the aim is to improve the relationship, and in the second, to maintain

a relationship, rather than risk damaging and perhaps losing it. As Breakwell has pointed out, a limit to choice of coping strategy is the ideological social context. This is of particular importance in considering coming out. The values and beliefs etc. associated with the ideological background may be seen reflected in the dominant social representations of human nature and gender. Individual experiences are structured by this context, and may only be understood in relation to it.

CHAPTER NINE
SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS
AND CONCLUSIONS

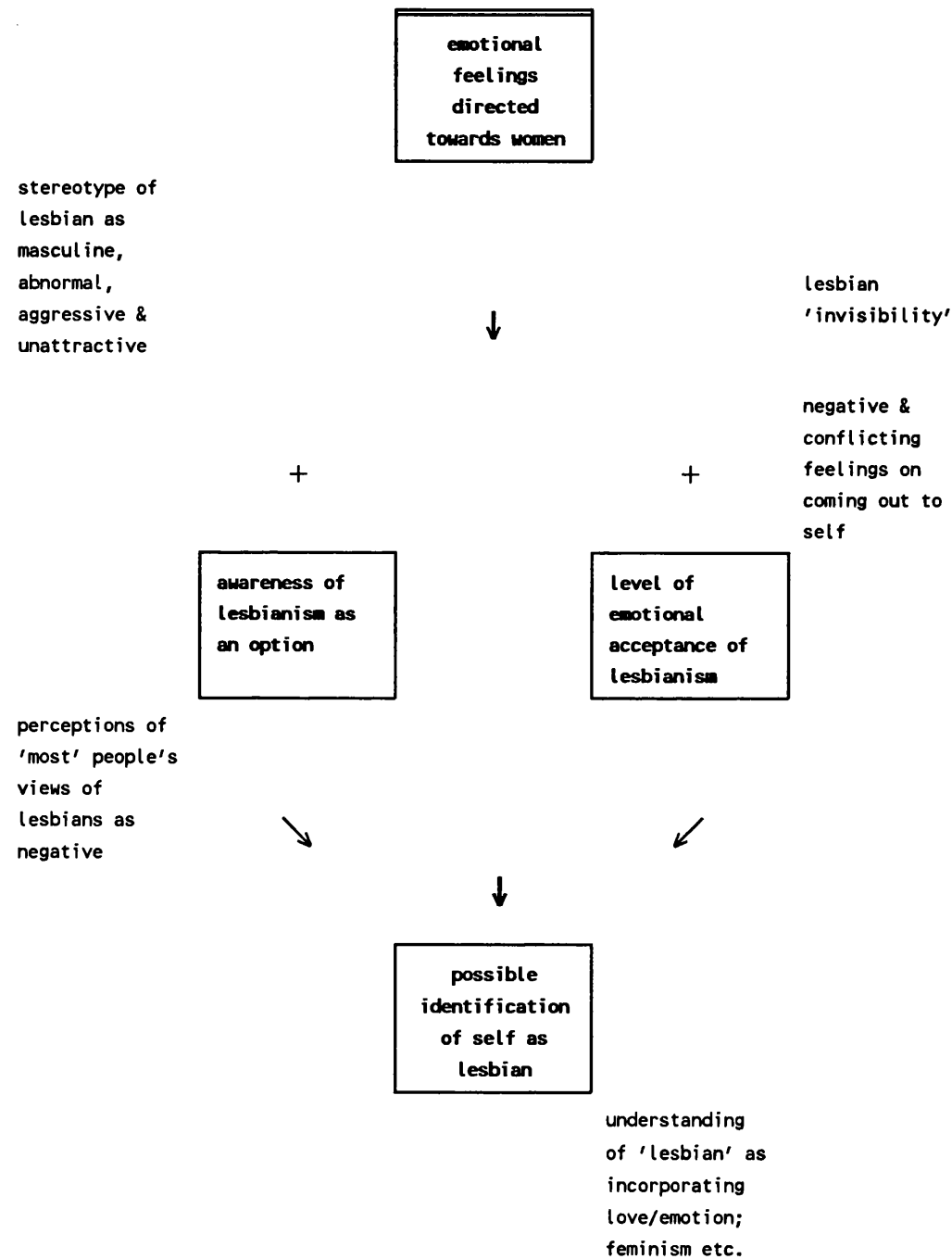
9.1 COMING OUT TO SELF: A SUMMARY

The process of 'coming out to self' is seen as based upon strong emotional feelings directed towards women, together with awareness of lesbianism as an option, and a level of emotional acceptance of lesbianism. These three components lead to identification as lesbian. This general conceptualization of 'coming out to self' was largely supported by the findings of the study.

The process takes place within a social context that includes perceptions of 'most' people's views of lesbians as negative (e.g. feeling threatened; not understanding); a stereotype of lesbians as masculine, abnormal, aggressive and unattractive; and lesbian 'invisibility' (see Figure 9.1.1). These aspects of the social context are likely to decrease both awareness of lesbianism as an option, and emotional acceptance of homosexuality. This suggests that for identification of self as lesbian to occur, emotional feelings directed towards women would need to be very strong. Indeed, strong emotional feelings for women were found to be central in identification of self as lesbian. Almost nine out of ten of the lesbian sample mentioned falling in love/crushes etc. Personal definitions of 'lesbian' often incorporated love/emotion. Findings supported Wolff's (1973) conceptualization of lesbians as 'homoemotional'.

Some support was provided for studies that have suggested two types of lesbians (e.g. Ettorre, 1980a; Golden, 1987). There were women who perceived their lesbian identity in essentialist terms, as part of their being, something they were 'born' with, or developed into; and secondly, there were those who perceived their lesbian identity as an active choice made during

Figure 9.1.1: 'Coming out to self' within the social context



adulthood. However, the distinction between the groups was not always clear; the sample contained comparatively few of the latter group, and many women's understanding of their lesbian identity would fall between the two extremes. Although aspects of Kitzinger's notions of lesbian identities (Kitzinger & Rogers, 1985; Kitzinger, 1987) were evident, this study was not designed to differentiate between the identities. It is thought, however, that categorization into such groupings may be problematic with clear boundaries between the identities being unlikely.

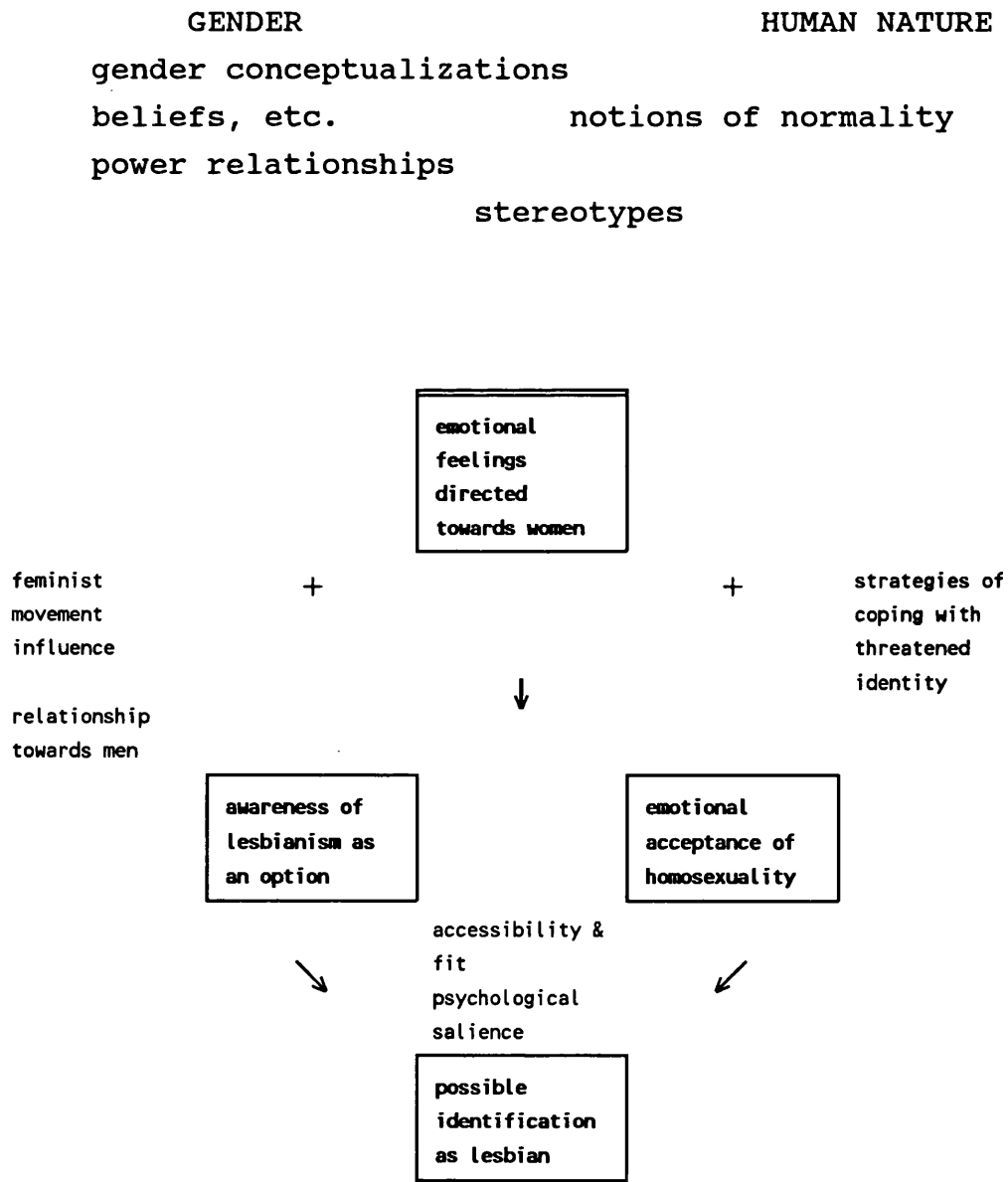
Awareness of lesbianism as an option may be seen to depend on available social representations of gender and human nature, while level of emotional acceptance may reflect coping with threat to identity (see Figure 9.1.2). Available social representations would be specific to the historical time period. Relevant social representations may be seen as reflecting the stereotyping, perceptions of negative attitudes, and attributions relating to lesbianism found in this study. The negative nature of these would contribute little towards lesbianism being perceived as an option. It was found that two out of three of the lesbian subjects had either held a stereotype or mentioned feeling frightened of lesbians prior to meeting others.

Lesbian 'invisibility', including low media coverage, was a further aspect of the social context that tends to limit awareness of lesbianism as an option. Lack of formal education about homosexuality contributes towards this 'invisibility'. Findings indicated that although for at least forty percent of the lesbian sample, first cognitive awareness of terms relating to homosexuality was at school or amongst other children, over half the sample had been unaware of lesbian/gay teachers or pupils. Three out of four women did not recall any mention of homosexuality in lessons at school.

Figure 9.1.2: 'Coming out to self' within the context of relevant social representations

Historical time period

SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS



For some women, involvement with the feminist movement may both heighten awareness of lesbianism as an option and facilitate emotional acceptance, providing an environment in which lesbianism is accepted to a greater extent than it is within society as a whole. Comparatively few women in this study had been directly involved with the feminist movement while coming out to self, but a greater proportion have experienced some indirect influence from the movement.

A fundamental aspect relevant to 'coming out to self' as lesbian is a woman's relationship towards men. While approximately a quarter of the lesbian women in this study perceived themselves as 'always' having been lesbian, and had had no important relationships with men, another quarter of the sample had had relationships with men, but perceived themselves as possibly lesbian at the time; and just under a half of the sample had had heterosexual relationships and perceived themselves as heterosexual at the time. Half of this last group, however, mentioned their heterosexual relationship(s) had been unsatisfactory in some way. Boundaries between these three groupings of women were unclear in some cases.

Emotional acceptance of lesbianism was gradual. Threat to identity (Breakwell, 1986) was evident in all the lesbian subjects' accounts. Variation occurred in intensity or type of threat, and in choice of coping strategies. Coping strategies selected may help to determine if/when a woman comes to identify herself as lesbian. Thus, on the intra-psychic level, where women use denial or other deflection strategies, rather than acceptance strategies, there would be delay in coming out to self. Women in the 'always' lesbian group experienced considerable threat during their teenage years and early twenties. On the intra-psychic level, conflict between continuity of lesbian feelings, negative distinctiveness and maintenance of self esteem was coped with by the

'always' lesbian women mainly through acceptance strategies. Women with a heterosexual background were more likely to report initial repression, suppression or denial. Less group support had been available for older subjects. Subjects across all groupings mentioned 'being yourself' as a main benefit of coming out. It is suggested that 'a need for authenticity and integrity' may constitute an additional identity principle guiding the process of coming out.

There was often a long gap of time between first lesbian feelings and identifying self as lesbian: between three years and twenty years for approximately half the women. Becoming aware of self as lesbian often began with negative or conflicting feelings. These included general feelings of worry or isolation, negative feelings in connection with others' attitudes or reactions, feeling unable to talk to others about it, awareness of the negative associations of lesbianism, and suicidal thoughts. A minority of subjects mentioned having positive feelings during this time. Current feelings about being lesbian were both positive and negative.

The generally negative or conflicting feelings on initially becoming aware of self as lesbian may be seen as associated with the negative attitudes towards homosexuality, stereotyping etc. reflected by dominant social representations of gender and human nature. Contained within these social representations may be common-sense perceptions of theories of the development of homosexuality ranging from the physiological to the psychoanalytic, influencing understanding and interpretation of self as lesbian. The accounts of the majority of the lesbian subjects may be interpreted as suggesting that experience of strong emotional feelings directed towards women was the most important cue leading to self-attribution as lesbian. Relationship towards men varied, and formed a less clear cue for perceiving self as lesbian. For a very few women in the sample, self-

identification as lesbian was perceived solely as an active choice taken. A considerable proportion of the women perceived reasons for being lesbian in environmental terms, but this interpretation may reflect views current within the lesbian community rather than their perceptions when initially becoming aware of self as lesbian.

Becoming aware of self as lesbian may also be considered in terms of social identity theory and salience of social categorization. Conflicting feelings on coming out to self may be viewed as associated with initial perceptions of lesbians as a negatively valued group. Salience of social category is seen as a function of accessibility and fit (Oakes, 1987). This takes into account emotional significance of categorization as well as match between self-perceptions and stereotypical notions. Negative stereotyping of lesbians may tend to decrease perceptions of fit.

Overall, findings in this study do not lend support to the notion of a linear stage model of coming out to self. Women came to identify themselves as lesbian at widely varying ages, in a variety of different ways, having had very different life experiences.

'Coming out to self' like 'coming out to others' needs to be understood within the social context. A fundamental aspect of this concerns the notions of gender that permeate the structure of our society and our everyday life. Dominant social representations of gender and human nature may be seen as containing inflexible conceptualizations of gender and sex-role notions, based on heterosexuality, and incorporating power inequalities between women and men. The process of coming out to self as lesbian may be seen as requiring broader, more flexible conceptualizations of gender. The notion of gender boundaries (Condor, 1987) which permit changes in social representations, with boundaries being viewed as negotiable, provides a useful conceptualization. The

process of coming out to self must also be seen as a challenge to male dominance. Within this context, conflict experienced in coming out to self as lesbian may be understood.

9.2 COMING OUT TO OTHERS: A SUMMARY

The main areas of 'coming out to others' examined were coming out to other lesbians; coming out to family and heterosexual friends; and coming out at work. Non-disclosure is as vital to investigate as disclosure: the focus was as much on issues related to decisions not to come out as on coming out itself. Like 'coming out to self', 'coming out to others' needs to be seen within the social context. On the individual level, self-disclosure issues are pertinent. Coming out to others was examined from the perspective of initial circumstances, approaches taken, telling the other person, reactions, and satisfaction with outcome.

Coming out to others may be viewed from a combination of individual/interpersonal, intergroup, and societal perspectives.

9.2.1 'Coming out to others' from an interpersonal perspective

A woman who has not come out to a particular heterosexual significant other may be seen as coping with threat to identity through 'passing' (Breakwell, 1986); as 'discreditable', with information to manage (Goffman, 1963); as 'markable' (Jones et al., 1984); or as an actor concealing information from the audience (Goffman, 1959). Personal identity rather than social identity may be salient in interaction with the other (Oakes, 1987), although another group membership may be salient. In particular, behaviour may be gender related (Deaux & Major, 1987). Disclosure reciprocity (Jourard, 1971; Chaikin & Derlega, 1976) may be inhibited, affecting relationships with others (Chaikin & Derlega, 1976) as

well as development of friendship (Miell & Duck, 1986). However, this needs to be balanced against possible negative effects of disclosure of 'deviant' information (Derlega, Harris & Chaikin, 1973); or alienation of others through distress disclosure (Coates & Winston, 1987).

Others may assume the woman is heterosexual; or the situation may be more ambiguous with others speculating about her sexuality; having guessed; or feeling uncertain. The lesbian may correctly or incorrectly assume others 'know'. Uncertainty and ambiguity may exist for both lesbian and heterosexual significant other, affecting the relationship between them.

Differences in lesbian and heterosexual perspectives are fundamental to understanding 'coming out'. Heterosexual subjects tended to perceive lesbianism solely in terms of sex, while lesbian subjects perceived it as something more than sex, including for example, love/emotion, feminism, the lesbian community, or possible celibacy in their definitions. While lesbian subjects' personal views of lesbians, derived from the BSRI, tended to be androgynous, over half the heterosexual subjects viewed lesbians as masculine. Many heterosexual subjects had had little contact with lesbians.

Previous studies of lesbians and/or gay men (e.g. Trenchard & Warren, 1984; Cramer, 1985; Chapman & Brannock, 1987) have indicated varying proportions of samples 'out' to parents and/or other family members. In this study, while approximately two out of three women had come out to some or most heterosexual friends, almost one in four had come out to few or none. Sixty percent of the women had come out to their mothers, but less than forty percent to their fathers. Of those who had sisters, two thirds had come out to one or more of them; and of those with brothers, one third were out to one or more. Some women had come out to husbands and/or

children. Such figures cannot be seen as representative of lesbians/gay men generally. Samples only consist of women and men confident enough about being 'out' to take part in research. Thus, proportions of those who are 'out' may be inflated.

Initial circumstances contributing towards decisions not to come out included perceptions of negative attitudes towards homosexuality; wishing to protect others from being upset; and feeling it was unnecessary to tell certain people. Contributing towards decisions to come out were need for support, in particular with lesbian relationship problems; feelings of guilt at not being able to speak freely, and being assumed to be heterosexual; and the feeling that the other person would not mind.

The approach taken in telling family or friends that one was lesbian tended to be direct, but sometimes women just assumed others knew, or 'came out' by not hiding being in a relationship. Few women were recorded as 'testing the water' before telling others, although potentially this could be a helpful approach.

When a lesbian tells someone about herself, social identity is made salient rather than personal identity. One possible scenario is that the lesbian has come to perceive her social identity as basically positive. The heterosexual person, however, may perceive lesbian identity as largely negative, and possibly as threatening to the distinctiveness of heterosexuality and/or gender roles. Attributions made may be based on social category membership.

Reactions to coming out were based on lesbians' perceptions of friends' or family members' responses to the lesbian telling them about herself; and on heterosexuals' perceptions of their reactions in the hypothetical situation of a friend or family member coming out to them. Responses were often a mixture of positive, neutral or negative reactions. Negative

responses ranged from being shocked/upset/not understanding or not being able to talk about it/a distancing, to being horrified/revolted; and from hoping it was a phase or concern about what others might say, to rejection. There were some differences in the types of negative reactions mentioned by lesbian and heterosexual subjects. A major reason for wishing to come out was to be able to speak freely with others, but half the lesbians suggested the subject had not been easy to talk about since, and heterosexuals suggested a distancing.

The outcome - lesbian subjects' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with coming out - reflected women's perceptions of the reactions of others. Perceived benefits of coming out focused particularly on 'being yourself', being true to yourself, being a whole person; and secondly, on general relationship to others - being able to stop lying or pretending, being more relaxed, not having to hide, being able to share feelings with friends or family.

Very few women in this study had come out completely at work. Some were 'out' to someone or a few people there, but almost a third of the sample were 'out' to no-one. Some heterosexual subjects' responses reflected concerns about relating to gay people at work. Teaching was seen as a particular focus of concern. Some subjects questioned whether sexuality has any relevance at work, suggesting that such personal issues are inappropriate for discussion in the workplace. The question of discussing personal issues at work was also raised by communication group interviewees. However, this view fails to take into account how deeply assumptions of heterosexual relations are woven into everyday life and communication. For the heterosexual woman, saying 'I went to the cinema with my husband (/boyfriend) on Saturday evening' may not seem of any significance or particularly personal, yet it implies heterosexuality. A parallel statement by a lesbian may be seen as very

personal and possibly unacceptable. Such double standards may be seen as a reflection of prejudice and discrimination. A lesbian, whether out or not, must also be considered as a woman within the workplace (Taylor, 1986; Rich, 1981; Beer, Jeffery & Munyard, 1983); and issues of class, race and disability need to be taken into account as well. Overall, this study indicated not only that lesbian subjects perceived being out at work as potentially problematic, but also that their concerns were, to some extent, a realistic reflection of heterosexuals' attitudes.

9.2.2 'Coming out to others' from intergroup and societal perspectives

All aspects of 'coming out to others' take place within the social context. Dominant social representations of gender (Duveen & Lloyd, 1987) and human nature (Moscovici & Hewstone, 1983) may be seen as reflecting attitudes, stereotypes, sex-role notions, conceptualization of gender, and notions of normality relevant to lesbianism. This study found perceptions of 'most' people's attitudes as largely negative, emphasizing 'threat' and 'abnormality'; and a stereotype of lesbians as masculine, aggressive, unattractive and abnormal. Lesbian 'invisibility', including lack of contact of heterosexual subjects with lesbians, and low media coverage of lesbian issues, formed a further aspect of the social context. At the most fundamental level, conceptualization of gender, incorporating heterosexual relations and power inequalities between women and men may be seen as shaping the social context within which coming out takes place.

Coming out into the lesbian community

There was evidence that lesbians are initially perceived as a negatively valued group. This included perceptions of negative associations of the term

'lesbian'; negative feelings on coming out to self; and awareness of a stereotype or feeling frightened of lesbians before coming out to others. Perceptions of most people's views of lesbians were mainly negative including fear or feeling threatened, and lack of understanding or acceptance. Feelings of threat were associated with abnormality and perceived on both societal and personal levels. Relevant dominant social representations may be seen as reflecting a masculine, abnormal lesbian stereotype; and notions of threat and abnormality. Lesbian 'invisibility' is a further feature of the social context, and is compounded by little media coverage. Various theories of 'causes' of homosexuality may also form part of the relevant social representations. The generally negative social context reflected by dominant social representations relating to lesbianism may be seen as contributing towards the difficulties many women experienced in initially making contact with other lesbians.

From the perspective of coping with threatened identity (Breakwell, 1986), group support and/or group action has the potential to facilitate the coming out process for lesbians. Less group support would have been available for women who first came out during the 1950's or 1960's than for those who came out during the 1970's or 1980's. The women's movement, in particular, either directly or indirectly, may have made coming out, both to self and others, easier. Few women in this sample had been directly involved with feminism when coming out to self. Some ambivalence of feelings towards the women's movement was evident.

Once women have made contact with other lesbians, interdependence and shared threat (Turner, 1984), as well as depersonalization (Turner, 1987), may contribute towards positive reinforcement of lesbian identity, group cohesiveness, and emphasis of social identity over personal identity.

Coming out to heterosexual friends or family

As described from the interpersonal perspective, when women come out to heterosexual significant others, social identity is made salient and attributions may be made based on social category membership. Social identity theory provides an intergroup perspective of coming out that allows power relationships between groups to be taken into account. Lesbians need to be viewed as women within a male dominated society, in addition to being seen as homosexual within a predominantly heterosexual society. Underlying notions of social identity and social attributions are the dominant social representations of gender and human nature. Taking a perspective that incorporates social representations allows consideration of historical period differences with the possibility of the content of dominant representations changing over time.

Central areas of focus have been the roles played by stereotyping and gender issues in the coming out process.

Stereotyping

Stereotyping may be considered from both social and individual perspectives. Stereotypes are part of the relevant social representations; and they may affect interpersonal behaviour. The stereotype of the masculine, aggressive, unattractive and abnormal lesbian emerged from the use of three convergent methods: interview questions; a questionnaire of open-ended questions and sentence completion; and sex-role inventories. Sex role was confirmed as an important part of the lesbian stereotype, but other aspects such as abnormality were also evident. Although the notion of sex role may be seen as a limited aspect of gender, and exactly what is being measured is uncertain (e.g. instrumental/expressive qualities), sex role is very clearly a central part of the lesbian stereotype. Of the social functions of stereotyping (Tajfel, 1981),

differentiation may be most important for the coming out process.

It was found that a considerable proportion of women had held stereotypical notions or felt frightened of lesbians before meeting others; and that this had made coming out more difficult and/or delayed the process of coming out for some women.

Some methodological problems of stereotype investigation, such as restriction of perceptions through use of checklist only, and possible reluctance to make generalizations were avoided. Open-ended questions were used in addition to sex-role inventories; and it was made clear that it was perceptions of 'most people's view' rather than personal views that were required.

Gender and the coming out process

Gender issues may be seen as affecting the coming out process for lesbians in a number of ways. Firstly, sex-role was found to play a central part in stereotyping of lesbians. Secondly, at a deeper level, heterosexuality may be seen as structuring gender conceptualization and relations between people in our society (Bem, 1981a; Spence & Sawin, 1985); and as incorporating power inequalities between women and men, and central to the oppression of women (Raymond, 1986; Kitzinger, 1987; Jeffreys, 1990). Coming out as lesbian may be seen as a violation of gender distinctions, and of relations based on assumptions of heterosexuality; and as a challenge to the status quo of power relations within a male dominated society. Thirdly, a lesbian coming out is seen both as a woman and as a lesbian. Gender related behaviour (Deaux & Major, 1987) may occur during the coming out process as well as behaviour specifically related to the lesbian identity of the woman.

In the past, psychology has neglected issues of gender (Frieze et al., 1978; Unger, 1985) and may have misinterpreted women's experiences with its incorporation

of male values (Wilkinson, 1986).

The emphasis in this study has been on investigation of lesbians coming out within the context of a mainly heterosexual society. It is suggested that it is crucial in considering coming out to investigate the heterosexual perspective as well as lesbians' perceptions and experiences. Coming out only assumes its importance as an issue within the context of a predominantly heterosexual society. To understand the coming out process, lesbianism must be seen in relation to heterosexuality, and examination of both lesbian and heterosexual perspectives is essential.

9.3 INTERPLAY OF INFLUENCES

9.3.1 Interaction between coming out to self and others

It has been emphasized that 'coming out to self' and 'coming out to others' need to be seen within the social context. For clarity, they have been described separately, but they are not independent and must be seen as interacting. Examples of some possible 'coming out' situations are shown in Table 9.3.1. A woman may identify herself as lesbian; be unsure of her sexual orientation; or completely unaware of herself as lesbian. In the first two cases, she may tell a heterosexual significant other about herself. Reinforcement of lesbian identity may occur whether the heterosexual person responds in positive or negative manner. In the third case, although the woman herself is unaware of self as lesbian, another person may perceive her as possibly lesbian. This may have no effect on the woman's perception of her identity, but if the person tells the possibly lesbian woman, modifies behaviour towards her, or perhaps tells others, there is likely to be an impact of the woman's identity. These effects may be positive or negative. An example, illustrated in this study, is denial by the possibly lesbian woman, followed by attempts to prove self heterosexual.

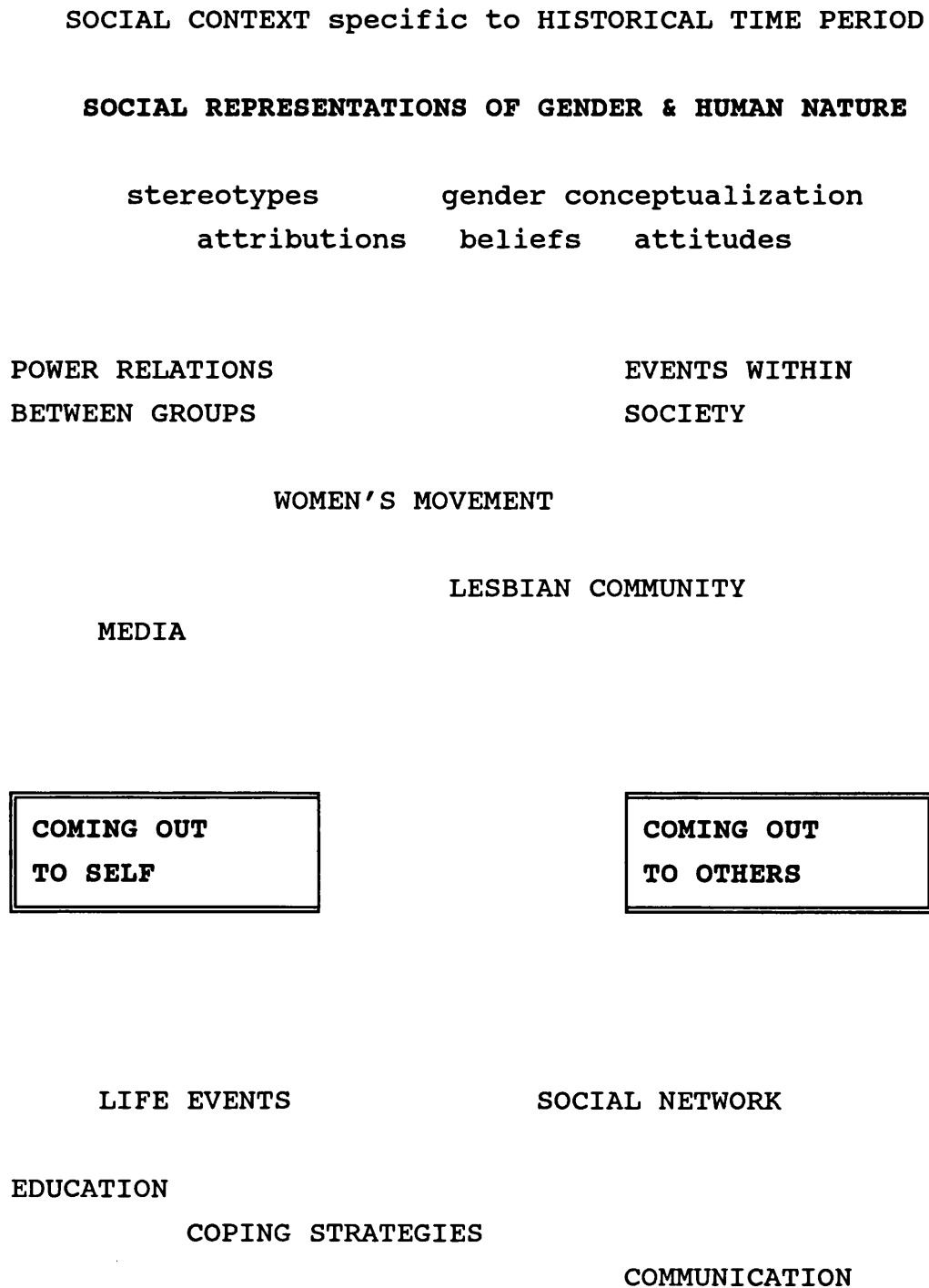
Table 9.3.1: Coming out to self and others: some possible scenarios

I	II	III
1. Has come out to self/ identifies self as lesbian	1. Unsure of self	1. Not aware of self as lesbian
2. Comes out to heterosexual person	2. Comes out to heterosexual person	2. Other perceives woman as possibly lesbian
3. Reinforcement of lesbian identity	3. Positive or negative impact on perception of self as lesbian	3. No impact on identity unless (a) person suggests it to woman (b) person modifies her behaviour towards woman (c) person tells other person(s)

9.3.2 Some influences on coming out

A variety of influences may affect the coming out process: Figure 9.3.1 shows some examples. The interplay of these influences, that range from the cultural or societal, to the individual, determine the coming out process. At the cultural/societal level are the dominant social representations relevant to lesbianism, reflecting stereotypes, attributions, beliefs and attitudes about homosexuality, and notions of gender and normality. The content of these social representations may change over time. Thus, the social context is specific to the historical period.

Figure 9.3.1: Examples of influences affecting the coming out process



Certain events that occur within a society may be seen as affecting coming out. Recent examples include Section 28 of the Local Government Act, and the spread of AIDS among gay men. Another very recent phenomenon, originating in the United States, is that of 'outing', where there is public declaration by people within the gay community that some well known or eminent person is gay or lesbian. Behind this is the idea that if such people were recognized as gay, it would ease the position for other gay people. However, as has been pointed out by Puddephatt (1991), the general secretary of Liberty (formerly, NCCL), 'outing' infringes the fundamental civil liberty of the right to privacy, and is likely to contribute towards an 'atmosphere of fear and intimidation' (p.17).

Both reflecting dominant social representations, and contributing towards them, are the media. Although coverage of lesbian issues is generally minimal, potentially, the media may have a strong impact on both lesbians coming out and heterosexual attitudes towards homosexuality. A further possible influence on coming out is education. There was little evidence of any formal provision of education relating to lesbianism in this study. Currently, with the introduction of Section 28, education in schools is likely to be even more limited. Potentially, however, education could provide strong support for lesbians coming out, influencing both understanding of lesbianism and attitudes of heterosexuals towards lesbians.

At the intergroup level, influences include the women's movement and the lesbian community. Generally, these may be seen as facilitating coming out. However, the strength of their influence may vary considerably with for example, locality; and their effect on coming out may be negative as well as positive. Power relations between groups also influence coming out. Particularly pertinent are firstly, the relationship of lesbianism to

a predominantly heterosexual society; and secondly, the consideration of lesbians as women within a male dominated society.

On the interpersonal level, a woman's social network and general relationships with others, including for example, family ties, may influence her coming out experiences. Individual life events such as career moves, marriage, or moving to a different area, may facilitate or hinder coming out. These life events and their influence on coming out must be seen within the cultural context of the relevant historical time period. A life span perspective takes into account women's development within the cultural context specific to a particular historical period, interacting with individual life events.

Coping strategies employed by women during coming out range from intra-psychic to intergroup. Strategies selected, their appropriateness and efficiency, as well as for example, availability of group support, will all influence the coming out process. It was found that whereas those women with heterosexual backgrounds often perceived themselves as having repressed/denied lesbian identity, women who perceived themselves as 'always' lesbian tended to have used acceptance rather than deflection intra-psychic coping strategies. More group support had been available for the younger women.

Women generally were found to communicate with family and friends with varying ease or difficulty. Topic; relationship with person disclosed to; and perceptions of other person, may all affect disclosure. Communication abilities and opportunities may be seen as further influences on coming out.

Thus, there is an interplay of cultural/societal, intergroup, interpersonal and intra-psychic influences that affects the coming out process. Coming out to self and others needs to be understood within this complex context.

9.4 METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Interpretation of the findings of this study must be based on awareness of its methodological limitations. Areas of concern include sampling; interview biases; and interpretation of qualitative data.

The lesbian sample, mainly from one London group, cannot be seen as representative of lesbians generally. Class, race and disability were not investigated. Possibly, women who felt most confident about being 'out' would have been more likely to volunteer to participate in the study than those less confident. The heterosexual sample was also not representative in terms of class, race or disability. Further, heterosexual individuals who felt most uncomfortable about homosexuality may have been unlikely to volunteer to take part in this study.

Communication group interviewees were all connected with the London School of Economics. Like the lesbian and heterosexual groups, participants may have had greater confidence in communication than those who did not volunteer to take part.

Interview material needs to be seen as deriving from interviewee and researcher biases, together with biases arising from interviewee-researcher interaction. It is pertinent that the researcher defines herself as lesbian, most lesbian subjects having been aware of this, but most heterosexual subjects, unaware. Heterosexual subjects may have assumed heterosexuality of interviewer, guessed she was lesbian, or been unsure, with consequent effects on responses.

Orientation of the researcher is also pertinent to the formulation of research questions. A heterosexual researcher might have focused on different issues.

In analysing qualitative material, the researcher structures the framework for analysis, as well as interpreting the material for coding. Bias may occur at both stages. Interview responses may sometimes be ambiguous or contradictory.

Many previous studies and attempts to measure heterosexuals' attitudes towards homosexuals have been methodologically problematic. Findings need interpreting with caution, in particular, for example, where constructs are poorly defined, where subject or target sex is not specified, where statistical methods used have been questionable, where samples have been restricted to student populations, or where social context has been neglected. Further, as Kitzinger (1987) has emphasized, prejudice may only be understood within the context of particular ideological frameworks.

9.5 IMPLICATIONS

Major implications of the findings of this study concern the need for examination of the coming out process from cultural and intergroup perspectives as well as considering intra-psychic and interpersonal aspects; the importance of notions of gender in understanding coming out for lesbians; and how differences in lesbian and heterosexual perspectives may affect coming out. Further implications relate to practical issues such as education, counselling and therapy; and on a more fundamental level, potential for facilitation of the coming out process.

9.5.1 The coming out process and social psychological theory

'Coming out' is seen as an essentially social psychological phenomenon. Analysis within a social psychological framework provides a basis for description and some explanations of the process, as well as indicating areas where development of theory would be useful. Although coming out needs to be viewed from intra-psychic and interpersonal perspectives, it is only when cultural and intergroup aspects are considered too that a deeper understanding of the process emerges. Social representations of gender and human nature,

incorporating notions of gender, stereotypes, attitudes and attributions relating to lesbianism may be seen as underlying the coming out process.

Two important aspects of the process of coming out are firstly, its association with historical time period; and secondly, the underlying issues of power. The dynamic nature of social representations allows historical period differences to be taken into account, while social identity theory permits some understanding of power relations between groups. Neither perspective on its own appears to cover both aspects adequately.

The notion of social attribution seems more useful for understanding the coming out process than attribution theory focused upon the individual level. Social attributions can incorporate a link between cultural aspects through social representations, with intergroup relations, and attribution theory. This link with cultural and intergroup aspects is crucial for understanding the role attributions may play in coming out: attributions made in coming out cannot be considered only from the individual perspective.

While social representations provide a vital cultural perspective, their links with the individual level are less clearly specified. Mead's (1934) notion of self, however, provides a connection between the individual and social, with the self seen as originating and developing within the context of social interaction. Women did tend to perceive their experience of coming out in individual terms, for example, emphasizing 'being yourself' as a main benefit of coming out.

Evidence of coping with threatened identity (Breakwell, 1986) was indicated in lesbian accounts. Identity principles of continuity, distinctiveness and self-esteem, however, were not considered sufficient to describe those guiding the identity processes in coming out. Additional identity principles were required: firstly, a need for authenticity and integrity, and

secondly, a need for affiliation.

Communication group interviews indicated difficult issues to talk about with family and/or friends included those relating to identity, relationships, and loss. Coming out may involve all of these areas of concern. Studies on self-disclosure have tended to focus on the individual/interpersonal level. In investigating an issue such as coming out, however, it is essential to consider intergroup and cultural aspects that may affect self-disclosure, and to view the self as social in nature.

9.5.2 Gender issues and coming out

Lesbians need to be considered as women within a male dominated society, and as homosexual within a predominantly heterosexual society. Taking a social identity perspective contributes towards understanding coming out in terms of group membership and power inequalities between groups. It is argued that coming out as lesbian only becomes an issue within a heterosexist society. Underlying heterosexism are inflexible notions of gender and gender schematic thinking, as well as interest in maintaining the status quo of power relations. For those who aim to maintain the current power imbalance between women and men, lesbianism is seen as a challenge and threat.

Consideration of coming out raises questions about the notion of sex role and conceptualization of gender. There has been debate about what it is that is being measured by instruments such as the BSRI and PAQ (e.g. Spence, 1991). Whether it may be instrumental and expressive characteristics, agency and communion, or some other qualities, the characteristics were clearly a central part of the lesbian stereotype. The question is raised, how might gender be conceptualized such that heterosexism disappears or diminishes. Although a gender aschematic society (Bem, 1981a) might be the ideal goal,

with the gender distinction disappearing, given the base of a biological sex difference, this seems unlikely to happen. However, a more flexible notion of gender, such as that suggested by the gender boundaries approach (Condor, 1987) could potentially contribute towards a decrease in heterosexism.

9.5.3 Comparison of lesbian and heterosexual perspectives

It is essential to view coming out both from the perspective of lesbians' perceptions and experiences, and from the perspective of heterosexuals' attitudes. The differences found between lesbian and heterosexual perspectives contribute towards understanding the coming out process. Fundamentally, definitions of 'lesbian' differed, with heterosexual subjects perceiving lesbianism as only relating to sex, and lesbian subjects perceiving a broader meaning, relating to for example love/emotion, feminism or lesbian community. This may contribute towards explaining heterosexuals' negative reactions when a lesbian comes out. They may be comprehending the issue from a very limited perspective. Lack of contact with lesbians and general lesbian 'invisibility' make increased understanding less likely. Stereotypical notions of lesbians may then continue to predominate, as indicated for example, by heterosexual subjects' personal views of lesbians as masculine. The coming out process for lesbians may only be understood within this context of heterosexual attitudes and beliefs relating to lesbians. This raises the question of the possibility of change in the attitudes and beliefs about lesbianism that are reflected in dominant social representations.

9.5.4 Education and the media

Could education, for example, contribute towards greater understanding of homosexuality? Some within the lesbian sample suggested that education was of

fundamental importance. Heterosexual subjects, on the other hand, expressed ambivalence about education relating to homosexuality being provided in schools. Misconceptions about lesbians and lesbianism are reflected in dominant attitudes and beliefs: education could help dispel misunderstandings, but would require a carefully planned approach, sensitive to the many issues involved.

The media provide another potential approach to modifying attitudes and beliefs relating to lesbianism. As with education, there is opportunity both for perpetuation of misrepresentation and misunderstanding, or for an approach that portrays lesbians without stereotypical generalization and misconceptions. Lesbian 'invisibility' does not aid understanding of lesbianism. On the other hand, the approach of the tabloid newspaper may be positively harmful, reinforcing stereotypes and misconceptions. The media have the potential, however, to portray lesbians in a manner that more closely reflects lesbian women's lives.

Lesbian 'invisibility' has to be seen as a problem. It allows misconceptions about lesbians to persist; isolates individuals 'coming out to self', and makes it more difficult for women to meet other lesbians. Women coming out to self may have no role models, and perhaps only stereotypical notions portrayed by the media. The women will need to make a positive effort if they are to meet other lesbians. For heterosexual men and women, lesbian 'invisibility' allows perpetuation of stereotypical notions.

Education and the media may provide the means to modify attitudes and beliefs about lesbians. However, fundamental change in attitudes towards lesbians, understanding etc. can only be realized through modification of content of dominant social representations of gender and human nature. Attitudes towards lesbianism cannot simply be modified on a

superficial level. What is required is change in thinking, conceptualization, relations and power balance, regarding gender and notions of normality: fundamental change in our social representations of gender and human nature.

9.5.5 Facilitation of coming out

Facilitation of the coming out process for lesbians would necessarily involve fundamental changes at all levels. Change at intergroup, interpersonal and intrapsychic levels would depend on modification at the level of social representations. If dominant social representations were to reflect flexible notions of gender that incorporated equality between males and females, and between homosexual and heterosexual persons in our society, then coming out as lesbian would almost certainly cease to be an issue. While notions of gender remain rigid in conceptualization, based on perceptions of differences between the sexes, devaluing characteristics defined as feminine, and maintaining a power imbalance favouring males, coming out as lesbian will continue to be seen in terms of threat and stigma.

Living within the context of a heterosexist society, it is not surprising that a considerable proportion of lesbian women seek counselling or therapy at some stage. A potential danger is the individualization of a problem that lies within society, not the individual. On the other hand, counselling or therapy that recognizes the social and societal issues, and implications, may relieve distress and depression, and contribute positively to individual development.

9.6 CONCLUSIONS

Women who 'come out to self' as lesbian may be any age. They may or may not have had a heterosexual past. They may or may not have met other lesbians. What they share is the experience of strong emotional feelings

directed towards other women. These emotional feelings when combined with awareness of lesbianism as an option, and a level of emotional acceptance of homosexuality, may lead to identification of self as lesbian (although this outcome is obviously not necessarily the case). Coming out to self was generally a gradual process. In contrast, however, for a very small number of women in this sample, it was a conscious adult choice. The diverse experiences of the women in this study, in coming to identify themselves as lesbian, do not support a linear stage theory.

The importance of viewing coming out to self within the social context has been emphasized. Affecting awareness of lesbianism as an option was availability of relevant social representations, and, for example, media representations. Interacting with awareness of lesbianism as an option was emotional acceptance of homosexuality. The social context, incorporating stereotypes, would tend to contribute negatively towards emotional acceptance. Coping with threatened identity (Breakwell, 1986) was usually necessary. Women who perceived themselves as 'always' lesbian tended to use intra-psychic, acceptance, coping strategies, while women with a heterosexual background may have tended to use the deflection strategy of denial. Coming out to self may also be viewed in terms of salience of social categorization. Feelings on initially coming out to self tended to be negative - often, in connection with perceptions of others' reactions or attitudes towards lesbianism. After coming out into the lesbian community, many women came to perceive their lesbian identity much more positively.

'Coming out to others' like coming out to self needs to be interpreted within the social context. Thus, it must be seen as taking place within a context of stereotyping, notions of abnormality, perceptions of negative attitudes towards homosexuality, and lesbian

'invisibility'. Coming out to others was examined from the perspective of initial circumstances, approach taken, telling other, reactions and outcome.

Some women had told certain family members, heterosexual friends or work colleagues about themselves. Others had not. For some the situation was ambiguous: they assumed others 'knew', but had not actually told them verbally. Decisions about whether or not to tell a significant other were made according to initial circumstances including perceptions of others' negative attitudes towards homosexuality, or a need to protect others; need for support; or wishes to speak freely, and not be assumed to be heterosexual. 'Testing the water' first was suggested as a possibly useful approach that few lesbian subjects used. Telling the other may be seen in terms of social identity being made salient. Reactions mentioned were often a mixture of positive, neutral or negative. Outcome was sometimes unsatisfactory, with for example, a distancing, or difficulty in talking about the subject subsequently. Since lesbian and heterosexual subjects defined 'lesbian' differently, the heterosexual person may not have understood what the lesbian was telling her/him in the way intended by the lesbian. Sometimes, however, the outcome was perceived as very satisfactory.

Communication group interviews indicated that women generally may find issues that involve identity, relationships, or loss, difficult to talk about with friends or family. All these may be seen as aspects of the coming out process.

Taking a life span perspective of coming out illustrated how coming out experiences, general life events, the cultural context specific to the historical time period, and the woman's development over time, may all be seen as interacting.

A main benefit of coming out (to self or others) was perceived as 'being yourself'.

For the lesbian subject, 'coming out' was a major issue that affected her perceptions of self; the way she related to family, friends and work colleagues; and much of everyday life. For the heterosexual subject, lesbians tended to be 'invisible', rarely thought about, perhaps joked about, and the idea that a family member or friend might be lesbian had usually not been considered. For the lesbian subject, lesbian identity generally meant more than sex: it included love or emotion; political or feminist aspects; the lesbian community; or a predominant interest in women. For the heterosexual subject, lesbianism tended to refer only to sex.

Having had little contact with lesbians, combined with low media coverage of lesbian issues, and usually no formal education about homosexuality, heterosexual subjects tended to perceive lesbians as conforming to the masculine stereotype. Lesbian subjects perceived lesbians generally as androgynous. Both lesbian and heterosexual subjects viewed the lesbian stereotype as masculine, aggressive, unattractive and abnormal; and perceived most people's perceptions of lesbians as largely negative. These stereotypes and perceptions, may be seen as reflected in the dominant social representations of gender and human nature.

The social context has been seen in terms of relevant social representations reflecting stereotypes, beliefs and attitudes; notions of gender and abnormality; and from a social identity theory perspective, as involving power inequalities between women and men, and further inequality between homosexual and heterosexual groups. In particular, the effect of rigid notions of gender division, with underlying assumptions of heterosexuality, has been considered as forming the basis for heterosexism. It is only within a heterosexist society that coming out as lesbian is an issue that needs considering.

The major findings of this study relating to

beliefs, attitudes and stereotyping indicate that for any basic change in lesbians' experiences of coming out to occur, there needs to be change at the level of social representations within our society. The most fundamental change required is in conceptualization of gender. Instead of rigid notions of sex categories, a more flexible conceptualization of gender that is not based on division and inequality between women and men, or on assumptions of heterosexuality, is necessary. The gender boundaries approach (Condor, 1987) may be suitable. Boundary lines would be fluid and permeable, and ideally, would not incorporate power differentials between the sexes. Such a vision of society is thought to be more achievable than a gender aschematic society (Bem, 1981a), which although highly desirable, seems less likely to emerge given the basis of biological sex division. How such changes could be brought about is beyond the scope of the present study. A starting point might be through education or the media. It could probably only be a very gradual process.

It is the power imbalance within our society between men and women that lies at the heart of any difference there may be between lesbians' and gay men's experiences of coming out. When considering lesbians' coming out experiences, their position as women must be taken into account. Lesbianism may be seen as posing a challenge to our largely heterosexual, male dominated society that is different to that of male homosexuality. Thus, although there will be some similarities between lesbians' and gay men's experiences of coming out, there are also likely to be profound differences.

Coming out has been considered from intra-psychic, interpersonal, intergroup and societal perspectives. A social psychological framework that acknowledges and incorporates a perspective of the cultural/ideological level of analysis, an analysis of power issues between groups, and an understanding of the self as originating

and developing within social interaction, provides a basis for considering 'coming out'. Social representations, social identity theory, and Mead's notion of self, together, provide a social psychological perspective that takes into account social/collective issues, and incorporates a focus on power inequalities between groups.

Although the social context has been emphasized, the approach taken in investigation has been largely individual (i.e. individual depth interviews). Individuals may be seen as the product of social interaction and the social context, as reflecting the social context and interacting with it. For the most complete perspective of social phenomena, examination at both the social/societal and the individual/interpersonal levels is necessary. The individual level should not be neglected. It provides one way of accessing the social level, and one of the ways in which a picture of the social may be made more complete. This study has attempted to look at the individual *within the social context*, taking into account issues of power.

Kitzinger (1987) has argued that 'liberal-humanistic' or gay affirmative' psychological approaches to the study of lesbianism individualize an issue that needs to be seen as political; claim to be 'objective'; and do not provide any analysis of power issues. Dismissal of psychology as inappropriate for the study of lesbianism on these terms, however, neglects social psychological approaches that incorporate notions of the social/collective; subjectivity rather than 'objectivity'; and power inequalities between groups.

Methodological limitations of this study indicate that results must be interpreted with caution. The methodology used, however, may be seen as having permitted some part, at least, of the richness and complexity of issues involved in coming out to emerge, and be reflected in the findings.

This study indicates a number of possible directions for future study of coming out. Although, potentially problematic in design and practicality of carrying out, the ideal way to investigate 'coming out to self' would be a longitudinal study, beginning in early childhood, and following through into later childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, and the main adult years. One difficulty would be the large initial sample required as the proportion of those who become lesbian is likely to be small. 'Coming out to others' could be investigated further by interviewing heterosexual women and men who have had close friends or relatives come out to them as lesbian. A more social perspective of coming out could be investigated using group interviews and/or media content analysis. Studies that consider class, race or disability would also be useful. Taking a social identity perspective, the relative importance of lesbian identity in comparison with other group memberships might be examined.

In summary, the major issues that structure the coming out experiences of individual lesbians are to a large extent, located within the social context: the content of dominant social representation of gender and human nature; and power inequalities between women and men. It is modifications at the level of social representations that need to occur if coming out is to become an easier process. Most fundamentally, it is suggested that conceptualization of gender must change.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Heterosexual pilot interviews

Responses from 'heterosexual' interviewees are described below. Sections included are definition of the term 'homosexual'; suggestions of how 'most' people regard homosexuals; feelings about gender of homosexual person; personal contact with homosexuals; attitudes towards the hypothetical or real situations of a friend, sibling, son or daughter, or work colleague coming out to subject; perceptions of suitability of different types of employment for homosexuals; examples of the subject of homosexuality arising in conversations; awareness of homosexuals at school and in the media or books; and finally, miscellaneous issues arising from the interviews, not covered within the main topic areas.

Definition of "homosexual"

Some subjects tended to think of men (e.g. subjects 1,2,4,8), while others did not indicate gender within their definition (e.g. subjects 3,5,6,9,10,12) or specifically referred to both sexes (subjects 7 & 11). Most defined homosexual simply in terms of a person attracted to someone of the same sex.

Most subjects seemed to use the terms 'homosexual' and 'gay' interchangeably, but subject 8 indicated there might be some difference, and subjects 10, 11 and 12 were therefore asked if they defined 'gay' similarly to 'homosexual'. Subject 10 suggested 'gay' was a slang term for homosexual, and subject 11 suggested that although he would personally define these terms similarly, he thought 'gay' had taken on a different connotation, and for males suggested a more effeminate approach.

Subject 12 provided comprehensive definitions for the terms 'homosexual', 'gay' and 'lesbian'. Unusually, in defining homosexual, she stressed that she perceived it as something within everyone, and not different from heterosexuality until it reached the stage of physical

relations or long term emotional involvements. Gay, she defined differently from homosexuality - as presupposing "a kind of political background, a kind of political awareness of homosexuality". Further, subject 12 suggested there were two types of lesbian. First there were those who "choose to be lesbian ... as a statement of political awareness and as a way of taking action politically" and here she suggested there was an even stronger political content than in being gay, and secondly there were those who feel they are born lesbians.

Subjects' suggestions of how 'most' people see/think of homosexuals

Male homosexuals

Subject 2 suggested male homosexuals were perceived as "sensitive", while subject 4 suggested they were seen as "objects of scorn" and that "no father wishes for his son to be gay"; it is not manly or macho. Hairdressers and lipstick were suggested by subject 5. Three images were suggested by subject 6: body building; very effeminate, even more so than women themselves, and finally artistic people, with "excessive sensitivity towards the outer world" and special relations towards other people. For subject 7, most people's view of the typical male homosexual was summed up by the term 'poufter', which he suggested was used in Australia as a term of abuse and here as a term of description.

Some subjects suggested that how most people viewed homosexuals depended on certain factors. Thus subject 3 suggested "it depends very much on the person" and their contact with homosexuals as to how they see them. She further suggested that a lot of men find it threatening because of perhaps doubts about their own sexuality. Stereotypes, this subject suggested, vary from the guy who hangs around toilets to the arty type. Subject 8 suggested how people see homosexuals depends on age and

culture, with older people thinking it's abnormal, a bit evil, dirty, something they don't even want to talk about, and younger people, brought up with it, talking about it freely and not seeing it as such a big deal. It was also suggested by subject 9 that "attitudes are changing", but that "there's probably still a lot of hostility mixed with humour". The caricature, he suggested was "limp wristed, weedy", and probably in a non-manual job. Views vary from people "completely sickened by it to people who are homosexuals themselves" suggested subject 10, while subject 11 also suggested that you cannot categorise most people together because of varied opinions. Thus, subject 11 suggested "a lot of people find it totally unacceptable, think they're freaks and they should just be straightened out or else like killed or something...whereas other people find it quite acceptable and realise that that's just the way they are and there's no reason they should suffer in any way for it". Subject 12 suggested "a lot of people find it a very threatening notion" and mentions state investment in the nuclear family set up. Also, she suggested, people with homosexual tendencies may feel threatened partly because the majority of people see it as 'perverted', and she mentioned its associations with being camp, opposed to ideas of manliness and virility, and the confusion of homosexuality and for example transsexuality. Further, subject 12 suggested homosexual experiences or feelings when young may be very frightening, since being a homosexual is seen "as living as an outsider, as a marginal person in society". This subject also mentioned transient relationships and AIDS.

Female homosexuals

Images of female homosexuals included Greenham Common women, no make-up and not looking after themselves from subject 2, and having 'male traits' from subject 3, while subject 4 commented that people do not think of it as much, because it is not obvious. Some subjects

perceived two different images of lesbians. Two extreme pictures were suggested by subject 6. First there is the woman who is feminist and looks a lot like a man; male behaviour is stressed. Secondly, there is the very effeminate woman who conceals being homosexual; she is very sexual looking and hides it within her; there is a lack of self-confidence about it. It is suggested by subject 7 that in Australia, people divide typical lesbians into two groups. Thus, there are the women who ought to have been men, who have very aggressive personalities, use coarse language, stand up for rights and are almost irredeemably attached to the feminist movement. "Men in Australia would really detest such women". Secondly, there are "really gentle cuddly women who've had a bad time with men" and who have turned to their own sex for comfort, suggests subject 7. Most men think if they could just get one of those kind of lesbians alone and show them a good time, they would switch back to heterosexuality, he added.

Other subjects pointed out the differences of people's perceptions based on gender. Thus subject 9 suggested men think of lesbians with a "mixture of slight fear" and "sexual attraction", while women, he suggested, may be more enlightened towards them. Further, he perceived less hostility from women towards lesbians than from men towards male homosexuals. Subject 11 suggested that males have more negative attitudes towards [male] homosexuality - they do not feel threatened by females. Finally, subject 12 commented "homosexuality for men has probably more negative images than women, although lesbians are obviously credited with some kind of butch appearance and aggressive behaviour".

Reported feelings of subjects regarding gender of homosexual person

Females Subjects

Subjects 1 and 2 suggested they would find female homosexuality more disturbing than male homosexuality,

with subject 1 commenting "The thought of two women together is worse I think than two men together", while subject 2 suggested she was "probably more sensitive to women being gay". On the other hand, subject 8 stated "... lesbian is much more acceptable than homosexual... physically it doesn't bother me so much ... I think it's because women are much more affectionate anyway ... to see two women kissing each other doesn't offend anybody, because it's just done anyway, but to see two men kissing each other, it's something a bit abnormal, to our society anyway". Thus, subject 8 suggested "Women are that much more loving anyway - and it doesn't seem to be so sordid for some reason".

Other female subjects showed no difference in their personal attitudes towards male and female homosexuals (subjects 3, 6, 10, 12). Thus of the female subjects, two seemed to find female homosexuality more disturbing than male homosexuality (subjects 1 & 2, both Canadian); one subject found male homosexuality more disturbing than female (subject 8), and for four subjects there seemed little or no difference in their personal feelings.

Male Subjects

Subject 5 suggested that with a male friend he would feel a bit wary at first and not so certain about going somewhere in public, but with a female friend he could still go to the cinema and "in the eyes of the general public ... it wouldn't look so bad". Another male subject (No.7) suggested that in Australia, female homosexuality is more acceptable because of what people think male homosexuals do to each other, but he showed no bias in his own attitudes. Similarly, subject 4 suggested that most people don't think of lesbianism as much because it isn't obvious, whereas they tend to see male homosexuals as "objects of scorn", but he himself showed no difference in attitude towards male and female homosexuals. Subject 9 suggested there might be less hostility from women towards lesbians than from men

towards male homosexuals, but did not express any personal attitude differences. In talking of his extended family's generally hostile attitude, this subject commented "they wouldn't be hostile to lesbians; they would just think that's a bit of a joke or a bit of a turn-on maybe". Finally, subject 11 suggested males have a more negative attitude towards homosexuality and don't feel threatened by females: "It's also a lot easier for someone of the opposite sex to imagine two people not of their sex in bed together - for me to imagine two women together doesn't bother me at all, but when I start thinking about two men together...".

Of the male subjects then, subject 11 was the only one who commented directly on finding male homosexuality less acceptable than female homosexuality; subject 5 made an indirect reference to similar feelings, and the three other male subjects (nos. 7, 4 and 9) appeared to suggest that most males may find male homosexuality less acceptable than female homosexuality.

Contact with homosexuals

This varied from subjects having had little or no contact with gay people, to those who had gay friends. Subject 1's only real contact seemed to be with her mother's hairdresser. Subject 2 had shared a house with a lesbian and reported that she got on well with gay men. Subject 3 knew some gays. Subject 4 had a friend who thought he was gay, but "I didn't think he was", and he suggested that he does not know anyone who is a 'true' gay or lesbian. Subject 5 was also unaware of knowing any homosexuals. On the other hand, subjects 6 and 7 both reported having homosexual friends of both sexes. Subject 8 had had the experience recently of a friend telling her that she was a lesbian, but described her shock at seeing people at the gay/lesbian society stall when she started at LSE. Subject 9 could think of one male homosexual he had been at college with, and one or

two people, he thought might be homosexual. Subject 10 reported having both friends and acquaintances who were homosexual. Subject 11 reported that he knew some, but not very well - mostly, people he had been at school with and he (and possibly they too) had not realized at the time that they were homosexual. He had also been friendly with one very open, male homosexual in the United States. He knew no gay women, only bisexual. Subject 12 knew both male and female homosexuals, the men most closely.

Subjects' attitudes towards a friend (hypothetical or real) coming out to them

Subject 1 suggested that she would not talk to a woman she knew to be lesbian. Later, she suggested "If I knew somebody was gay, I would be a bit wary to have anything to do with them. However, if I didn't know that and I got friends with them, just friends ... and found out ... I don't think it matters to me then". (It is not quite clear here whether or not she is using the term 'gay' to refer only to males). Some other subjects suggested that it would not matter to them. Thus subject 3 suggested it would give her a "better understanding" of the friend and would not affect their relationship, and subject 4 reported "I just couldn't be bothered really". He pointed out that you have to take people as they are, and if you like them, you like them, and if you don't, you don't.

Surprise or shock were mentioned by several subjects. For example, subject 2 said she would be "surprised" and that it would change her perspective. She suggested a lot of things would change especially at first until you got accustomed to it. Subject 5 reported that he would feel "pretty shocked". It would depend on how long he had known the friend, and he went on to say that it would still be the same person and that sex is not everything. Subject 9 suggested that he would

possibly be surprised, but not appalled. The degree of surprise would depend on who it was, but he reported "I certainly wouldn't be shock, horror, drama". Subject 11 suggested that in general it depends on who it was and what he had previously thought of them: "I would never feel anything bad about it. I would just feel more or less surprised", the degree of surprise varying with previous thoughts on the person.

Different possible reactions according to gender of the friend coming out to them are reported by subjects 5 and 6. Subject 5 mentioned that he would be wary at first of a male friend and would be uncertain about going somewhere with him in public. With a female friend, he could still go to the cinema and "in the eyes of the general public ... it wouldn't look so bad". Subject 6 suggested that if it were a male friend her feelings would depend on the kind of relationship she had with him. With a female friend it would depend on circumstances. If it was a close friend, she would "try to understand it", and would be interested in how the friend felt and why etc. If telling her was a proposition to go to bed, her reaction would be very different.

Some subjects were able to give actual examples of friends who had come out to them. Subject 7 reported that when a male friend told him, it did not bother him, but he added "I suppose if it was somebody whom you always looked on as being overtly heterosexual ... I'd be really surprised". Subject 11 describing a male friend coming out to him, reported "I didn't feel in any way threatened by him because I realised that he appreciated that I wasn't [homosexual]". Subject 10 reported "not really such a reaction" and that the issue had just come up generally as part of conversation. Subject 12 had several homosexual friends, none of whom had 'come out' as such to her.

The fullest account of a friend coming out to a

subject was provided by subject 8 (a woman), with the example of a female friend who had quite recently come out to her:

"I was pretty shocked first of all"

"I was really quite taken aback, but now I don't see her on any different level than anyone else, but the first few days, I sort of saw her in a different light until I got used to it and accepted it."

"The next day I saw her, I saw her slightly differently, because I thought she was probably thinking, I was thinking that, and so there was a slight atmosphere between us, but after ... the next day, we were fine - we were just talking away just as if nothing had happened..."

Further, subject 8 commented: "I haven't told anybody - I thought I'd be dying to tell everybody... because it's something unusual, but ... it's her business and if she wants to tell people, then that's up to her." Reflecting on this, she added that if she had been younger, she might have been tempted to tell everyone.

The hypothetical situation of a brother or sister coming out

Subject 1 suggested that if a sister told her that she was gay, she would not like it, but would not cut them, and would not feel less for them. Similarly, with a brother, she would not like it and it would be a "mass shock" at the beginning, but she would accept it. A difference in attitude towards a brother or sister being gay was expressed by subject 2 (female), who reported that with a brother "I don't think that would bother me that much, although I'm not that close", while with her sister, she would feel "quite shocked", it would not go down well with the family and would be complicated as she is married. Subject 3 (female), considering a sister, suggested that she would be "very, very surprised" and would have to learn to accept it. Subject 4 (male) suggested that in the case of both a brother and a sister, he would try and accept. Subject 5 (male),

considering a brother suggested "I don't think it would particularly affect me, but at first it would be a big shock", although it was "perhaps better that the family knew about it". Subject 6, for a sister, would try to understand it and to help her get over any problems, and similarly for a brother.

It is suggested by subject 7 that it would not have affected him as he does not get on very well with most of his brothers and sisters. With his older sister, who he does get on with, he would be really surprised, but it would not affect their relationship, as he loves her as a person. He pointed out however that it is the kind of situation where you think you know someone and the way they live, and discover that is not true. He suggested, he would only be bothered that homosexuality is not socially accepted and so you are sentencing yourself to a difficult life.

Subject 8 (female), like subject 2, expressed different attitudes towards her brother or sister being gay, but unlike subject 2, it was her brother rather than her sister being gay that concerned her. Thus, she suggested that, her sister being gay would not bother her, although it would probably bother her mother. For her brother, she did not like the idea: "I don't know why - it just doesn't seem right". On the surface, she suggested she might not be bothered by her brother, but if she thought of the sexual side of it, she would be: "that would probably put me off".

Subject 9 (male) reported that with his brother, he would be a little surprised, but not appalled. Subject 10 considering her brother and sister, suggested she would be surprised as they have shown no indication, but that it would be interesting. Any change in relationship would depend on the new lover.

Considering a brother, subject 11 (male) suggested that would be different from friends: "I would be upset about it ... hopefully I would come to terms with it

eventually, just by reasoning it out". He goes on to reflect "... everyone will say 'oh dear, his brother's gay' - and they'll think badly of him - maybe that's why I'll be upset about it".

Finally, subject 12, considering her brothers and sisters, suggested that the only sense she would regret it in, would depend on how positive they seemed to be feeling about it, and that would determine her reaction. From her point of view, the only regret concerned greater vulnerability of gay people, and not being able to have children. She suggested "I would .. hope to encourage them to feel good about it", but at the same time would be aware of problems concerning people's attitudes, the institutional framework and children.

Thus, in summary, subjects suggested that they might feel shock (eg. subjects 1, 2, 5) or surprise (e.g. subjects 3, 7, 9, 10). Some suggested that they would not like it (e.g. subjects 1, 8) or would be upset (subject 9). Several suggested that they would try to accept or understand it (e.g. subjects 1, 3, 4, 6, 11). Differences in attitude towards brothers or sisters being gay were suggested by subjects 2 and 8. Concern to help with any problems the brother or sister might have was expressed by subject 6, while subject 12, also aware of possible problems, suggested she would hope to encourage the brother or sister to feel good about it. The possible problems arising from other people's or society's attitudes were also mentioned by subjects 7 and 11. Other points determining reaction, might include the sibling's lover (subject 10) or positiveness of sibling's feelings (subject 12).

If a son or daughter told you s/he was gay...

For all subjects this was a hypothetical question, but some subjects did actually have children, whereas others did not.

Subject 4, male, without children, would accept as

he could not do anything about it. Subject 5, also male, without children, suggested that to be quite honest, he would probably be horrified, but added that he does not think he would be overtly bothered as long as they kept themselves to themselves. He was concerned with what the neighbours might think. Subject 8, female, without children, suggested that she would probably accept it more than her future husband who would be totally against it. She thought that she probably would accept especially because when they are your own children "I'm sure you feel differently towards them", whereas when it is somebody else's, you might think, that if it were your own, you would not accept it. Subject 8 would accept it more with a daughter than a son. She added "If they told me it was something they really wanted and they were really sure about it, then [I] probably would accept it - it might take me a while to get used to it, but I think eventually I probably would just take it as their choice, and carry on as best I could".

Concern for problems the children might have was expressed by some subjects. Thus subject 6, female, without children, suggested she would be "concerned whether they have problems about it". Subject 7, male with three daughters in their twenties, suggested he would feel bothered that it is not socially accepted and so they would be sentencing themselves to a difficult life and a lot of harassment. He would explain the consequences to them. However, subject 7 added that he did not see anything intrinsically wrong with it. Subject 10, female, with no children, suggested that if it were a son, she would be worried about AIDS, but added that she would be more concerned about the relationship being formed than that they were gay. Subject 12, female with a young daughter, was also concerned with the nature of the relationship being formed. She began by commenting "I can't see any disadvantages - I mean, I have said to her in anger on occasions [laugh] - 'I hope

you grow up to be a lesbian!'" Subject 12 suggested there is a problem in heterosexual relationships due to the power differential, thus "If I thought my daughter was homosexual, that's just as homosexual, that's fine, but if I saw her getting into relationships where I thought that she was being dominated in some way, I would have the same opinion whether it was a man or a woman that was doing it".

Two subjects expressed concern that, as parents, they might hold some responsibility. Subject 6 suggested she would search to find "what did I do so that they became gay". Subject 8 commented "I don't know whether I'd feel that I was responsible - I'm not sure whether it was something missing from their lives that led them to want to be gay ... maybe that would upset me more than anything, thinking that it was my fault".

One subject considered it might be a phase. Subject 9, male, with two daughters, aged three and four, suggested he would ask whether they were sure and "try and find out how gay they are" as they might be somewhere on the continuum. Further, "they might be going through a particular stage in their lives; their sexuality might change ...". Subject 9 concluded "I hope I'd be reasonably enlightened - you can never tell though, can you, until it happens".

A homosexual colleague (hypothetical or real) at work

Some subjects suggested it would make little or no difference if a work colleague were homosexual. Thus subject 6 pointed out that it would be the same as if the person were married or not, and suggested her feelings would be the same in the case of male and female colleagues. Subject 7 had had experiences of working with homosexuals, and subject 10 suggested it would not make any difference and would depend on the person. Subject 11 said it would not bother him at all unless the person started approaching him; his relationship would be

a work relationship. Subject 9 suggested his attitude to a homosexual work colleague would be the same as his attitude to a friend. He would possibly be surprised, but not appalled or anything. Subject 3 suggested that it should not affect the work situation, although she knew that it could, and described her sister's experience. Theoretically however she did not see why it should cause problems. Subject 4 suggested that he would accept.

Caution was suggested by some subjects. Subject 5 suggested he would be a bit wary at first, but if he knew them socially and they seemed okay, then it would be all right. Subject 2 (female) suggested there are sexual overtones in work relationships. If a colleague were gay (male) it would be more matter of fact, but with a woman, she was not sure. Subject 1 suggested that if she did not need the money, she would use an excuse not to work with the homosexual person.

A number of points emerged from subject 8. First, she suggested that girls she has met have accepted the idea more readily than men: "Some men that are very straight ..." wouldn't accept the idea of working with a gay man if they knew. They probably would refuse to work with him because it is just so much against what they believe in, whereas I don't see anything wrong with it". Her Middle Eastern boyfriend, she suggested, would probably hold a 'he goes or I go' attitude. Further she suggested some of the men she knows view a male they think might be homosexual "with slight distaste; they sort of accept him to a certain extent, but I don't think they're that pleased about the situation. I think because he sort of behaves himself as it were, they don't really mind him, but I think if he started forcing his ideas on them, they probably wouldn't like it at all". Finally, subject 8 pointed out, that attitudes regarding working with a homosexual colleague "also might depend on what everybody else thinks".

Subject 12 uniquely suggested "I would like to say that it wouldn't make the slightest bit of difference to me, but I think I would feel that that person was vulnerable - I mean I think I would probably go out of my way to be friendlier, particularly if I thought they were open to some kind of abuse from other people". She described how in the office atmosphere, "one is..open to all sorts of horrible innuendos and..approaches" and that "you get to the stage where (a)you want to discourage it because you're sick of it and (b) if you do feel yourself open to invitations, propositions or whatever, you do have to make your sexuality clear, which is ludicrous, but I mean this is how it is ... people relate to each other in that way". Further to her approach of being friendlier to a homosexual colleague, subject 12 added "...it's difficult for me really to see a case where I wouldn't react like that - where I wouldn't feel that somebody was vulnerable, even if there was no outward sign of it ... one would over-compensate that's a general consequence of liberalism, isn't it! It's only when you really get to know somebody, or else you meet them in an atmosphere where they're not threatened that you can actually say, well this is just a person, and not [be] conscious of anything else - and in an office situation, I don't think that would be the case somehow".

Are some types of employment unsuitable for homosexuals?

Some subjects responded simply that there were no types of employment unsuitable for homosexuals (e.g. subjects 3, 6 & 10). Others qualified their response. Thus subject 1 suggested that it was all right so long as the homosexual did not go public or encourage other people.

The issue of working with children was brought up by several subjects. Subject 2 suggested that sexual abuse is the same with regard to heterosexuals and homosexuals, and in the case of a homosexual working with children, it

would only matter where the person also had a psychiatric problem. Subject 5 however suggested a homosexual might give young children the wrong impression. Subject 7 gave the example of a school teacher in Australia, where the parents were saying he had no right to be a teacher. As there is the problem of the heterosexual man teaching girls, subject 7 did not think that homosexuality should affect the job. Subject 8 also considered working in a boys school, but pointed out that just because they are homosexual, does not mean that they are going to do it to everyone - it would only be a minority. Similarly, subject 9 suggested that homosexuals are no more likely to molest children than heterosexuals, and subject 11 pointed out that working with children would only be unsuitable if the person were deranged, and this could apply to heterosexuals too. Finally, subject 12 provided a further perspective on this issue. First subject 12 suggested that, particularly with regard to residential children's homes, most people would probably say automatically 'yes, they shouldn't work with children' - "because there is a confusion between paedophilia and homosexuality". Then subject 12 continued "...it's not actually possible at this particular time, but I would like to see more gays that had come out working with children, in fact, particularly in the teaching situation ... it's not your average Joe Bloggs that .. I really resent about this actually, it's the people that have the power and that have education that continue to .. put forward these mythical kind of dangers".

A variety of other work fields were considered by some of the subjects. 'Sensitive' jobs/intelligence work where homosexuals might be blackmailed were mentioned by subjects 2 and 5, although subject 5 pointed out that this was only because homosexuality was not generally accepted. Social work was mentioned by subject 8, but, like school work, she suggested that when you think about it, it is not sensible to regard it as unsuitable.

Subject 11 considered whether dating service work might be unsuitable, but decided there was no reason why it should be unacceptable. He also considered 'doctors' suggesting the patient might feel uncomfortable, but then pointed out it could be a female and this is not really any different. Subject 7 concluded that logically there are no jobs that are unsuitable for homosexuals, but that within our society there may be some.

Perceptions of why some people are homosexual

Subjects' suggestions of why some people are homosexual ranged from biological explanations through psychological or emotional reasons to socialization and upbringing.

Subject 1 looked upon homosexuality as "a disease" and suggested "you always think that there's something wrong with them, because by nature, it should be a man and a woman". Subject 5 also perceived homosexuality as biological; subject 11 suggested that "They're definitely born that way", and subject 9 thought it may be genetic at the extreme ends of the continuum. Subject 6 suggested apart from some exceptions who may be born that way, homosexuality occurred for psychological or emotional reasons.

Most of the other subjects perceived social reasons as important. Subject 7 stated "I don't think children are born homosexual - I think they're made homosexual". Subjects 8 suggested "I think it's socialization .. I think it's the way they've been brought up .. for some reason I think there's something missing in their lives". She went on to suggest that maybe the father died or was away a lot, and the girl was surrounded by women, so she could not accept males. However, she added that she could not really decide one way or another, because she did not know enough. Subject 9 saw a good deal of it being social, and suggested that most people are on a continuum, with potential either way depending on the

social situation, people they meet and education. From a different perspective, subject 12 suggested "If people feel they are born lesbians, then who are we to say otherwise, but there obviously are two strands to the experience of lesbianism and one of them is very much a political one".

Looking at whether people have a choice in becoming homosexual, subject 2 commented that she did not think it was a choice: 'why would they choose?' Subject 11 was in agreement with subject 2: "Choosing to be gay, I find that very, very, very, incredibly unlikely". Further, Subject 11 suggested "A gay person choosing to be heterosexual just to fit into society would be quite a regular occurrence, I'm sure". Subject 4 thought choice might be involved as well as maybe being born that way.

Finally, subject 10 responded simply that she had no idea.

Examples of times the subject of homosexuality has come up in conversations.

Jokes, speculations about whether or not someone is gay, and abuse were mentioned by several subjects. Subject 1 reported that among friends, they joke about it and speculate "is he gay ...". Subject 2 suggested "Sometimes I think there's a real tendency to make jokes and to laugh as if it's .. an acceptable thing that everyone can laugh at, and make jokes about". Subject 3 commented that it is sometimes other people being rude, and subject 5 mentioned the odd comment of abuse or something. Subject 6 reported that among the heterosexual crowd she is a member of, there was a joke going around that if you are not homosexual you are backwards. She suggested the group were "ridiculing homosexuals a lot" and were reacting against having to accept homosexuality as a natural thing, so that you almost felt guilty for not being one yourself. The members of the group did not consider homosexuality

natural, there was something really weird about it and sick. "The men" subject 6 suggested "would show all their manliness themselves by not accepting to be friends with one" or by being really explicit that no way would they go to bed with one. Subject 7 mentioned that there were plenty of jokes around and that he did not like them as he thought "homosexuals are victimized because they're homosexuals". Subject 8 suggested that the "main time you get to talk about it, is if there's somebody within your peer group that you think might [be homosexual] and specially if they're acting in a different way to make him stand out, or her stand out". She gave the example of a girl at college they thought was gay. This girl never said anything, but the subject's friend thought the girl was gay, and "thought it was sort of funny". Subject 9 mentioned that people speculate about people: "is he or she gay or not?" Subject 11 described how he talked about a visit to a gay evening he had had, to his flatmates: "the whole thing was quite a laugh to me because it was just such a different environment to what I was used to". This subject also pointed out that if someone is very effeminate, people tend to say 'he must be gay', and finally he commented that homosexuals "are considered freaks, to an extent, by a lot of people".

Further examples of the subject of homosexuality arising in conversations included talking about friends who have problems in that way (subject 3), a talk with a friend who thought he was homosexual (subject 4), and a warning to be 'wary' of a man at work from an aunt (subject 5). The topic may also arise if a man or a woman is not married at a certain age, or if someone is 'arty', (subject 9). It was described by subject 6 how among her heterosexual women friends, two have gone to bed with a woman and talk about it very openly, there seeming to be no shock or negative reaction. For subject 7 there was a discussion with friends when he attempted to join the LSE gay group but was not accepted as he was

not gay. The subject reported that everyone agreed that if the gay group wanted to function as an 'acceptable and sensible' club, it ought to accept anyone who is prepared to join. Subject 8 pointed out that if something is on television, or a gay or lesbian assault on someone, for example, is reported in the newspaper, it may arise in conversation, and subject 9 also mentioned "it comes up when you get the usual shock, horror, revelations in the newspapers".

Some subjects mentioned the difficulty with, or reluctance of some people in talking about homosexuality. Subject 4 said it was not talked about in the family, and subject 6 reported that her parents did not seem to understand at all; it was something they did not accept - a real taboo. Subject 8 suggested "You have to be careful. Some people just disagree with it totally - if you start talking about it, they just don't want to know, they don't want to listen ... I think you have to sort of tread the ground first, to see how everybody feels about it, before you start putting any strong views forward". She described how at school and her first college, homosexuality was never talked about or even considered.

At school - awareness of homosexuals

Two of the themes that seemed to emerge from the subjects' responses regarding homosexuality at school were a lack of awareness of gays at school by some, although not all, of the subjects, and secondly, a perception of hostility towards gays within the school environment.

Thus, subject 4 commented, that if there was anyone you disliked, you said he was gay. However, he added that he could not think of anyone who really was gay, but that it was hard to tell really. Subject 5 said that he supposed there must have been gays at school, but he could not think of any in his class. Then he added that there may possibly have been one or two, from 'the way

they said things' and 'kept themselves to themselves', not going to the pub with others. Subject 6 could not recall any homosexuals, and commented that she was very naive then. Subject 8 was not aware of anyone being homosexual at school: "I don't think it was even in my mind then". Since it was eight years ago, she suggested it was not much talked about then, but she reported that she was not aware of anybody behaving any differently, although, as she commented, she did not know if this was because she was not looking. Subject 10 was aware of gay peers, two men living together, and she recalled suspecting the football teacher, but no others. Subject 12 described how, in a class she was in at the age of eleven, it dawned on all of them one day that a girl who was quite popular was a lesbian: "awful, shock, horror".

The greatest hostility towards homosexuality at school seemed to have been shown by males. Subject 9 described how at school there was a "rough, tough, macho attitude" that all the fellows had "and there was a great deal of hostility". He suggested that clearly there must have been some homosexuals, but no-one would ever admit it, as they would be 'finished'. Either it was regarded as very humorous, or there was a lot of hostility, and it was 'one of the big insults'. If anyone liked classical music, painting or reading or was academic, it was regarded as 'semi-pouffy'. So subject 9 was not really aware at school of anyone who might have been gay: "it would have been difficult to see any signs of it, because it really was such a taboo subject, no-one would have possibly come out". Similarly, subject 11 reported that he was aware of people being gay, but not many, because it was an all male school and people were scared to say anything about it. There was only one homosexual that he knew of. He suggested that there tended to be suspicions about members of staff more than students, where it was known that they were unmarried.

Awareness of homosexuals in the media/books

Several subjects commented that they did not watch much television. Some were unable to recall any programmes on television that they had seen with homosexuals in them, (e.g. subjects 2, 3 & 6). However, subject 1 said that she wondered why they 'advertise' it so much on television, and suggested "I really don't think they should show it on TV because it may affect people who are vulnerable to that". She thought that if some people saw it, they would tend to come out. Several subjects mentioned they had seen John Inman/'Are You Being Served', (subjects 7, 9, 11 & 12), or other comedy programmes with homosexuals in them (e.g. subject 4, 'Agony'; subject 5). Subject 10 mentioned having seen 'Brideshead Revisited'. Some subjects had watched documentaries on television. For example, subject 8 had seen some documentaries on lesbians. She suggested that some documentaries tended to look at the 'worst' aspects, while others are more neutral and do not look at the sexual side. A documentary on male homosexuals, with masculine type men dancing together at a disco and kissing, she disliked however, because she suggested, they looked so wrong in doing it and were doing it so aggressively and crudely..

Some subjects had seen 'La Cage aux Folles' either on television or as a film. Subject 6 commented that it was very funny and that she had enjoyed it. She described the main characters as caricatures, but perceived them as going through all the stages of a conventional heterosexual couple. As well as this she suggested, the film brought out certain problems that homosexuals have. Subject 7 had seen this film three times and commented that it was a most enjoyable couple of hours. Subject 8 thought this film was really nice, with such nice people. She suggested this might be because one of the characters of the male homosexual couple acts in a feminine way rather than a masculine

way. If both were acting in a masculine way, that might be what put you off, she suggested, and thus seeing them in the light of a man and a woman, it was more acceptable.

Some subjects could not recall having seen any films with homosexuals in them (e.g. subjects 2 & 5), while others reported having seen many (e.g. subjects 7 & 11). Subject 1 had gone to see a film because a certain actor was in it, not realizing what the film was about, and found that she could not sit through it, and had to leave; she described it as "disgusting". Subject 3 suggested films usually portrayed stock characters. Subject 9 talked of soft porn films and suggested he had seen nothing portraying gays in a positive way. Subject 10 had seen the film 'Lianna'. Subjects 4 and 11 mentioned comedy films, and subject 11 commented that if the characters were gay, they always made them out as very effeminate. Subject 8, describing her feelings on seeing the film 'The Killing of Sister George', commented "I was a bit shocked", but that it was not sordid or dirty and so did not offend her.

Few subjects could recall having seen specific newspaper articles on lesbians. Some mentioned having seen reports on AIDS (subjects 3, 6 & 10). Subject 6 had seen letters in a newspaper suggesting that AIDS had been sent by G-d to show that homosexuality is unnatural, and others pointing out the false association. Subject 5 considered that while the popular press tended to 'blow up' homosexuality a bit, newspapers like the Telegraph, tended to ignore it. Subject 10 commented that she had seen nothing about homosexuality in the Financial Times. Subjects 3 and 6 commented that they had seen no articles on lesbians in magazines, but subject 9 reported that many pornographic magazines contained features on lesbians.

Subject 12 made some comments of interest regarding the media. She suggested that in general, homosexuals

were "obviously grossly underrepresented, but on another level, I suppose you could say, well, unless they're going to be extremely, overtly camp, how is anybody going to know they're homosexual". Further, she pointed out "The whole onus of the cultural representations, especially at a mass level, is absolutely geared to very strict dichotomies of male and female, and the way that they are supposed to relate is very clearly layed down ... from page 3 to just about everything that you see. I can't think of any exceptions to that".

Some subjects could not recall having read any books with homosexual characters (e.g. subjects 1, 5, 9 & 11). Subject 7 reported reading a lot, but being unable to think of any book he has read in which the homosexual character was an important one. Subjects 2, 3 and 10 recalled reading books with homosexual characters, but not the details. Subject 6 however did recall books in detail. Subject 4 mentioned having started to read 'The Boy's Own Story', but not reading much of it, and commented that he did not think the character was really gay.

Miscellaneous points and some further suggestions from subjects

Several subjects expressed the attitude that as long as they were not directly concerned, homosexuality was all right. For example, subject 11 commented "I'm quite happy for homosexuals to do whatever they like, so long as it doesn't affect me"; and subject 8 said "I do what I want, they do what they want, then I don't see what's wrong..."

The question of being able to 'detect' homosexuals was brought up. Subject 1 reported "I can detect whether they are homosexuals or not ... a certain walk or a certain talk", and further, the way they dress made some of them very obvious. However, although she reported being able to detect gay men easily, she was unsure about

gay women.

Some subjects suggested further areas that might be of interest regarding people's views of homosexuals. Subject 7 considered it would be useful to look at the issues of AIDS; sadistic killings and the leather image; music, in particular the pop culture, and homosexual harassment at LSE. He also suggested it would be useful to consider whether heterosexual interviewees had had homosexual experiences. Similarly, subject 12 mentioned AIDS and homosexual experiences of interviewees as further topics to discuss.

Subject 12 also considered the role of gender. Questioning why transvestites tend to be men rather than women, she suggested "I had this kind of feeling that somehow it's easier to be a woman - you can be accepted more easily into the society of women, whereas if you're going to masquerade as a man, and want to be a man, you're going to want to try and be the sort of dominant section, which is bound to be more closed to you, but at the same time being a man has more responsibilities". She suggested that it may be easier for lesbians to retain femaleness, than for gay men to retain manliness, particularly if there is a political content. Further she suggested that gay men tended only to want to be allowed to be gay, whereas many lesbians opposed the sexist structure of society and were actually "looking for something more than the right just to express their sexuality".

A final point, after the interview, subject 8 mentioned that she had wondered about coming to it, as one of her fellow students had suggested she should not do it, as it might go on to her file, and she should make sure not to sign anything.

APPENDIX B: Lesbian supplementary pilot interviews

Data from the supplementary interviews with lesbians are described below in sections concerning stereotypes held initially and later changes to these; perceptions of how heterosexuals feel about lesbians; perceptions of reasons for women being lesbian or heterosexual, and of whether being a lesbian is a choice; general feelings regarding being lesbian; perceptions of similarities with other minority groups; and finally views regarding teaching about homosexuality in schools.

Stereotypes held before coming out to other lesbians

While some subjects (nos. 3, 6, 7 and 1) seemed to hold some kind of stereotype before meeting other lesbians, others (subjects 2, 4 and 8) did not seem to have held a stereotype, or maybe were aware of a stereotype, but did not believe it (subject 5).

Of those who seemed to have held some kind of stereotype, subject 1 provided an example of how she thought two teachers at school might have been gay (although the word 'gay' would not have been used at this time). Asked what kind of things she looked for to decide whether somebody might be gay, subject 1 suggested that one teacher looked or acted like a man; it was the way she walked and the way she dressed. Just before starting to go to gay meetings, subject 1 suggested "Well, I suppose one had been brainwashed into the idea that most gay women were pretty butch, that there wasn't any other kind of women and so there was a certain amount of apprehension as to whether you were going to meet anybody with whom you had anything in common".

Subject 3 at first suggested that it was easier to describe her idea of what gay men might be like rather than any idea of what gay women might be like. Of women she suggested "I don't really know how I would have felt .. I think I possibly would have been puzzled - I would have seen them in the 'butch-femme' image" - plus fours

and tweed skirts - "and thought it was a bit perverted". Having become involved in a relationship with another woman, but before having met any other lesbians, subject 3 suggested "I still thought that they would be predatory". Among the other subjects who seemed to have held a stereotype before meeting other lesbians, subject 6 commented "I don't think I ever thought of there being young lesbians ... I suppose, the sort of butch image - I suppose - if I thought at all". Subject 7 also reported having a 'butch' image of lesbians before meeting others: "I had the stereotype image in my head ... Not the femme ones; I thought they were all the butch types". Finally, although subject 5 was aware of the masculine stereotype of lesbians, she suggested that she did not think that she ever really believed in it since "there were various teachers at school who were said to be [lesbians] and they weren't really different from anyone else".

Of the subjects who did not seem to have held any stereotype, subject 2 suggested that she had probably not even realized that there were homosexual people until her mid-twenties, and that during her teens she had not thought that there were other people like herself, although this did not really worry her. She had not read anything either. Thus she suggested that she did not have any idea as to what gay people might be like although: "It seems odd saying it ... when I knew what I felt all along". Similarly, subject 4 suggested that during her teens and early twenties she had had no idea that homosexuals existed and that she had been unaware of homosexuals in the media: "It sounds incredible, but I was unaware of it until about ten years ago". Having become aware of the existence of homosexuals, subject 4 held no image. Finally, considering what she had thought lesbians might be like before meeting others, subject 8 commented "I don't think I thought about it ... I got married very early and I just don't think I thought about

it - in other words, I have no stereotypes". In addition, subject 8 reported that just before meeting others she "thought they'd probably be very compatible" and further "I assumed that they'd be like minded people - I thought that I would find them easier than the people I knew at present".

The ages of the subjects who had held stereotypes were 57, 47, 33 and 51. The subject who was aware of a stereotype, but did not believe it was aged 31. Those who had not held stereotypes were aged 43, 36 and 55. Thus for these subjects age (or historical life cycle position) does not appear to have contributed to having held a stereotype or not.

Changes in image held on coming out to other lesbians

"I think the first shock was that they were ordinary people", (subject 6). Similarly, subject 3 describing her feelings on first attending a lesbian group with her partner, reported "We were quite .. expecting anybody who sat down to make a pass at one another of us and we were quite surprised that it didn't actually happen - when we learnt that not all lesbians are attracted to all women, they're discriminatory, as heterosexual people - quite a relief!"

Several subjects however did report perceiving something of the 'butch' stereotype image. Thus subject 6 adds that "A lot of them did fit the image I had", and suggests that many lesbians tended to follow a uniform pattern of short hair and trousers, and seemed to have "thrown femininity out of the window". Subject 4, who had not previously held any stereotype of lesbians, commented that "I don't find this business of 'camp' and 'butchness' very attractive, but I hadn't got any idea about people being like that till I met them". Further she commented "I regard myself as an ordinary person. I don't regard myself as putting on a 'persona' ... I feel that a really true homosexual comes out of an ordinary

person ... I don't regard it as..an act". Subjects 1 and 7 suggested that the 'butch' aspects of lesbian meetings may have decreased in recent years. The meetings subject 1 first attended seemed to be dominated by the butch type of women, but now she suggested, lesbians seem to be more integrated into society than they were. Subject 7 comparing her experiences of lesbian meetings twelve years ago with today, suggested that it seemed to her "quite a butch scene" then. Now, she suggested, it may have changed a lot, although she did not know whether she was "seeing it very differently or whether it actually has changed" and considered it may be a bit of each. Thus now subject 7 perceived people at lesbian meetings as more natural, not having to put on a uniform or behave like men, and able to be more themselves: "I find it much more comfortable".

Perceptions of how heterosexuals generally feel about lesbians

It was suggested by some subjects that heterosexuals may feel threatened. "On the whole I think they're very threatened and fearful" suggested subject 2. Further she commented this may apply even more to lesbians than to male homosexuals, since she suggested lesbianism "impinges much more on the sort of structure of society". Subject 3 suggested "I think they're probably scared of the unknown ... and yet I think they're curious a bit too", while Subject 5 said she thought heterosexuals felt very bad about lesbians: "...most of the time, most of them don't talk about it at all, and if you get the silly jokes about gays, it's usually men, so I think that means they find it frightening or threatening and would rather not think about it".

The idea that heterosexuals may not think about lesbians much was also put forward by subject 8, although she did not link it to feeling threatened. Thinking of "Mrs. Suburban Average", subject 8 suggested "most of the

time they don't recognize the existence of such people, certainly not among their friends. They may have a sort of stereotypical picture..but the fact that the women next door might be lesbians never crosses their mind".

The stereotypical picture, subject 8 suggested "is something very unlike what lesbians actually are like, which is like everyone else. I think it's sort of short back and sides, and curly on top - it's the old stereotype, I would imagine, but I really don't know because it's not a thing I talk about".

Some subjects made the distinction between heterosexuals who know lesbians and those who do not. Subject 6 suggested there may be two groups of heterosexuals to consider: those who have a gay friend; and those who have never met any gays and only see the stereotype on television, of whom she commented "I don't think they understand it at all". Those who are religious, she suggested, think it very sad, but once heterosexuals know one or two gay people, it did not bother them. Heterosexuals who have not thought about understanding, subject 6 suggested, may perceive homosexuality in terms of sex only, ignoring feelings. Further, subject 7 suggested "I think people are okay when they know you as an individual, but I've come across quite a lot of people who are amazed at the idea in general".

Further perspectives on perceptions of heterosexuals feelings about lesbians were provided by subjects 4, 3 and 1. Subject 4 perceived male homosexuality as more tolerated than female, and suggested that she had found people's reactions towards her, negative. Subject 3 suggested that many heterosexuals "probably feel how I did, more or less, they should pull themselves together and not be perverted". Many too, she suggested, may not know who to find out about it from, but may not be condemning. Subject 1 said she did not think you could generalize, and, further, that apart from overhearing

people talking, how could you tell. In such cases she suggested, it is usually laughter and not downright hostility.

Perceived reasons for some women being lesbians, and some women, heterosexual

Most subjects perceived reasons for some women being lesbian in terms of nature and nurture. Many tended to begin by suggesting upbringing, environmental or social reasons, and then to add that there may also be genetic or hormonal reasons, or predispositions. Thus, subject 1 suggested that there may be inadequate parenting so that the person looks constantly for what they think they've missed. There may be a cold mother to whom the child cannot relate, or a very domineering mother so that the father looks insignificant, or the father may not be there much. Subject 1 pointed out that people react in different ways to those sorts of situations, and that they could drive a person towards men. She added that she did not know if there were genetic reasons that might predispose people to be as they were whatever the environment, and pointed out some hermaphrodite people become gay. Subject 2 also began by suggesting it may be something to do with the environment that a person is brought up in, but added "you feel sometimes that it's biological in that..when you think back..you've always been attracted to women and therefore maybe it is biological, but on the other hand a lot of other women probably felt it as well, but didn't take that path, so I think somewhere along the line, there must be some sort of social influences that actually make you take that path". Similarly, subject 3 began by suggesting "I think quite strongly, it's to do with mothers wanting sons or daughters and given the wrong sex, and trying to convert you into being one or the other which you aren't". She then added "I don't know whether there's also a potential..which is exploited that way".

Subject 6, ambiguously, stated "I think it's completely to do with early upbringing. I believe that perhaps it's genetic". She explains that in almost every case she has talked to, there have been "either mothers who are very, very strict and not loving, not motherly, or mothers who try to be motherly and don't know how to do it - mothers who've failed their daughters in some way; or absent fathers, fathers who just aren't there, or inadequate". Further, she suggested that due to not having the right kind of loving relationship with one's father, a reason for being a lesbian may be fear of men.

Social conditions were suggested by subject 7, but she added that for some it was obviously hormonal and could be seen in their make up. Similarly, subject 8 suggested that "in at least 50% of cases, women are affected by what's happened in their upbringing, and in other cases they are affected by a certain genetic tendency". It can be seen that for some of the subjects, the nature/ nurture issue was viewed as dividing lesbians into two separate groups (i.e. those for whom there are genetic reasons, and those for whom there are social or environmental reasons) whereas for other subjects, nature and nurture together were seen to contribute towards being a lesbian.

Finally, two subjects perceived the reasons for some women being lesbians and others heterosexuals as simply that people are different (subject 5) or that "it's to do with the variety of life", (subject 4).

Perceptions of whether being a lesbian is a choice or not

Responses regarding whether subjects perceived being a lesbian as a choice for themselves were mixed, and in some cases contradictory. Subjects 4 and 5 were both clear that for them there had been no choice. However, Subject 2 responded "No..no, I'm not conscious that I was actually making a choice..but obviously I did make a choice". Thus, in retrospect, she suggested she had made

a choice. Subject 8 explained "For myself, I feel I've chosen it because that's how I am".

The responses of subjects 3 and 6 provided a further perspective. "I think behaving is a choice, I'm not sure about being", suggested subject 3. And after commenting that at the moment it was a choice for herself as she is in a marriage, subject 6 then added "Wait a minute - there's a choice as to what behaviour you take up - I don't think you have a choice as to how you feel, which is what people who are not gay don't understand. People who are not gay believe you have a choice".

Regarding the situation for lesbians generally, subject 1 suggested that being a lesbian might be a choice if one 'reaches' a bisexual stage, although she added that it may not always be something on which you can make a choice. Subject 8 perceived most people as bisexual, with society pushing them towards norms. It is suggested by subject 2 that there is choice, and subject 3 commented "I think some people choose ... the climate being that lesbianism is talked about and so you can meet lesbians..." Subject 4, however, suggested "If they're genuine homosexuals, I don't think they do [have a choice]". Some women making a political choice was mentioned by subjects 2 and 5. Finally, subject 7 provided a different perspective on the question of choice in her response to the previous question of reasons for some women being lesbians and some heterosexuals. She suggested "I think some women are heterosexual because they live in a certain part of the country, or another country, where they're not aware of a choice, or they haven't got the imagination to realize there is a choice". This, she suggested, refers to the way people 'act' rather than the way people are 'deep down'.

General feelings about being a lesbian

"I like it"

(Subject 8)

Among the positive feelings expressed about being a lesbian was the suggestion that there may be greater understanding or compatibility between two people of the same sex. Thus, subject 7 suggested "I think there are a lot of advantages of people of the same sex being together, we can understand each other better"; and subject 1 commented "You can on the whole find some more compatible relationships than you might have been able to find with a man" since there is no "sex war" going on. Subject 6 pointed out that for someone living a lesbian lifestyle, a big benefit was not having men around.

For subject 5, a positive aspect of being a lesbian was that it could be associated with feminism "which is trying to improve women's lot in the world". Further, this subject suggested that "it takes a lot of courage to be true to your feelings rather than just live life according to the rules, and do the done thing for the sake of it".

General feelings of being comfortable as a lesbian were expressed by subjects 2, 7 and 8. Subject 7 suggested that her feelings had been changing quite quickly, and that only a year ago, she would have said that she would prefer to be straight, but this was no longer the case. Subject 8 explained "I don't really often think 'oh, I wish I was hetero' - I've already done that bit - I don't want to repeat that".

Some subjects however did not feel comfortable about being lesbians. Thus subject 5 reported "I think I feel very uncomfortable about it", while subject 6 on being asked how she felt about being a lesbian responded "Cross. I'm very cross. I would far rather not be. It's not making my life any easier. It doesn't fit in with mainstream life. It certainly isn't what I've chosen ... I'm not resigned to it". Both these subjects expressed feeling some doubt about qualifying as lesbians

when they were not in relationships. Subject 4 describing her feelings about being homosexual commented "I suppose I feel negative really, because, there's no doubt about it, you have a negative position in society - it's very difficult to form a decent relationship".

Other subjects were able to provide suggestions of possible negative aspects to being a lesbian, but did not suggest that their primary feelings about being homosexual were negative. Thus, subject 2 suggested 'society' was a negative point, but added "I don't myself see it [being a lesbian] personally as having any negative side". For subject 7 too, society's attitudes were a negative aspect: "I think the world as a whole, people as a whole, are not as pro as they are anti". Subject 7 was also concerned that "There are a lot of things to help people split up and not a lot of things to help people stay together; it can be difficult to have relationships that last". Further, subjects 1 and 7 both commented on the difficulties experienced by gay people when relationships break up, a lack of support except from gay friends (subject 7), and fewer alternative options during periods between relationships than heterosexual people have (subject 1). Lack of support following bereavement was also mentioned by subject 7.

Finally, subject 3 asked for her general feelings about being gay just commented "I think now I kind of treat it matter of factly, and I have to think quite hard who knows I am, and who knows I'm not, and who to be diplomatic with, and who I can be open with, because it's sort of part of my life now".

Perceptions of similarities with other minority groups

Subjects 1 to 5 were not asked this question. Subject 8 approached considering the question of whether lesbians have something in common with other minority groups in 'coming out', by suggesting that the main thing about lesbians is a tendency to 'conceal' it from work

colleagues. Thus she attempted to think of other people with something to conceal, and suggested alcoholics and drug addicts, and gay men in jobs such as teaching. Blacks, she pointed out cannot conceal themselves. Subject 7 approached responding to the question by considering which other people have in common, discrimination and 'sticking together'. She suggested blacks may have a more similar experience to that of lesbians, rather than disabled people for example, because the type of discrimination may be more similar.

Subject 6 said she thought there were similarities with other minority groups, but was concerned at lesbians treating themselves as a group. Thus she suggested that the similarities with other minority groups may be 'self-imposed'. She suggested that there may be two groups of lesbians, one of which feels that they are very misunderstood and want to come out and get their rights in the same way as black people or Jews. Further, subject 6 suggested that a difficulty with gays is that they are invisible, whereas other minority groups may be identified through colour or accent for example. Subject 6 suggested that it was not necessary to treat ourselves as a group, and it was something 'to be got over'. However, further to this, she added "I suppose it's the heterosexist society that insists on putting us into a minority group, because if the heterosexual society wanted to, they could say we are all human beings who love".

Finally, subject 2 commenting on positive feelings about being gay, suggested that she felt more tolerant of other people, more akin to other minority groups, and more understanding of the problems of other minority groups through being gay.

At School

Asked whether homosexuality had been mentioned in lessons at school, most subjects replied that it had not been. Exceptions to this were where the topic had been raised in question time following a sex education lesson (subject 5) and where 'perverts' had been mentioned (subject 6). Subject 5 commented that she had the impression that the people asking the question were deliberately asking embarrassing questions. She can no longer recall the answers to the questions, but thinks they were as brief as possible.

All, except subject 1, reported that they would have found it helpful if homosexuality had been mentioned in lessons at school. Some subjects mentioned its helpfulness might depend on how the topic was treated. Thus subject 3 would have found it helpful if it were treated "matter of factly", and subject 4 mentioned that some ways of approaching the topic at school would be better than others. In particular, subject 5 suggested that it would be a good thing if gay people were mentioned in ordinary lessons - for example, as a character in history.

Subject 1 was the only subject doubtful of introducing homosexuality into sex education at school. She explained "it could push you in a direction you wouldn't have thought of going in, just out of sheer laziness ... you might think 'oh it's okay to be like that, so I'll stay like that.'" All other subjects however suggested the introduction of homosexuality into school education would have been helpful to them. Thus, for example, subject 6 suggested that she had been very confused and would have liked to have known the options.

APPENDIX C: Questionnaire

I Please describe briefly what you understand the following words to mean:

1. Heterosexual
2. Homosexual
3. Lesbian

II Please complete the following sentences:

1. Women are often described as...
2. Many people think lesbians are...
3. Lesbians are often described as...
4. Compared with heterosexual women, lesbians are...
5. The typical heterosexual woman...
6. The typical lesbian...

III Please list any words that you think most people might use to describe the following (even if you do not personally agree with them):

1. A woman who is heterosexual
2. A lesbian

THANK YOU

APPENDIX D: Bem Sex-Role Inventory items (BSRI; Bem, 1974)

<u>Characteristics</u>	<u>Masculine/Feminine</u>
1. Self-reliant	M
2. Yielding	F
3. Helpful	
4. Defends own beliefs	M
5. Cheerful	F
6. Moody	
7. Independent	M
8. Shy	F
9. Conscientious	
10. Athletic	M
11. Affectionate	F
12. Theatrical	
13. Assertive	M
14. Flatterable	F
15. Happy	
16. Strong personality	M
17. Loyal	F
18. Unpredictable	
19. Forceful	M
20. Feminine	F
21. Reliable	
22. Analytical	M
23. Sympathetic	F
24. Jealous	
25. Has leadership abilities	M
26. Sensitive to the needs of others	F
27. Truthful	
28. Willing to take risks	M
29. Understanding	F
30. Secretive	
31. Makes decisions easily	M
32. Compassionate	F
33. Sincere	
34. Self-sufficient	M
35. Eager to soothe hurt feelings	F
36. Conceited	
37. Dominant	M
38. Soft spoken	F
39. Likable	
40. Masculine	M
41. Warm	F
42. Solemn	
43. Willing to take a stand	M
44. Tender	F
45. Friendly	
46. Aggressive	M
47. Gullible	F
48. Inefficient	
49. Acts as a leader	M
50. Childlike	F
51. Adaptable	
52. Individualistic	M
53. Does not use harsh language	F
54. Unsystematic	
55. Competitive	M
56. Loves children	F
57. Tactful	
58. Ambitious	M
59. Gentle	F
60. Conventional	

**APPENDIX E: Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ), long form,
abbreviated items (Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1975).**

Male valued items

Independent
Not easily influenced
Good at sports
Not excitable, minor crisis
Active
Competitive
Skilled in business
Knows ways of world
Adventurous
Outspoken
Interested in sex
Makes decisions easily
Not give up easily
Outgoing
Acts as leader
Intellectual
Self confident
Feels superior
Takes a stand
Ambitious
Stands up under pressure
Forward
Not timid

Female valued items

Emotional
Not hide emotions
Considerate
Grateful
Devotes self to others
Tactful
Strong conscience
Gentle
Helpful to others
Kind
Aware, other feelings
Neat
Creative
Understanding
Warm to others
Likes children
Enjoys art and music
Expresses tender feelings

Sex specific items*

Aggressive (M)
Dominant (M)
Likes math and science (M)
Excitable, major crisis (F)
Home-oriented (F)
Mechanical aptitude (M)
Needs approval (F)
Feelings hurt (F)
Cries easily (F)
Loud (M)
Religious (F)
Sees self running show (M)
Needs for security (F)

* For sex specific item poles shown, M indicates male, and F indicates female.

APPENDIX F: Pilot study Bem Sex-Role Inventory and Personal Attributes Questionnaire data analysis

From the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) data, perceptions of a lesbian stereotype and of subjects' personal views of lesbians (shown in Tables F.1 and F.2 below) were derived using t-tests as shown by Bem (1974). Thus, a subject's data is classified as sex typed, masculine or feminine, if the androgyny t-ratio is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$); androgynous if the absolute value of t is less than or equal to one (i.e. if $|t| \leq 1$), and between these cut off points, as near masculine or near feminine.

Table F.1: Perceptions of lesbian stereotype derived from individual subject t-tests on BSRI data

	Number of subjects perceiving lesbian stereotype as:				
	masculine	near masc.	androgynous	near fem.	feminine
H. Group (n=20)	18	1	1	0	0
L. Group (n=8)	8	0	0	0	0

Table F.2: Personal view of lesbians derived from individual subject t-tests on BSRI data

	Number of subjects perceiving lesbians as:				
	masculine	near masc.	androgynous	near fem.	feminine
H. Group (n=12)	3	0	7	1	1
L. Group (n=8)	0	2	5	1	0

It can be seen from Table F.1 that both heterosexual and lesbian subjects perceived the stereotype of lesbians to be essentially masculine. For subjects' personal view of lesbians, it can be seen from Table F.2 that the modal category for both heterosexual and lesbian subjects was 'androgynous'. Heterosexual subjects' personal views ranged from masculine to feminine, while lesbian subjects' personal views ranged from near masculine to near feminine.

Table F.3: Median masculinity and femininity scores for lesbian stereotype and lesbian personal view, BSRI data.

	lesbian stereotype		personal view of lesbian	
	masc.	fem.	masc.	fem.
H. Group (n=12)	5.600	3.250	4.525	4.325
L. Group (n=8)	5.225	2.500	4.375	4.450

Median masculinity and femininity scores of the heterosexual and lesbian group subjects for the lesbian stereotype and lesbian personal view are shown in Table F.3. (Only those heterosexual subjects who completed both stereotype and personal view BSRI tasks have been included here). For the heterosexual group, Wilcoxon tests indicated a significant difference between the masculinity scores for the lesbian stereotype and lesbian personal view ($T=77.0$, $p<0.01$) and a significant difference between the femininity scores for the stereotype and personal view ($T=0.0$, $p<0.01$). Similarly, for the lesbian group, Wilcoxon tests indicated significant differences between the masculinity scores for stereotype and personal view ($T=35.0$, $p<0.05$) and between the femininity scores ($T=0.0$, $p<0.05$). Looking at differences between the two groups of subjects for the various masculinity and femininity scores, it can be seen that there was little difference in median values for the personal view of lesbians. For the lesbian stereotype, Mann-Whitney tests indicated no significant differences between the two groups of subjects for either masculinity or femininity scores ($W=151.0$ and 145.5 respectively, $p>0.05$). However, for both groups of subjects, significant differences between masculinity and femininity scores were found for the lesbian stereotype (heterosexual group: $T=78.0$, $p<0.01$; lesbian group: $T=36.0$, $p<0.05$). Thus the BSRI data indicates differences between lesbian stereotype and lesbian personal view, and differences between masculinity and femininity scores for the lesbian stereotype. No

differences between lesbian and heterosexual subjects are indicated.

Cluster analysis of BSRI data

An agglomerative hierarchical cluster analysis was carried out on the BSRI data from the heterosexual group. In this type of cluster analysis all cases begin as individual clusters, are then grouped into larger clusters, and ultimately into a single large cluster.

Considering the lesbian stereotype data and looking at the two cluster solution, it was found that all the masculinity items fell into cluster 1, and all the femininity items, into cluster 2. (The Social Desirability items were divided, twelve falling into cluster 2, and eight into cluster 1). Examining the five cluster solution, it may be seen that the majority of masculine and feminine items begin in clusters 1 and 2 respectively. The only exceptions are variable 8, 'shy', a feminine item, that begins in cluster 3; variable 28, 'willing to take risks', a masculine item, that begins in cluster 4; and variable 49, 'acts as a leader', a masculine item, that begins in cluster 5.

The 'personal view of lesbians' cluster analysis data cannot be interpreted in the same way as the stereotype data above. At the two cluster solution stage, all but three items fall into cluster one. (The exceptions being variable 14, feminine, 'flatterable', and variables 18 and 60, social desirability, 'unpredictable' and 'conventional'.) Looking at the three cluster solution, 18 masculine items are in cluster 1 and two ('dominant' and 'ambitious') in cluster 2; 12 femininity items are in cluster 2, 7 in cluster 1, and one ('flatterable') in cluster 3. Thus the differentiation between masculine and feminine items is not as clear in the personal view data as in the stereotype data.

Table F.4: Mean scores and standard deviations for subjects on the PAQ

	Heterosexual Group (n=20)		Lesbian Group (n=8)	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Lesbian stereotype				
Male valued (n=23) ¹	85.70	10.29	80.88	9.06
Female valued (n=18)	57.20	10.67	60.25	9.36
Sex specific (n=13)	47.15	6.51	45.38	7.44
Heterosexual woman stereo.				
Male valued (n=23)	58.65	15.96	52.00	11.99
Female valued (n=18)	37.58 ²	10.75	35.25	9.02
Sex specific (n=13)	28.65	8.68	25.25	5.85

1. In this column, n refers to number of items contributing to score.
2. Number of subjects contributing to this score is 19, not 20.

Table F.5: Mean ratings of subjects on the PAQ

	Heterosexual Group (n=20)	Lesbian Group (n=8)
Lesbian stereotype		
Male valued	3.726	3.516
Female valued	3.178	3.347
Sex specific	3.627	3.490
Heterosexual woman stereo		
Male valued	2.550	2.261
Female valued	2.088*	1.958
Sex specific	2.204	1.942

- * The number of subjects contributing to this score was 19, not 20.

Mean scores for subjects on male valued, female valued and sex specific items of the PAQ are shown in Table F.4. Table F.5 shows the mean ratings of the heterosexual group subjects and the lesbian group subjects for the three types of items on the PAQ. To obtain ratings, scores were divided by the number of items contributing towards the particular scale. This then allows comparison between scales. Kruskal-Wallis tests on mean ratings for male valued, female valued and sex specific scales, across subject groups, within stereotypes, indicated no significant differences between ratings on the three types of items for heterosexual and lesbian group subjects for the lesbian stereotype ($H=9.664$, $p>0.05$) or for the heterosexual woman stereotype ($H=8.309$, $p>0.05$).

Looking at Table F.5, it can be seen that mean ratings for all three scales for the lesbian stereotype are greater than 3.00, i.e. towards the masculine poles, while mean ratings for the heterosexual woman stereotype are mainly less than 2.50, i.e. towards the feminine poles. Comparing the lesbian and heterosexual stereotypes, two tailed Wilcoxon tests indicated significant differences for both groups between the scores for the three different types of items (i.e. Heterosexual group: male valued scores, $T=210.0$, $p<0.001$; female valued scores, $T=175.0$, $p=0.001$; sex specific scores, $T=209.0$, $p<0.001$. Lesbian group: male valued scores, $T=36.0$, $p<0.05$; female valued scores, $T=28.0$, $p<0.05$; sex specific scores, $T=36.0$, $p<0.05$).

Friedman tests indicated that for the lesbian group there were no significant differences between the mean ratings on the three different types of item for either the lesbian stereotype ($S=1.75$, $p>0.05$) or for the heterosexual woman stereotype ($S=5.25$, $p>0.05$). For the heterosexual group however, significant differences between the mean ratings on the three types of item were found for both the lesbian stereotype ($S=13.9$, $p<0.01$)

and for the heterosexual woman stereotype ($S=15.82$, $p<0.01$). It can be seen from Table F.5 that for both stereotypes, mean ratings of heterosexual subjects varied from the more feminine for the female valued scales to the more masculine for the male valued scales, with the sex specific mean ratings falling into an intermediate position.

Thus, overall the mean scores and ratings of the PAQ data seem to indicate differences between lesbian and heterosexual stereotypes, but little differences between the subject groups.

Table F.6: Perceptions of lesbian and heterosexual women stereotypes derived from median split of PAQ data

	undifferentiated	feminine	masculine	androgynous
Lesbian stereotype				
Heterosexual group (n=20)	1	1	15	3
Lesbian group (n=8)	1	0	6	1
Heterosexual stereotype				
Heterosexual group (n=19)	2	13	2	2
Lesbian group (n=8)	0	8	0	0

In Table F.6, subjects' perceptions of lesbian and heterosexual women stereotypes, derived from a median split on the PAQ male and female valued scales, are shown. The overall median score for male valued items (i.e. over data from both groups and for both stereotypes) was 70, and the overall median score for female valued items was 48. Subjects' total scores on male valued items greater or equal to the male valued median were categorised as 'high masculine' and those falling below the median, as 'low masculine'. Subjects' total scores on female valued items less than or equal to the median value were categorised as 'high feminine',

while those above the median were categorised as 'low feminine'. Each subject's perception of the particular stereotype was then classified as undifferentiated (low feminine and low masculine), feminine (high feminine and low masculine), masculine (high masculine and low feminine) or androgynous (high feminine and high masculine). It can be seen from Table F.6 that for both groups of subjects perceptions of a lesbian stereotype were predominantly masculine, while perceptions of a heterosexual woman stereotype were predominantly feminine.

Table F.7: Correlations between masculinity scales and femininity scales of the BSRI and the PAQ for the lesbian stereotype

	All subjects (n=28)			Heterosexual subjects (n=20)			Lesbian subjects (n=8)		
BSRI F	-.46''			-.65'''			-.06		
PAQ M	.56'''	-.20		.74'''	-.37		-.39	.14	
PAQ F	.18	-.53''	.30	.42'	-.67'''	.27	-.63'	.12	.59
	BSRI M	BSRI F	PAQ M	BSRI M	BSRI F	PAQ M	BSRI M	BSRI F	PAQ M

' p<0.05 '' p<0.01 ''' p<0.001

Table F.8: Correlations between the BSRI masculinity and femininity scales and the PAQ sex specific scale for the lesbian stereotype

	All subjects (n=28)		Heterosexual subjects (n=20)		Lesbian subjects (n=8)	
PAQ SS	.44''	-.52''	.67'''	-.77'''	-.41	.05
	BSRI M	BSRI F	BSRI M	BSRI F	BSRI M	BSRI F

'' p<0.01 ''' p<0.001

It can be seen from Table F.7 of correlations between BSRI and PAQ masculinity and femininity scales that when lesbian and heterosexual subjects are considered together, there are strong correlations between the BSRI and PAQ masculinity scales ($r=.56$,

$p < 0.001$) and between the BSRI and PAQ femininity scales ($r = -.53$, $p < 0.01$). The negative correlation between femininity scales are to be expected due to the scoring systems of the two types of scale. Looking at the two groups of subjects individually, it can be seen that for the heterosexual group, there were similarly high correlations (for the masculinity scales, $r = .74$, $p < 0.001$, and for the femininity scales, $r = -.67$, $p < 0.001$). However, for the lesbian subjects alone, there appears to be little or no association between the BSRI and PAQ masculinity and femininity scales ($r = -.39$ and $.12$ respectively, $p > 0.05$).

Similarly, it can be seen from Table F.8 that there were strong correlations between the BSRI masculinity and femininity scales and the PAQ sex specific scale for subjects overall, and particularly for the heterosexual subjects alone. However, for the lesbian subjects alone, there were no significant correlations. For the lesbians, any association between the BSRI masculinity scale and the PAQ sex specific scale seems to be in the opposite direction to that of the heterosexual group, and there seems to be no association for them between the BSRI femininity scale and the PAQ sex specific scale.

APPENDIX G: Short form PAQ pilot study analysis

Table G.1: Item total correlations for male valued, female valued and sex specific PAQ scales for lesbian and heterosexual stereotypes

Variable	Lesbian stereotype	Heterosexual Stereo.
Male valued		
independent	.76 ^{**}	.60 [*]
active	.91 ^{***}	.83 ^{**}
competitive	.66 [*]	.49 [*]
makes decisions easily	.55 [*]	.17
never gives up easily	.68 [*]	.57 [*]
self confident	.82 ^{**}	.80 ^{**}
feels superior	.59 [*]	.68 [*]
stands up under pressure	.33	.69 [*]
Female valued		
emotional	.51	.50
devote self to others	.47	.59 [*]
gentle	.87 ^{***}	.48
helpful	.94 ^{***}	.70 [*]
kind	.55	.37
aware of others' feeling	.96 ^{***}	.70 [*]
understanding of others	.86 ^{***}	.86 ^{***}
warm in relations	.85 ^{***}	.44
Sex specific		
aggressive	.89 ^{***}	.57 [*]
dominant	.80 ^{**}	.45
excitable in major crisis	.71 [*]	.53
home-oriented/worldly	.73 ^{**}	.48
needful of approval	.59 [*]	.72 ^{**}
easily hurt	.66 [*]	.77 ^{**}
cries	.62 [*]	.54 ^{**}
needs security	.51	.84 ^{**}

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001

It can be seen from the item total correlations shown in Table G.1 that all the variables under consideration are associated positively with the male valued, female valued and sex specific scales. For the lesbian stereotype, most of the variables are significantly correlated with their respective scales. Within the female valued scale however, there are three items which are not significantly correlated (emotional, devote self to others, and kind, $p>0.05$). One male valued item (stands up under pressure) and one sex specific item (needs security) also are not significantly correlated with their respective scales ($p>0.05$). For the heterosexual stereotype, half the items are not significantly correlated with the female valued scale, and similarly, half the items are not significantly correlated with the sex specific scale ($p>0.05$). For the

male valued scale, heterosexual stereotype, all but two items are significantly correlated ($p < 0.05$).

Table G.2: Perceptions of lesbian stereotype derived from individual subject t-tests on BSRI data

	masculine	near masc.	androgynous	near fem.	feminine
lesbian stereotype	7	0	1	0	2
lesbian personal view	1	2	4	2	1

From Table G.2, it can be seen that the lesbian stereotype emerging from the BSRI data was predominantly masculine, although two subjects perceived a feminine stereotype. The personal view of lesbians indicated from this data was basically androgynous.

Table G.3: Median masculinity and femininity ratings for lesbian stereotype and lesbian personal view, BSRI data

	Median ratings	
	Masculinity	Femininity
Lesbian stereotype	5.12	3.45
Personal view of lesbians	4.14	4.28

Median masculinity and femininity ratings on the BSRI for lesbian stereotype and personal view of lesbians are shown in Table G.3. Two tailed Wilcoxon tests indicated no significant differences between masculinity and femininity scores for either the lesbian stereotype ($T=46.0$, $p > 0.05$) or the personal view of lesbians ($T=22.0$, $p > 0.05$). A significant difference was found between femininity ratings for lesbian stereotype and lesbian personal view ($T=6.0$, $p < 0.05$), but no difference was found between the two sets of masculinity ratings ($T=43.0$, $p > 0.05$).

Table G.4: Perceptions of lesbian and heterosexual women stereotypes derived from median split of PAQ data

	undifferentiated	feminine	masculine	androgynous
lesbian stereotype	0	1	7	2
heterosexual woman stereotype	2	7	1	0

Perceptions of a lesbian stereotype and a heterosexual woman stereotype derived from a median split of the short form PAQ data are shown in Table G.4. The median score for male valued items (calculated from the data across both stereotypes) was 23.50, and that for female valued items was 19.50. It can be seen from Table G.4 that the lesbian stereotype was predominantly masculine, while the heterosexual woman stereotype was predominantly feminine.

Table G.5: Mean scores with standard deviations, and mean ratings, for subjects on the short form PAQ

	Mean score	S.D.	Mean rating
Lesbian stereotype			
Male valued	27.00	3.80	3.38
Female valued	24.40	4.62	3.05
Sex specific	27.60	4.95	3.45
Heterosexual woman stereotype			
Male valued	19.20	3.99	2.40
Female valued	16.90	3.11	2.11
Sex specific	15.40	3.50	1.93

Mean scores and ratings for male valued, female valued and sex specific variables on the short form PAQ are shown in Table G.5. It can be seen that all the lesbian stereotype mean ratings are above the midpoint of 2.5 and hence towards the masculine pole, while all the heterosexual woman stereotype mean ratings are below 2.5, and hence towards the feminine pole. A Friedman test on

the male valued, female valued and sex specific scores, for lesbian and heterosexual woman stereotypes, indicated a significant difference between scores among the six conditions ($S=39.85$, $p<0.01$). Further Friedman tests indicated significant differences between the three PAQ scales for the lesbian stereotype ($S=8.26$, $p<0.05$), and for the heterosexual stereotype ($S=12.21$, $p<0.01$). It can be seen that for the lesbian stereotype, the mean female valued score was less than the mean male valued and sex specific scores. For the heterosexual woman stereotype the mean male valued score was greatest, and the mean sex specific score, smallest.

Using two tailed Wilcoxon tests, significant differences were found between lesbian and heterosexual woman stereotypes for male valued variables ($T=36.0$, $p<0.05$); female valued variables ($T=53.5$, $p<0.01$); and sex specific variables ($T=55.0$, $p<0.01$).

Table G.6: Correlations between the BSRI masculinity and femininity scales, and the short form PAQ masculinity, femininity and sex specific scales, for the lesbian stereotype

PAQ F	.78''			
PAQ SS	.93'''	.80''		
BSRI M	.86'''	.86'''	.86'''	
BSRI F	-.56'	-.86'''	-.63'	-.77''
	PAQ M	PAQ F	PAQ SS	BSRI M

' $p<0.05$ '' $p<0.01$ ''' $p<0.001$

It can be seen from Table G.6 above that correlations between the BSRI and short form PAQ masculinity and femininity scales were high ($r=.86$ and $r=-.86$ respectively, $p<0.001$). There was also a strong correlation between the BSRI masculinity scale and the short form PAQ sex specific scale ($r=.86$, $p<0.001$). The association between the BSRI femininity scale and the PAQ sex specific scale was less strong, but still significant ($r=-.63$, $p<0.05$).

Table G.7: Median ratings - a comparison of short form PAQ data with long form data from previous study

	Short form median	Long form median
Lesbian stereotype		
Male valued	3.38	3.72
Female valued	3.25	3.28
Sex specific	3.69	3.69
Heterosexual woman stereo.		
Male valued	2.50	2.59
Female valued	2.19	2.06
Sex specific	1.94	2.19

Comparing median ratings for the ten short form PAQ subjects with the median ratings of the twenty long form PAQ subjects (from previous pilot), using two tailed Mann-Whitney tests, no significant differences were found for either the lesbian stereotype variables (male valued, $W=341.0$; female valued, $W=328.0$; sex specific, $W=319.5$; $p>0.05$) or for the heterosexual woman stereotype variables (male valued, $W=326.0$; female valued, $W=274.0$; sex specific, $W=335.0$; $p>0.05$). The median values are shown in Table G.7 above. (Long form data for the female valued heterosexual stereotype was based on 19 cases, instead of twenty).

APPENDIX H: 'Self-disclosure' pilot interviews

Areas covered in the interviews are described below. These included communication with parents, with friends, and with work colleagues; and examples of particular situations in which communication with others had been perceived as difficult. Following this, general issues regarding self disclosure that emerged from the interviews are described.

Talking to parents

Sex, boyfriends and relationships were mentioned by subjects as topics that were difficult for teenagers to discuss with parents. Further topics mentioned included smoking cigarettes; alcohol; drugs; neglecting school work/non-attendance at school; one's own relationship with parents; and jokes.

Some subjects had tended not to talk to their parents about certain parts of their lives during their teenage years.

"I think I was quite secretive about my friends and what I was doing ... it was nothing naughty ... the naughtiest thing we ever did was smoke cigarettes"
(S2)

"I suppose I didn't really talk to my parents a lot about what was going on at school, or anything to do with my private life - anything that was out of the family"
(S4)

"Alcohol consumption - that was always sort of a sensitive area speaking about with my parents - you know, trying drugs and stuff like that. And I suppose sex - sex definitely was very taboo..."
(S7)

"I never really felt any necessity to talk to them about anything, so it wasn't as though I was sort of keeping things away from them"
(S1)

Other subjects felt they had been able to talk to their mothers about anything.

"[re sex]...my parents, I could talk to them if I wanted to"
(S5)

"[There] wasn't any reason not to tell her"
(S6)

Perceptions of possible reactions in situations where subjects avoided talking to parents on certain issues included the following:

"My dad would have been embarrassed" (S5)

"...when I did try things, I always had such guilt, and I think because of that I never wanted to tell them, because I was afraid that they would just lash out at me - and I don't mean physically - verbally - so, that's what I was frightened of - it was their reaction..." (S7)

One subject considering her difficulty in talking to her parents as a teenager suggested

"... I think at the heart of it all was problems I think that most teenagers have of not understanding their parents as people ..." (S7)

Feelings about being able, or unable, to talk to parents may vary with time and circumstances, or may remain similar to the adolescent situation.

[I can talk to mother] "about boyfriends and that sort of thing ... but we carefully avoid all mention of the word sex" (S4)

"I've never suppressed anything" (S5)

"I think if my parents were still married, I'd have talked to my mother a lot more" (S2)

Talking with friends

Some subjects reported finding it easier to talk to friends than family, while for others it seemed easier to talk to family rather than friends, or confiding in anyone was avoided. For some there had been changes over time, and with varying circumstances, in the depth of their communication with friends.

"I can talk about the most intimate and most personal things, and my deepest feelings; whereas when I was a teenager, I don't think I did" (S4)

"I have friends who would feel that they're very close to me and confide in me quite a lot, but I don't feel the necessity to do the same ... " (S1)

[Most of the data relating to communication with friends is described within the sections below covering examples of situations, and general issues of self disclosure.]

Talking to others at work

Work experience of subjects was varied, but included many temporary jobs. (All subjects were currently students). Areas of employment had included teaching; secretarial/office work; nursing; working with homeless people; working behind a bar; working on a farm and a ranch; and working as a legislative intern for a senator.

Some subjects mentioned how they tended to separate work from their personal life.

"I keep things very separate, so the people at work I talk to just about things to do with work, and I rarely mention anything to do with my personal life"
(S1)

"I think you really have to separate work and your personal life ... because once they start to overlap..things get muddled"
(S7)

"..I think we were generally quite guarded ..."
(S4)

The temporary nature of some of the employment may have lead to a disinclination to talk much with work colleagues.

"I didn't talk. I just got on with my job ... because I saw it as just an intermediate phase. It wasn't going to be my job [i.e. career]"
(S5)

One subject avoided discussing her university experiences with colleagues in office and shop jobs.

"...most of them wouldn't have identified with any of the problems that I had at university ... and I certainly couldn't identify with most of the things they concerned themselves with"
(S6)

The structure of the work environment may be perceived as restricting personal communications.

"I think it's very difficult to make good friends at a workplace ..because usually you're part of some sort of hierarchy and..secondly, it can be just a bit politically difficult" (S4)

Some examples of situations in which discussion with others was perceived as difficult

Particular topics that subjects had found difficult to talk about with others included bereavement (subjects 1 & 6); having psychotherapy (S6); issues concerning their education/studies (subjects 2, 6 & 7); having had plastic surgery (S6); a past affair (S4); having a serious operation (S7); and personal dreams and ambitions (S4).

In the circumstances regarding bereavement, perceptions of others' reactions seemed important.

"...I think my friends found it difficult just sort of being in my company ... I felt I should apologise for my very existence sometimes because it was causing such an embarrassment to people - it was quite awful really, so I just kept away from people, I suppose, which was the only solution to me ... I think it's just that people, they don't know what to say ... quite an awful situation" (S1)

At the same time, subjects did not necessarily actually want to discuss their bereavement with others.

"..I didn't want to talk to anybody ... I feel as though 'it's mine'" (S1)

"With very few people do I talk about my father's death and all the ensuing events ... mostly 'cause it's not what one talks about in casual conversation .. there're definitely lines between casual conversation and conversation that means something to you, and things I think very quickly don't have much significance if you tell them to everyone ..." (S6)

Perceptions of possible reactions from others were also mentioned when considering other situations which subjects had avoided talking to others about.

"I have told a few people about it [a past affair], and they've been very sympathetic .. but, I guess, it was something I am ashamed of, and I wouldn't want to lower anybody else's opinion of myself"

(S4)

"The thing I don't tell people is more because I think it'll change their attitude to me" [money left to her by grandmother]

(S2)

The experience of subject 7 having a serious operation provided an example of a situation in which a person needed to talk to others but felt unable to.

"No-one around me was capable of speaking about it ... I really needed it before an operation, and my family was not there - it was just a form of denial for them: 'daughter's about to be operated on - it could be very serious - we don't know the consequences - let's just not acknowledge it'"

"No, there wasn't a soul [to speak to], and in fact - to make it seem more terrible - my best friend at that time decided that she just didn't want to really be friends, and before she decided to terminate the relationship, she told me her father died of the same operation, by the same surgeon"

(S7)

This example also provided an illustration of a situation where words may become unnecessary. Visiting after the operation, her father would

"...come in with flowers or a stuffed animal or something, and that was very touching - and it [was] his way of saying, 'I've thought about you today'. He couldn't even talk; he couldn't even look at me in the eyes ... he was so distraught inside; and that said enough for me ..."

(S7)

Further examples of areas or issues that subjects reported having avoided talking about with others included personal dreams and ambitions (S4); and politics (S6).

"I suppose the only area where I wouldn't talk to [friends] would be my very sort of personal dreams and ambitions, and that sort of thing ... it's hard to talk to somebody else about that because they don't always understand; things may change; you may look a fool in a year's time.."

(S4)

"I pretty much discussed everything with my friends, except I often avoided politics, because I grew up in a really conservative area, and I have very liberal politics, and so we didn't always agree on politics" (S6)

Two subjects recalled specific incidents in their childhood that they had found difficult to talk to others about. Both occurred at school.

"...when I was about four, I took up fifty pence from my teacher's table ... and that I wouldn't mention, but like everybody knows about it" (S5)

In the other case, within an R.E. lesson, a priest asked whether anyone had been to Lourdes. Subject 3 reported that she nodded, because the priest was, and then felt guilty that she had 'lied', and this worried her for a long time.

General issues relating to self disclosure

The most commonly mentioned reason for deciding not to talk to others about certain topics was the feeling that the other person(s) would not understand (subjects 1, 3, 6 & 7).

"She probably would have thought that she understood, but I think she didn't have the same experience, so she couldn't really put herself in my place" (S3)

A deeper reason was suggested by one subject.

"...sometimes I feel it's an intrusion if people want to go into greater detail, and some things ... in a sense I feel as though I lose part of myself if I tell somebody else" (S1)

Some subjects perceived themselves as the kind of person who tended to talk about themselves either more or less freely than others.

[I'm a] very talkative person. I've always found it very easy to talk to anybody - I think because I haven't had anything drastic happening, and my family's loud and big" (S5)

"Perhaps I'm just the sort of person who doesn't really feel that I want to sort of confide in people" (S1)

Readiness to talk to others may change over time.

[re parents] "We're very open..can talk about anything - and I'm very grateful for that. We've become very good friends, I would say" (S7)

"When I made this decision to be more..open, I dredged up things from the dim and distant past, and told somebody..and it was like a burden suddenly lifted" (S3)

"We talk about..anything and everything now" (S4)

"The older I'm getting, the less I care" (S5)

"... in a way, we're out of the habit of speaking to each other" (S2)

Some subjects described needing to sort out their own feelings about certain topics before talking about them to others (Subjects 2 & 3).

"I just wanted to find out about it myself before anybody asked me why or what" (S2)

On the other hand, the reaction of another may be sought to help clarify one's own feelings about a particular issue (subject 4).

Considering a specific topic, there may be selection of who would be most appropriate to confide in, and maybe some testing of possible reactions too.

"If I've wanted to [tell others of something], I choose the person very carefully ... there is always somebody that I could talk to, because I think that that person would understand about that particular subject"

"I've tried actually testing her reaction by telling her sort of watered down versions just to see her reaction ... because I know what the reaction would be, I don't think it would do any good to really tell her anymore" (S3)

This subject also mentioned reciprocity in self

disclosure with friends.

Perceived vulnerability/inability to defend oneself may be a reason for reluctance to talk openly on certain issues.

"I desperately wanted to use my experience in order to change their minds, but didn't feel able to, because I felt as though I would be..almost sort of baring my soul to them" (S1)

Individuals may be more open with some groups of people than others.

[With family] "I've never suppressed anything" (S5)

[With school friends] "I'm very reserved..like some girls love talking about who they fancy ... I'm not like that at all - I'd rather..talk to my family" (S5)

One subject describes her feelings of being unable to talk to friends:

"... [it] was very difficult...not to have people to empathise - those fears and inhibitions, and doubts and desires, that wanted to be realized - so I felt things very one dimensional at a time when I needed them to be much more than that" (S7)

APPENDIX I: Interview schedules and rationales

Interview schedule: Lesbian interviews

1. Terminology preference

1.1 SOME WOMEN PREFER TO USE THE WORD 'GAY' AND SOME WOMEN PREFER TO USE THE WORD 'LESBIAN'. DO YOU PREFER ONE TO THE OTHER?

2. Personal definitions

2.1 CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT YOU UNDERSTAND THE WORDS GAY AND HOMOSEXUAL TO MEAN?

Do they have similar or different meanings for you?

There are no right or wrong answers. I would just like you to tell me what the words mean to you.

2.2 WHAT DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE WORD LESBIAN TO MEAN?

2.3 CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE AS THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP?

3. Coming out to self

3.1 CAN YOU REMEMBER WHEN YOU FIRST STARTED FEELING THAT YOU MIGHT BE GAY/A LESBIAN?

Can you tell me (more) about it?

How did you feel during this time?/How would you describe your feelings during this time?

3.2 CAN YOU REMEMBER HOW YOU FELT BEFORE THAT?

Before the time when you first started feeling that you might be gay/a lesbian.

3.3 DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN YOU FIRST HEARD THE WORDS HOMOSEXUAL, GAY OR LESBIAN, OR ANY OTHER WORDS REFERRING TO HOMOSEXUALS?

3.4 WHEN DID YOU FIRST BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND WHAT THESE WORDS MEANT?

3.5 HAVE YOU AT ANY STAGE LOOKED FOR INFORMATION, SUPPORT OR ADVICE ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY?

4. Perception of roots/'causes'

4.1 DO YOU THINK THERE ARE ANY REASONS WHY SOME WOMEN ARE GAY/LESBIAN AND SOME WOMEN ARE HETEROSEXUAL?

4.2 DO YOU SEE BEING A LESBIAN AS A CHOICE OR NOT?

- (a) for self
- (b) generally

5. Relationships with men

5.1 GENERALLY WHAT HAVE YOUR FEELINGS BEEN TOWARDS MEN?

Have you had any important relationships with men?

6. Coming out to others

6.1 CAN YOU REMEMBER YOUR FIRST EXPERIENCE OF "COMING OUT" TO SOMEONE?

6.2 DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT YOU THOUGHT LESBIANS/GAY WOMEN MIGHT BE LIKE BEFORE YOU MET OTHERS?

6.3 CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT YOUR FIRST MEETINGS WITH OTHER LESBIANS OR GAY WOMEN?

6.4 GENERALLY, HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE LESBIANS OR GAY WOMEN NOW?

6.5 HOW HAVE YOU DEALT WITH "COMING OUT", OR NOT "COMING OUT", TO YOUR FAMILY?

- (a) parents
- (b) siblings
- (c) other relatives

6.6 HAVE YOU "COME OUT" TO YOUR FRIENDS?

Can you tell me about that?

Are there some friends you have chosen not come out to?

Can you tell me why that is?

How do you think they might react if you told them?

6.7 HOW ABOUT WORK?

Are you 'out' to anyone there?

Can you tell me why that is?

How do you think they might react if you told them?

6.8 CAN YOU THINK OF ANY PARTICULAR GOOD OR BAD "COMING OUT" EXPERIENCES YOU HAVE HAD?

6.9 ARE THERE SOME PEOPLE YOU WOULD LIKE TO COME OUT TO, BUT HAVEN'T?

6.10 ARE THERE SOME PEOPLE YOU WOULD NOT WANT TO COME OUT TO?

6.11 HAVE THERE BEEN ANY SITUATIONS WHEN YOU THOUGHT YOU MIGHT BE 'DISCOVERED'?

6.12 HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT GOING ON GAY/LESBIAN MARCHES?

7. Perception of heterosexuals' feelings re lesbians

7.1 HOW DO YOU THINK MOST HETEROSEXUALS GENERALLY FEEL ABOUT LESBIANS/GAY WOMEN?

7.2 DO YOU THINK THERE HAVE BEEN ANY CHANGES IN HETEROSEXUALS' ATTITUDES DURING THE LAST YEAR OR TWO?

7.3[If yes] HAS THAT MADE ANY DIFFERENCE TO YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT COMING OUT?

8. Feelings about being homosexual

8.1 GENERALLY, HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT BEING GAY/A LESBIAN?

Positive and negative feelings?

9. Examples of the subject of homosexuality arising in general conversation

9.1 CAN YOU THINK OF ANY EXAMPLES OF TIMES THAT THE SUBJECT OF HOMOSEXUALITY HAS ARISEN DURING GENERAL CONVERSATIONS WITH HETEROSEXUALS RECENTLY?

10. Women's movement

10.1 DO YOU FEEL THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT HAS PLAYED A PART IN YOUR COMING OUT AS A LESBIAN, OR IN YOUR LIFE AS A LESBIAN GENERALLY?

11. The media and literature

11.1 CAN YOU RECALL READING ANY PARTICULAR BOOKS, OR NEWSPAPER OR MAGAZINE ARTICLES, DURING YOUR EARLY STAGES OF COMING OUT?

11.2 CAN YOU RECALL SEEING ANY PARTICULAR FILMS OR TELEVISION PROGRAMMES DURING YOUR EARLY STAGES OF COMING OUT?

12. Religion

12.1 HAS RELIGION PLAYED ANY PART IN YOUR "COMING OUT" EXPERIENCES?

13. Comparable life experiences/minority groups

13.1 DO YOU THINK THERE ARE SOME OTHER MINORITY GROUPS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCES THAT ARE SIMILAR IN ANY WAY TO COMING OUT FOR LESBIANS?

13.2 CAN YOU THINK OF ANY INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCES THAT MIGHT HAVE SOME SIMILARITIES WITH COMING OUT?

14. School

14.1 DID YOU GO TO MIXED OR SINGLE SEX SCHOOLS?

Primary level

Secondary level

14.2 WHILE YOU WERE AT SCHOOL, WERE YOU AWARE OF ANYONE THERE WHO MAY HAVE BEEN GAY OR LESBIAN?

(a) teachers

(b) pupils

14.3 WAS HOMOSEXUALITY MENTIONED IN LESSONS WHILE YOU WERE AT SCHOOL?

14.4 HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT SCHOOLS TEACHING CHILDREN ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY?

15. Changes in feelings regarding coming out

15.1 DO YOU THINK YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT COMING OUT TO OTHERS HAVE CHANGED OVER TIME?

15.2 HAS THE ISSUE OF AIDS MADE ANY DIFFERENCE TO YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT COMING OUT TO OTHER PEOPLE?

16. Any further points

16.1 ARE THERE ANY ASPECTS OF "COMING OUT" THAT YOU THINK ARE IMPORTANT AND THAT WE HAVEN'T COVERED?

17. Benefits of coming out

17.1 FINALLY, CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE AS THE MAIN BENEFITS OF "COMING OUT"?

Rationale for lesbian interview schedule

The semi-structured schedule for the lesbian subject interviews was designed to cover perceptions and experiences of coming out to self and others; and to elicit perceptions relating to the social context of coming out, exploring something of the content of relevant social representations, and issues relating to social identity as lesbian. It was attempted to phrase questions in an open manner and to avoid leading questions.

The first two sections in the interview deal with terminology. Question 1.1 is to ascertain whether the subject prefers to use the word 'lesbian' or 'gay' in referring to herself. On the basis of informal discussions and the pilot interviews, it is known that some women feel quite strongly about the using of one of these terms in preference to the other. Question 2.1 regarding personal definitions of the words 'gay', 'lesbian' and 'homosexual' has been included as pilot work has shown that while some subjects may use the terms interchangeably regarding themselves, other subjects may use the term(s) 'gay' and/or the term 'homosexual' mainly or solely in reference to men. Further, pilot work has shown that some subjects may perceive varying political connotations attached to the different terms. Based on the pilot work, as well as Wolff's (1973) notion of lesbians as 'homoemotional', it is hypothesized that underlying coming out to self are strong emotional feelings directed towards women. The final question in section two aims to explore understanding of love and friendship.

Section 3 of the interview schedule is directed towards investigating 'coming out to self'. It is possible that responses to question 3.1 may cover the questions within the rest of this section. Question 3.2 has been included as previous studies, and the pilot interviews, have suggested that many homosexuals

retrospectively report feelings of 'being different' in childhood. The remaining questions in section 3 are relevant to awareness of lesbianism as an option, such awareness being necessary for possible identification as lesbian. The final question was also directed towards examining sources of support or advice that a woman may have used. Experience of therapy, for example, would have implications for the woman's understanding of her identity and sexuality. Interpretation of responses to these questions needs to take into account the reconstruction of past experiences that may arise in retrospective accounts. The issue of essentialist and constructionist understandings of homosexuality (Plummer, 1981) is also pertinent to consider here. Breakwell's (1986) model of coping with threatened identity may provide an appropriate framework for interpretation of accounts of coming out to self. From the social identity theory perspective (Tajfel, 1981), it is thought that lesbians may initially be perceived as a negatively valued group; and coming out to self may be understood in terms of salience of social category (Oakes, 1987).

Section 4 is concerned with perception of roots or 'causes' of homosexuality. This section has been included both for its relevance to different lesbian identities (Kitzinger & Rogers, 1985), and for comparison with heterosexuals' perceptions on whether homosexuality is learned or physiologically based, which have been shown by Agüero, Bloch and Byrne (1984) to be of importance in heterosexuals' attitudes towards homosexuals. Section 5, looking at relationships towards men, has also been included for its relevance to different lesbian identities (e.g. Kitzinger and Rogers, 1985). From a theoretical perspective, this section relates to attributions, as well as the essentialist-constructionist debate. Attributions may be seen as an aspect of the relevant social representations.

'Coming out to others' is basically covered in

section 6. Also included in this section are questions relating to lesbian stereotypes, as on the basis of the pilot interviews, it seemed that the most logical place for inclusion of such questions would be within the section dealing with 'coming out to other lesbians'. Question 6.1 is directed towards looking at the subjects' first experiences of coming out to others. Question 6.2 concerns any initial stereotypes held before meeting other lesbians; question 6.3 is concerned with initial coming out to other lesbians, and question 6.4 is directed towards looking at changes to initial stereotype held having now met other lesbians. Dominant social representations of gender (Duveen & Lloyd, 1987), and human nature (Moscovici & Hewstone, 1983) may reflect stereotyping of lesbians. The stereotype is expected to be based on sex role and notions of abnormality. Coming out to family, friends, and at work, are covered by questions 6.5, 6.6 and 6.7 respectively. Within all of these major areas of 'coming out', importance is attached equally to decisions regarding not coming out. Reasons for not coming out, and coping strategies used in such situations, as well as anticipated reactions of others in the event of coming out to them, are to be looked at. Questions 6.9, 6.10 and 6.11 follow up this theme. Question 6.8 is to provide further opportunity for recounting of coming out experiences that may not have been described in the previous questions on family, friends and work. Finally, in this section, question 6.12 concerns feelings about more public coming out. A social identity theory perspective, which incorporates notions of power (Tajfel, 1981); as well as salience of social categorization (Oakes, 1987) may be used to interpret coming out to others. Any interpretation of coming out must take into account lesbians as women within a male dominated society.

Perceptions of 'most' heterosexuals' feelings about lesbians, covered in section 7 may reflect the content of

social representations relevant to sexuality (i.e. social representations of gender and human nature). These perceptions are thought to be generally relevant to the issue of coming out. It is intended to compare the lesbians' perceptions of heterosexuals' feelings with heterosexual subjects' perceptions of 'most' heterosexual people's feelings as well as with the actual feelings expressed by heterosexuals in their interviews. The interviews took place during a period when there was growing awareness of AIDS and its links with the gay male community (Shiers, 1988), as well as the beginning of political backlashes against the 'loony left' councils and their positive policies towards lesbians and gay men (Parker, 1988). Question 7.2 was designed to focus on any awareness of such issues, and question 7.3, where appropriate, to investigate any effects of such awareness on feelings about coming out.

Section 8, on general feelings about being homosexual, is relevant in particular to lesbian identity. From previous studies (e.g. Kitzinger & Rogers, 1985; Ettorre, 1980) it is expected that the more traditional type of lesbian may express more negative feelings about being a lesbian. Responses may reflect aspects of social identity, feelings about group membership, and possibly, social comparison.

Section 9 looked at the subject of homosexuality arising in general conversations with heterosexual people. (Only a proportion of the lesbian sample were presented with this question). There was a corresponding question within the heterosexual interview schedule.

Any part played by the women's movement is looked at in section 10. This may have implications for type of lesbian identity. Further, it may have provided intergroup support in cases of threat to identity. Section 11 is included to look at any possible impact of the media and literature during the early stages of coming out. The media may be seen as playing a role in

creating relevant social representations, as well as reflecting the dominant representations. Responses in the pilot interviews suggested that subjects often tended to recall little of the media during the first stages of coming out to self, except maybe particular films they had seen. Subjects' responses may be expected to reflect availability of material and historical time period differences. In section 12, any part played by religion in coming out experiences is covered. It is thought that those from religious backgrounds, or those who are themselves religious, may experience particular difficulties and conflicts regarding coming out. Religions form an important aspect of the general cultural context, and may affect attitudes towards homosexuality (e.g. Coleman, 1980).

Section 11 on lesbians' perceptions of comparable minority groups or comparable life experiences with those of coming out as a lesbian, is intended to complement the set of interviews to take place with women regarding self acceptance and self-disclosure in a variety of life situations. It is thought that an understanding of some of the similarities and differences between coming out as lesbian, and others' experiences in different situations, may illuminate some of the important aspects of coming out.

The school years may be a crucial time for many who are beginning to come to terms with their sexual identity. The questions in section 14 are intended to look both at awareness of homosexuals within the school environment, and also at the provision of lessons on homosexuality, and feelings regarding such teaching. From the pilot interviews, it is expected that subjects will tend not to have been aware of other homosexual pupils, but will probably have thought that some teachers may have been homosexual. Secondly, it is expected that subjects probably will not have been provided with any formal sex education lessons mentioning homosexuality,

but that most would feel that such teaching would have been helpful. It is intended to compare the responses of the lesbian sample with those of the heterosexual sample to similar questions.

It is possible that the emergence of AIDS as a major health problem has affected general attitudes towards homosexuality and hence feelings about coming out to others. Section 15 is aimed at looking at lesbians' perceptions of this issue (if it has not already been covered in section 7 with perceptions of heterosexuals' changing attitudes).

Finally, sections 16 and 17, respectively, have been included to allow subjects the opportunity to raise anything to do with coming out that they feel has been omitted, and to finish the interview on a positive note by focusing on the benefits of coming out.

Interview schedule: Heterosexual interviews

1. Personal definitions

1.1 CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT YOU UNDERSTAND THE WORDS GAY AND HOMOSEXUAL TO MEAN?

Do they have similar or different meanings for you?

There are no right or wrong answers. I would just like you to tell me what the words mean to you.

1.2 WHAT DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE WORD LESBIAN TO MEAN?

1.3 DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN YOU FIRST HEARD THE WORDS HOMOSEXUAL, GAY OR LESBIAN, OR ANY OTHER WORDS REFERRING TO HOMOSEXUALS?

When did you first begin to understand what these words meant?

1.4 CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE AS THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP?

2. Stereotype

2.1 HOW DO YOU THINK MOST PEOPLE MIGHT DESCRIBE A TYPICAL HOMOSEXUAL?

2.2 HOW DO YOU THINK MOST PEOPLE MIGHT DESCRIBE A TYPICAL LESBIAN?

3. Personal contact with homosexuals

3.1 DO YOU KNOW ANY GAY MEN OR LESBIANS?

How long have you known him/her? Is he/she a close friend?

How did you come to know about him/her being gay?

Do you know any other gay men or lesbians?

4. Perceptions of heterosexuals' feelings/attitudes towards gay people

4.1 HOW DO YOU THINK MOST HETEROSEXUAL PEOPLE FEEL ABOUT LESBIANS AND GAY MEN?

4.2 DO YOU THINK THERE HAVE BEEN ANY CHANGES IN PEOPLE'S ATTITUDES DURING THE LAST YEAR OR TWO?

4.3 HAS THE ISSUE OF AIDS MADE ANY DIFFERENCE TO PEOPLE'S FEELINGS ABOUT LESBIANS AND GAY MEN?

5. Section 28

5.1 DO YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT SECTION 28 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT?

Can you tell me what you know about it?

5.2 HOW DO YOU THINK MOST PEOPLE FEEL ABOUT SECTION 28?

What are your own views about Section 28?

6. School experiences

6.1 DID YOU GO TO MIXED OR SINGLE SEX SCHOOLS?

Primary level

Secondary level

6.2 WHILE YOU WERE AT SCHOOL, WERE YOU AWARE OF ANYONE THERE WHO MAY HAVE BEEN GAY OR LESBIAN?

(a) teachers

(b) pupils

6.3 WAS HOMOSEXUALITY MENTIONED IN LESSONS WHILE YOU WERE AT SCHOOL?

6.4 HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT SCHOOLS TEACHING CHILDREN ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY?

7. Perception of roots/'causes'

7.1 DO YOU THINK THERE ARE ANY REASONS WHY SOME PEOPLE ARE HOMOSEXUAL AND SOME PEOPLE ARE HETEROSEXUAL?

Do you think it is the same for men and women?

7.2 DO YOU SEE HOMOSEXUALITY AS A CHOICE THAT PEOPLE MAKE?

8. Feelings about significant others coming out

8.1 HOW DO YOU THINK YOU WOULD FEEL IF A FRIEND TOLD YOU THAT HE OR SHE WERE GAY?

Would you feel the same if it were a male/female friend?

8.2 DO YOU HAVE ANY BROTHERS OR SISTERS?

8.3 HOW DO YOU THINK YOU WOULD FEEL IF YOUR BROTHER/SISTER TOLD YOU THAT HE/SHE WERE GAY?

8.4 DO YOU HAVE ANY CHILDREN?

Ages. Sex.

8.5 (IF YOU HAD TEENAGE OR GROWN UP CHILDREN) HOW DO YOU THINK YOU WOULD FEEL IF A SON OR DAUGHTER TOLD YOU THAT HE OR SHE WERE GAY?

8.6 HOW WOULD YOU FEEL ABOUT SOMEONE AT WORK BEING GAY?

Would it make any difference if the gay person were a man or a woman?

8.7 DO YOU THINK THERE ARE ANY TYPES OF WORK THAT MOST PEOPLE MIGHT CONSIDER UNSUITABLE FOR GAY MEN OR LESBIANS?

9. Examples of the subject of homosexuality arising in general conversation

9.1 CAN YOU THINK OF ANY EXAMPLES OF TIMES THAT THE SUBJECT OF HOMOSEXUALITY HAS ARISEN DURING GENERAL CONVERSATIONS RECENTLY?

Have there been any other times the subject of homosexuality has arisen?

10. Media/Literature

10.1 CAN YOU REMEMBER ANY BOOKS THAT YOU HAVE READ IN WHICH ANY OF THE MAIN CHARACTERS WERE HOMOSEXUAL? Lesbians?

10.2 CAN YOU RECALL READING ANY NEWSPAPER OR MAGAZINE ARTICLES ABOUT LESBIANS OR GAY MEN?

10.3 CAN YOU REMEMBER SEEING ANY TELEVISION PROGRAMMES ABOUT GAY MEN OR LESBIANS?

10.4 HAVE YOU SEEN ANY FILMS OR PLAYS ABOUT LESBIANS OR GAY MEN?

11. Comparison with other minority groups

11.1 DO YOU THINK THERE ARE SOME OTHER MINORITY GROUPS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCES THAT ARE SIMILAR TO THOSE OF GAY PEOPLE?

12. Any further points

12.1 CAN YOU THINK OF ANYTHING MORE TO DO WITH PEOPLE'S FEELINGS ABOUT LESBIANS OR GAY MEN THAT WE HAVE MISSED OUT SO FAR?

12.2 IS THERE ANYTHING FURTHER YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD?

Rationale for heterosexual interview schedule

This semi-structured interview schedule was designed to cover heterosexual people's perceptions of homosexuality, and in particular issues of relevance to the coming out process for lesbians. Items were generally phrased in an open manner, attempting to minimize 'leading' questions. Where possible, questions were designed to correspond to those on the lesbian interview schedule, although all questions generally covered gay men as well as lesbians.

The interview schedule included questions relating to gay men for several reasons. Firstly, heterosexual people's attitudes towards gay men, although possibly different to their attitudes towards lesbians, are pertinent to the context in which coming out for lesbians takes place. Secondly, it was thought that gay men are probably more 'visible', and generally talked about, in our society than lesbians are, and that subjects might find little to say in an interview focused only on lesbians. Thirdly, it was thought less likely that subjects would perceive the researcher as lesbian with the interview focused on gay men and lesbians, than if the interview were concerned solely with lesbians, and thus, would feel more free to express any negative views about homosexuality.

The first section in the interview was designed to look at personal definitions of the terms 'gay', 'homosexual' and 'lesbian'; recall of first contact with the terms; and perceptions of love and friendship. Previous studies have indicated that the term 'homosexual' is sometimes understood to refer to males

only (e.g. Black & Stevenson, 1984).

Generally, throughout the interview, the researcher attempted to use the terms 'gay man' and 'lesbian' rather than 'homosexual' or 'gay' to reduce ambiguity where subjects understood one or both of the latter terms as applying only to males. If the researcher used the terms 'homosexual' or 'gay' without specifying gender, where applicable, she would then include follow up questions determining which sex the subject's response applied to, and if the subject had omitted lesbians, she would ask specifically for a response relating to gay women. (In some questions (e.g. question 2.1), the term 'homosexual' was deliberately used initially without specifying gender to see whether the subject's response would cover both sexes or only men.)

Social representations of gender (Duveen & Lloyd, 1987) and of human nature (Moscovici & Hewstone, 1983) may contain stereotypes relating to homosexuality. Such stereotypes would be likely to affect issues of coming out for lesbians. Section 2 of the heterosexual interview schedule was designed to elicit any awareness of stereotyping of gay men and lesbians. The phrasing of these questions avoided use of the term 'stereotype' in case of reluctance of subjects to provide stereotype information (Gilbert, 1951; Karlins, Coffman & Walters, 1969). Presenting questions in the form of focusing on 'most people's' views also avoided any reluctance of subjects in directly expressing personal views.

The third section of the interview schedule was concerned with the subject's personal contact with gay men and lesbians: whether they knew any as acquaintances or friends, for example.

Section 4 of the schedule, focused on perceptions of heterosexual people's feelings or attitudes towards lesbians and gay men; whether subjects perceived any change in attitudes recently; and, if not mentioned spontaneously, whether subjects perceived the issue of

AIDS had modified people's feelings towards lesbians and gay men. Part 5 of the interview schedule specifically covered any recall/knowledge about Section 28 of the Local Government Act, and, where there was any knowledge, perceptions of people's feelings about the Section.

Corresponding to similar questions within the lesbian interview schedule, section 6 of the heterosexual schedule focused on school experiences, including awareness of gay/lesbian teachers/pupils; whether homosexuality had been mentioned in lessons; and their attitudes towards schools teaching about homosexuality.

Section 7, focusing on perceptions of reasons why some people are homosexual and some heterosexual, and whether homosexuality is perceived as a choice, also corresponded to a similar section within the lesbian interview schedule. It was designed to look at attributions relating to homosexuality, which may link with attitudes towards lesbians and gay men.

Section 8 forms a main focus of the heterosexual interviews. Perceptions of feelings in the hypothetical situations of a friend, sibling, teenage or adult child, or work colleague coming out to the heterosexual subject are investigated. Any differences in perceived reaction towards males or females were to be investigated. Previous studies have indicated differences may occur, although the nature of such differences is still unclear (Kite, 1984). It was intended to compare responses in this section with perceptions of reactions to coming out to parents, family and heterosexual friends reported by lesbian subjects, as well as with reasons suggested by lesbian subjects for not telling family or friends etc. about themselves. Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981), which incorporates issues of power, is one approach to interpretation of lesbians telling significant others about themselves.

The subject of homosexuality arising in general conversations at work, at home with the family, or in

talking with friends may be difficult for a lesbian who is not 'out' to deal with. Section 9 focuses on recall of times the topic of homosexuality has arisen in conversation, in what kind of form (e.g. discussion, jokes, speculating about people), with whom, and where (e.g. work, home).

The media may both create and reflect social representations. Section 10 of the interview schedule focused on any awareness of gay men and lesbians portrayed in the media or literature.

Section 11 of the interview schedule was designed to elicit comparison of perceptions of the experiences of gay people with those of other minority groups. This was to supplement corresponding information collected in lesbian interviews, and also any relevant material from the communication group interviews.

Finally, section 12 of the interview schedule provided subjects with an opportunity to add any further observations they wished to.

Interview schedule: Communication with family and friends

A. Confidentiality

1. FIRST OF ALL, CAN YOU THINK OF ANY TOPICS THAT TEENAGE CHILDREN MIGHT PREFER NOT TO TALK ABOUT WITH THEIR PARENTS?
2. DID YOU FIND IT DIFFICULT IN YOUR (EARLY) TEENS TO TALK ABOUT CERTAIN SUBJECTS WITH YOUR PARENTS?
Can you tell me (more) about that?
How do you think your parents would have reacted if you had talked to them about this?
Generally, did you find it easier to talk to your mother or father?
3. DO YOU HAVE ANY BROTHERS OR SISTERS?
How many of each? Older/younger?
4. DO YOU REMEMBER WHETHER THERE WERE ANY TOPICS YOU FOUND DIFFICULT TO TALK ABOUT WITH YOUR BROTHER(S)/SISTER(S) WHEN YOU WERE IN YOUR (EARLY) TEENS?
Were there any topics you avoided talking about with them?
5. WERE THERE TOPICS YOU AVOIDED TALKING ABOUT, OR FOUND DIFFICULT TO TALK ABOUT, WITH FRIENDS DURING YOUR TEENS?
6. CAN YOU REMEMBER ANYTHING YOU FOUND DIFFICULT TO TALK ABOUT WITH OTHERS DURING YOUR CHILDHOOD?
Can you tell me (more) about that?
Who did you want to talk to about it?
How long was it before you managed to talk to someone?
How did you choose the moment to tell?
7. AS AN ADULT ARE THERE TOPICS YOU AVOID TALKING ABOUT OR FIND DIFFICULT TO DISCUSS WITH YOUR FAMILY?
parents/siblings/husband/children
8. ARE THERE AREAS YOU FIND DIFFICULT TO TALK ABOUT WITH FRIENDS NOW?

9. NOW SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT WORK.
Are you currently a student?
Have you had any work experience? [ascertain areas]
HAVE THERE BEEN TOPICS THAT YOU'VE AVOIDED TALKING ABOUT WITH YOUR WORK COLLEAGUES OR EMPLOYERS?
Why?
How did you think they might react?
What did you feel might happen?
10. HAVE THERE BEEN TIMES [RECENTLY] WHEN YOU'VE WANTED TO TELL OTHERS ABOUT SOMETHING, BUT EITHER NOT FELT ABLE TO, OR FOUND IT DIFFICULT?
Recently/in the last month/during the last year?
Can you tell me more about that?
11. CAN YOU THINK OF WHATEVER YOU HAVE FOUND MOST DIFFICULT TO TALK TO OTHERS ABOUT.
You don't need to tell me what it was actually about. I'm just interested in your feelings about talking to others about it, and how you approached telling them.
So, thinking about whatever you found most difficult to talk to others about:
First of all, can you describe your feelings before you talked to anyone else?
What did you do to cope during that time?
How did you think others would react if/when you told them?
How long did you think about it before talking to someone?
How did you choose the moment to tell the other person?
Can you describe how you approached telling them?
How did they react?/What was their reaction like?
How did you feel about it having talked to them?
[If appropriate] What did you do to cope?/How did you cope with this situation?

12. HAVE THERE BEEN ANY OTHER INCIDENTS OR HAPPENINGS IN YOUR LIFE WHICH YOU'VE FOUND DIFFICULT TALKING ABOUT WITH FAMILY OR FRIENDS, OR AVOIDED TALKING ABOUT WITH THEM?

Can you give me any examples?

(- again, it's all right if you'd prefer not tell me exactly what the incident or happening was.

Thinking about the example...)

First of all, can you describe your feelings before you talked to anyone else?

What did you do to cope during that time?

How did you think others would react if/when you told them?

How long did you think about it before talking to someone?

How did you choose the moment to tell the other person?

Can you describe how you approached telling them?

How did they react?/What was their reaction like?

How did you feel about it having talked to them?

[If appropriate] What did you do to cope?/How did you cope with this situation?

Can you think of any more examples of particular incidents or happenings in your life which you've avoided discussing with others or found difficult to talk about with them?

13. GENERALLY, HOW DO YOU FEEL WHEN YOU HAVE BEEN ABLE TO TALK TO OTHERS ABOUT SOMETHING THAT WAS DIFFICULT?

14. IS THERE ANYTHING MORE THAT YOU CAN THINK OF ABOUT COMMUNICATING WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS ON DIFFICULT TOPICS THAT WE HAVEN'T COVERED?

Rationale for 'communication with family and friends' interview schedule

This interview schedule was designed for investigation of women's perceptions and experiences of communicating with family and friends on topics they (had) perceived difficult to talk to others about. It was intended to compare perceptions of initial situation, coping strategies used, approaches taken in communicating, perceived reactions of other(s), and outcome, with the perceptions and experiences of lesbians in coming out to family and friends. Studies of stigma (Goffman, 1963; Jones et al., 1984), psycho-social transitions (Parkes, 1971), and coping with threatened identity (Breakwell, 1986) suggest there may be diverse minority group or life experiences that may be considered within common interpretive frameworks.

For the first question on the interview schedule, a general rather than personal issue was chosen, to provide an opportunity for beginning to build up a rapport with the interviewee. Question 1, thus, simply concerned perceptions of topics that teenage children might prefer not to discuss with their parents.

Questions 2, 4 and 5 then focused upon topics that the subject had found difficult to talk about, or avoided talking about, with her parents, siblings and friends, respectively, during her teenage years (or if the subject was still a teenager, topics found difficult to talk about during her early teens). For some lesbians, their teenage years are when they first begin to become aware of themselves as lesbian, and they may feel a desperate need to talk to someone about it. Stigmatization is a central concern for young gay people to deal with (Hetrick & Martin, 1987). It is thought perceptions of stigma may deter confiding in family or friends. Isolation may become a major problem for the lesbian (Hetrick & Martin, 1987) and suicidal thoughts/attempts may occur (Trenchard & Warren, 1984). Generally, self-

disclosure may be necessary for psychological health (Jourard, 1971); and non-disclosure may affect interactions with others, friendships, and relationships (Jourard, 1971; Chaikin & Derlega, 1976; Miell & Duck, 1986). However, this has to be balanced against possible alienation of others arising from 'distress disclosure' (Coates and Winston, 1987), or disclosure of information of a 'deviant' nature (Derlega, Harris & Chaikin, 1973).

Question 6 concerns anything found difficult to talk about during childhood. Some lesbians report having felt 'different' during childhood.

Questions 7 and 8 focus on topics found difficult to talk about, or avoided, with family or friends, as an adult. Question 9 concerns topics avoided with work colleagues or employers. Comparison of such topics with the issue of lesbianism may illuminate aspects that make coming out as lesbian difficult.

Question 10 was designed to aid recall of any difficulties in talking to others by focusing on particular time periods.

Questions 11, concerned with whatever the subject had found most difficult to talk to others about, was directed towards examining feelings, coping strategies, perceptions of possible reactions of others, timing in choosing when to disclose, approach taken, perceived reactions of other, and feelings after talking. Subjects were informed that they did not need to tell the interviewer exactly what the issue was: rather than the actual topic, the interviewer was interested in approach taken in talking to others, how the interviewee had thought others would react etc. Question 12 focused on any further incidents or happenings that the subject had found difficult to talk about, or avoided talking about, with family or friends. Again, subjects were informed that the interviewer did not need to know exactly what the incident was, but was interested in how the subject had coped before talking to anyone, the approach taken in

telling the other person, their reactions etc. This question was repeated until the subject could recall no further examples of incidents. Thus, questions 11 and 12 were primarily directed towards examining different approaches taken, and ways of coping, with issues that women found difficult to talk to others about. It was intended to compare these accounts with lesbian women's approaches to coming out, and methods of coping.

Question 13 was an attempt to finish the interview positively - making the assumption that generally, having talked to someone about something difficult would probably at least be a relief of some kind. The final question, number 14, was to provide the interviewee with an opportunity to raise any further issues that she wanted to.

APPENDIX J: Some sample details

(Main study lesbian and heterosexual group subjects - education levels, occupations, and Kinsey ratings)

Education

The modal category indicating highest level of education for lesbian and heterosexual group subjects was in both cases that of a degree. Twenty percent of the lesbian group, and a third of the heterosexual group fell into this category. Altogether, 37.5% of the lesbian group indicated their highest level of education as a degree or post-graduate degree; and 56.6% of the heterosexual group. For 45% of the lesbian group, the highest level of education indicated ranged from CSE/GCE O or A levels or equivalent, to some further education. For the heterosexual group, 30% mentioned these categories as their highest level of education - eight out of nine of these heterosexual subjects falling into the GCE A level category, and none into the further education category.

Occupations

Lesbian subjects' occupations covered a wide range including nursing, social work, journalism, secretarial work, teaching, and accountancy. There were also women in the army and civil service; a doctor; and a traffic warden. A few of the lesbian sample were self employed, and a few unemployed.

Heterosexual subjects' in employment included those in secretarial work, teaching, the police force, accountancy and business.

Kinsey ratings

Table J.1: Subjects' self-ratings of sexual experiences on a modified version of the Kinsey scale

	Lesbian Group		Heterosexual Group	
	no. of subjects	% sample	no. of subjects	% sample
Scale value*				
0	0	0	27	90.0
1	4	10.0	3	10.0
2	3	7.5	0	0
3	5	12.5	0	0
4	4	10.0	0	0
5	13	32.5	0	0
6	10	25.0	0	0

Table J.2: Subjects' self-ratings of feelings/emotions on a modified version of the Kinsey scale

	Lesbian Group		Heterosexual Group	
	no. of subjects	% sample	no. of subjects	% sample
Scale value*				
0	0	0	19	63.3
1	0	0	8	26.7
2	0	0	2	6.7
3	1	2.5	1	3.3
4	7	17.5	0	0
5	11	27.5	0	0
6	21	52.5	0	0

- * 0 Entirely heterosexual
 1 Mainly heterosexual, but very occasionally homosexual
 2 Mainly heterosexual, but sometimes homosexual
 3 Equally homosexual and heterosexual
 4 Mainly homosexual, but sometimes heterosexual
 5 Mainly homosexual, but very occasionally heterosexual
 6 Entirely homosexual

Just over two thirds of the lesbian sample described their sexual experiences as entirely homosexual, or mainly homosexual but very occasionally heterosexual, or mainly homosexual but sometimes heterosexual. Twenty five percent of the lesbian sample indicated their sexual experiences were entirely homosexual. Ninety percent of the heterosexual sample indicated their sexual

experiences had been entirely heterosexual, and the remaining ten percent, that their experiences had been mainly heterosexual, but very occasionally homosexual.

Eighty percent of the lesbian sample described their feelings or emotions as entirely homosexual, or mainly homosexual but very occasionally heterosexual. Just over half the lesbian sample indicated their feelings or emotions were in the former category. Ninety percent of the heterosexual sample described their feelings or emotions as entirely heterosexual, or mainly heterosexual but very occasionally homosexual; with nearly two thirds of the heterosexual sample falling into the former category.

APPENDIX K: Examples of sections from questionnaire and interview coding frames

Questionnaire coding frame: example sections

1. Normality	1.1 normal	1.1.1 normal 1.1.2 conventional 1.1.3 typical 1.1.4 straight
	1.2 abnormal	1.2.1 abnormal 1.2.2 perverted 1.2.3 strange/unnatural 1.2.4 atypical 1.2.5 queer/bent 1.2.6 outcast/misfit 1.2.7 'different' 1.2.8 deviant
4. Sex role	4.1 feminine	4.1.1 feminine 4.1.2 'femme' (fem. role) 4.1.3 'a real woman' 4.1.4 fulfils role as woman/womanly 4.1.5 female
	4.2 masculine	4.2.1 masculine 4.2.2 unfeminine 4.2.3 women who want to be men/try to act like men /are like men/pseudo males /manly/mannish 4.2.4 'butch'(masc. role) 4.2.5 tomboy/boyish 4.2.6 failure as woman /unwomanly /failed heterosexual/unnatural women 4.2.7 frustrated heterosexual woman 4.2.8 dykey
	4.3 androgynous	
	4.4 sexless	
5. Political /feminist	5.1 political (general) 5.2 feminist (ordinary) 5.3 extreme feminist 5.4 not a feminist 5.5 involved with CND or peace issues 5.6 concerned with environment	

Interview coding frame: example sections

Coming out to self

4. Feelings and context	4.1 self - feelings	4.1.1 negative general e.g. very worried/frightened/panic stricken / desperate 4.1.2 isolated/lonely/thought I was the only one 4.1.x suicidal thoughts 4.1.y had nervous breakdown 4.1.4 never in any doubt/never confused/when understood what 'lesbian' meant, knew that's what I was/you know it's there and you know you feel it, and there's absolutely nothing you can do about it 4.1.5 actual condition never worried me/never felt it was wrong 4.1.6 it wasn't a question of feeling I might be lesbian, but of seeing lesbianism as an option /first became a political lesbian 4.1.7 had repressed/suppressed/denied feelings/pretended didn't have the feelings/at first I couldn't accept my feelings for women/feelings didn't surface for (long) period 4.1.8 excited/relieved/a release/glad to understand myself 4.1.9 conflicting feelings/felt guilty/felt resentful/ angry/confused 4.1.10 thought I'd have to live a lie (for ever) 4.1.11 wished I wasn't different from others/wondered whether I was different from everyone else
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- 4.2 feelings
 - specifically 4.2.1 upset/sadness/traumatic
 - in 4.2.2 anger/bitterness
 - connection 4.2.3 jealousy
 - with others' 4.2.4 too worried about it not to want it to be taken
 - attitudes & 4.2.5 felt they wouldn't believe me/would dismiss it as a phase
 - reactions 4.2.6 aware of negative associations/stigma
 - 4.2.7 concerned what others would say/do
 - 4.2.8 /if suspected, I would have been ostracised
 - 4.2.8 /thought they would think it was wrong
 - 4.2.8 thought I'd never be able to tell anyone/felt I couldn't talk to anyone/wanted to share it with everybody but knew I couldn't/it was a no-go area
 - 4.2.9 /I didn't think there was anything I could do
 - 4.2.10 worried re parents finding out/felt guilty
 - 4.2.10 problem of keeping secret
- 4.3 context
 - 4.3.1 unspecified/not within women's movement
 - 4.3.2 within context of women's movement
- 4.4 order
 - 4.4.1 someone knew/suggested it before subject identified self as gay/lesbian
- 4.5 perceives lesbianism in political terms
- 4.6 previously knew little about homosexuality
- 4.7 lesbianism had negative connotation
- 4.8 miscellaneous

Coming out to others

- 18. Initial circumstances and emotions immediately prior to coming out to others /reasons for coming out (whether actually out or not)
 - 18.1 something happened, so it was appropriate
 - 18.2 in a state/confused/needed support/shocked
 - 18.3 /horrified at realizing feelings/very worried
 - 18.3 lesbian relationship break up/problems
 - 18.4 feel guilty/leading a double life/having to lie
 - 18.4 /want to be able to speak freely/don't want people assuming me to be heterosexual/one of the most important things about you as a person/would like to be able to say it's me - that's what I am /it would be easier if they did know /wanted other to understand /I'd feel more natural with them
 - 18.4 /wanted to tell them before they heard from somebody else
 - 18.5 embarrassed/scared/nervous/worried at idea of telling /I always expect people to reject
 - 18.6 I didn't think they'd mind /expected approval /I think they could handle it /I've always told them everything /close to person /other told me things about themselves /coming out to others had gone well
 - 18.7 if they're real friends it wouldn't bother them
 - 18.a suspects other may be gay
 - 18.b coming out linked to alcohol problem
 - 18.x miscellaneous
- 20. Reactions
 - 20.1 positive
 - 20.1.1 positive general
 - (a) good/no problem/interested/understanding
 - /accepting/wishes me well/sympathetic/supportive
 - /glad I felt I could tell them/receptive/good conversation/can talk about relationships
 - (b) it wouldn't bother me (at all) /happy if she's happy/would encourage what they want to do/would help with any problems/would create best circumstances for them/would try to understand
 - /accept/be supportive /would admire /would help them to try to understand their own sexuality
 - 20.1.2 general positive change over time
 - e.g. is coming to terms with /relationship with other(s) has improved

- 20.2 negative
- 20.2.1 negative general
shocked/upset/unhappy/uncomfortable/said can't understand/does not accept/disapproved/judgemental /unhelpful/I don't think I could hate her for it /hope I would not tell them to go away /doesn't believe it /worries about me /sorry for them /sorrow/distressed/frightened/embarrassed
- 20.2.2 extreme negative
went mad/appalled/horrified/felt revolted/anger /extremely disappointed /pressure leading to breakup of lesbian relationship
- 20.2.3 rejection
didn't ever want to see me again /would reject /would not have as friend /would avoid
- 20.2.4 a distancing/awkwardness/strain (long term) /wary /keep my distance /scared they might be attracted to me
- 20.2.5 accused of living under false pretences
- 20.2.6 not discussed since /not easy to talk about now (long term) /not something generally talked about
- 20.2.7 religious concerns
- 20.2.8 blames self/feels guilty/wondered if their fault /bad reflection on you
- 20.2.9 concerned at what neighbours/relatives/parents /others might say /concerned with social stigma /concerned with effects on family
- 20.2.10 sees me as having been influenced /corrupted by other woman
- 20.2.11 connects with paedophilia
- 20.2.12 unhappy they couldn't have children /wants/wanted me to marry & have children /would prefer them to be straight
- 20.2.13 thinks/hopes it's a phase /thinks I just haven't met the right man /would try and work out whether it was just a phase /would like to look at it as one-off affair /told me I can change
- 20.2.14 suggested I see somebody (e.g. psychiatrist) /would suggest they see a psychiatrist /asked if I'd spoken to my doctor
- 20.2.15 would take a long time to come to terms with /would not reject completely
- 20.2.16 thinks it's difficult for lesbians to be happy /thinks that life would have been happier if not gay
- 20.2.17 general negative change over time
- 20.2.x negative miscellaneous
- 20.3 neutral /mixed
- 20.3.1 neutral/mixed general
I don't really know what they felt /not sure if they understood /I don't think I'd feel anything at all /is not a relevant issue /I wouldn't be for or against it /it's her business /let person get on with own life /wouldn't put own beliefs on others /neither a terrible reaction, nor a particularly good one /contradictory /no different towards me /she didn't know what to do /found it a bit difficult /concerned for me /don't think I'd feel bad /wouldn't be unhappy /would wonder how s/he had become gay /would tell them to be very careful /would warn them of the possible consequences /would be slightly wary because I'm not on familiar ground /it wouldn't bother me too

much /curiosity /said she didn't want to know

20.3.2 surprise

20.3.3 in one way it wouldn't surprise me and in another way it would /even though she knew, she was a bit shocked

20.3.4 not surprised /had thought I probably was /had suspected /would probably have worked out person was gay beforehand

20.3.5 concerned re society/societal pressures

20.3.6 said was something in self was frightened of /repression of feelings I might have

20.3.7 said she couldn't respond /feel like that

20.3.8 parent told her not to tell other parent/other family

20.3.9 would want to know why they were homosexual

20.3.10 it's all right as long as it doesn't affect me

20.3.11 uncertain /can't tell until situation arises /I've never really thought about it /it would depend (on context, age etc.)

20.3.12 general neutral/mixed change over time

20.3.x neutral miscellaneous

20.4 male/
female
differences

20.4.1 generally the same for male & female

20.4.2 less bothered/could understand more if female

20.4.3 less bothered/could understand more if male

20.4.4 confused/contradictory response /some difference but not as above

APPENDIX L: Examples of life span lines

Key to abbreviations:

FF	Reported first feelings
IL	First identified self as gay/lesbian /first consciously realised self to be gay/lesbian
COL	Coming out into lesbian community
COP	Coming out to parent(s)
COS	Coming out to sibling(s)
COHF	Coming out to heterosexual friend(s)
COH	Coming out to husband
COF	Coming out to family
FCO	First coming out
COC	Coming out to children
rel(s)	relationship(s)
w	with
v	very
les	lesbian
het	heterosexual
occ	occupation

SUBJECT 8 (BORN 1958): LIFE SPAN LINE

1958		1968		1978		1988	Year
0	5	10	15	20	25	30	Age (yrs)

	FF		COHF	COS
	IL		COL ₂	

EVENTS:

Fell in love (2)	Had fallen in love
---------------------	-----------------------

Move to
London₁

EMOTIONS:

Not v aware
of emotions
except
strong
feelings
for a best
friend

V worried,
frightened,
hoped was
phase,
isolated

Shocked,
desperate
(wd have
gone out
to
commit
suicide)

+ better
along
road to
accepting
self
- not easy
worried
re future
conflict
re reli-
gion and
work

¹ Timing of this event unknown, but it preceded S8 feeling able to come out

² Timing of this estimated, not given

SUBJECT 14 (BORN 1961): LIFE SPAN LINE

1961	1966	1971	1976	1981	1988	Year
0	5	10	15	20	25	27

FF

IL
COL
FCO
COP
COS

EVENTS:

Started
working
in occ
where
many
lesbians

Les work
colleague
asked her
'Do you
think
you're
gay?'
(rather
than
'you are')

RELATIONSHIPS:

Was
engaged
to be
married

Not going
out with
anyone

Going out
with men
to prove
she wasn't
gay

EMOTIONS:

Retrospective
(Preferred
(company of
(women to
(men - strong
(feelings for
(women

Can't lead
a double
life/pre-
tend to be
something
I wasn't

SUBJECT 30 (BORN 1953): LIFE SPAN LINE

1953	1958	1963	1968	1973	1978	1983	1988	Year
0	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	Age (yrs)

FF

FCO

COHF

COP₁

COS₁

EVENTS:

Engaged
twice

Joined
Wrens

RELATIONSHIPS:

Had lots of
boyfriends

Still occasion-
ally sleeps with
men - but loves
her rels with
women

EMOTIONS:

Happy but
knowing some-
thing in rels
with boys
missing

Very positive

Recalls
teacher
she loved

Sudden
realization
of gay
feelings

¹ Timing very unclear

SUBJECT 32 (BORN 1947): LIFE SPAN LINE

1947		1957		1967		1977		1988	Year
0	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40 (41)	Age (yrs)

FF

IL

COL

FCO

COH

COHF₁

EVENTS:

Married

Birth of
3rd child

EMOTIONS:

Always
felt
strong-
ly about
women.
Recalls
wanting
to be
close
to
other
girls at
five.

Didn't think
of feelings
as gay as
didn't asso-
ciate her-
self with
abnormal
- "dread-
ful lezzie
teachers".

Always being
attracted
to women.

C.O. self -
it was
terrifying.

+ve re gay
relation-
ships.

+ve re con-
flict betw.
marriage &
family &
gay rels
& regrets
re wanting
to be whole
self &
having to
deny
essence.

¹ Estimate

SUBJECT 36 (BORN 1940): LIFE SPAN LINE

1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1988	Year
0	10	20	30	40	48	Age (yrs)

FF
IL
COL
COS
COP₁
COF_m
FCO

EVENTS:

RELATIONSHIPS:

← In het rel (10 yrs) → ~~X~~ Rel w woman (2 yrs) → ← 16 yr rel w woman →

EMOTIONS:

During teens
very unhappy,
disturbed,
depressed

Eldest child
- had to work
v hard from
8 yrs old
looking after
the younger
children -
unhappy

Distressed
when man
she had
been expect-
ed to
marry found
it hard to
accept
(blackmail)

Generally posi-
tive - only
negative feel-
ings related
to not being
able to be
totally open
& accepted by
other people

SUBJECT 37 (BORN 1932): LIFE SPAN LINE

1932	1942	1952	1962	1972	1982	1988	Year
0	10	20	30	40	50	56	Age (yrs)

FF	COH
COA ₁	COHF ₂
	COC ₂

<u>EVENTS:</u>	Married	Fell in love w woman	Fell in love w woman (2)
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<u>RELATIONSHIPS:</u>		Traumatic rel w woman (2)
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<u>EMOTIONS:</u>	Happily married
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¹ 1970 C.O. to aunt

² Estimates - very unclear

APPENDIX M: Examples of 'coming out' tables

Table M.1: Coming out to family for Subject 32

FAMILY

NOT OUT TO	OUT TO
Subject's perceptions of situation	Perceived reactions
<u>Mother</u> (deceased) Thought it was a real perversion. Had an absolute thing about lesbians.	<u>Husband</u> No problem. I think he knew before I did.
<u>Father</u> (deceased) I don't know how it would have been.	
<u>Parents</u> It would have killed them.	
<u>Brother</u> (deceased) I would have told him.	
<u>Cousins, aunts, etc.</u> Welsh, very conventional, wouldn't accept/understand.	
<u>Children</u> (16, 13 & 10 yrs old) Hoped it would filter through like osmosis & there wouldn't be any great moments of revelation - they've never said anything. Worried about 16 yr old as thinks she's gay.	

Table M.2: Coming out to family for subject 14

FAMILY

NOT OUT TO	OUT TO
Subject's perceptions of situation	Perceived reactions
<p><u>Younger brother:</u> Doesn't want to tell him because they're very close & S. doesn't want him to treat her differently. Is 17/18 - would like to wait until he's older.</p>	<p><u>Father:</u> Told because S. didn't want to lead double life. Reactions: mixed - neg - pos. First shocked, but concerned for her. Then neg comments on gays on TV - leading to S. leaving home. Now accepts but doesn't talk about it.</p>
	<p><u>Mother:</u> Told by father first; fine, no bother.</p>
	<p><u>Sister:</u> Initial rejection. Now OK, but won't talk about it.</p>
	<p><u>Brothers?:</u> [No details given].</p>
	<p><u>Brother-in-law:</u> Positive reaction.</p>
<p>Generally - didn't want any secrets from family.</p>	

Table M.3: Coming out to family for subject 30

FAMILY

NOT OUT TO	OUT TO
Subject's perceptions of situation	Perceived reactions
<p><u>Cousins & Aunts & things:</u></p> <p>Mother doesn't want them to know - S. shocked at this/taken aback that she feels it's something not to be talked about.</p>	<p><u>Mother:</u></p> <p>Guessed. S. showed her photos of friend - when she realised it was a woman, not a man, as she'd first thought; during next couple of years, she put things together. Then when S. had breakdown because of relationship break up & spoke to her, she told her she'd known for about 2 years.</p>
	<p><u>Sister:</u></p> <p>S. found it difficult to tell her & thinks her mother told her.</p>
	<p><u>Father:</u></p> <p>We don't talk about it, but I take my friends home & there's no uncomfortable feeling.</p>

Table M.4: Coming out to friends for subject 30

HETEROSEXUAL FRIENDS

NOT OUT TO	OUT TO
Subject's perceptions of situation	Perceived reactions
<p><u>Friend 4:</u> She probably wouldn't mind but it puts onus on them to make a decision about you, which is a bit unfair.</p>	<p><u>Friend 1:</u> First het. person S. came out to - it was her 21st birthday party - S. asked if she'd still be her friend - and they're best friends.</p>
	<p><u>Friend 2:</u> S. would not tell her - but she discovered because she read a letter S. was writing. All her family know - and friend has a gay sister and brother.</p>
	<p><u>Friend 3:</u> S. won't tell her and thinks friend is hurt that she won't - "she knows, but I won't actually say the word". It would make S. feel better to tell her, but she thinks she would be forcing her to [make a decision] do something.</p>

Table M.5: Coming out to friends for subject 8

HETEROSEXUAL FRIENDS

NOT OUT TO	OUT TO
Subject's perceptions of situation	Perceived reactions
<p><u>Two friends</u> Opportunities to (has known tell - has for quite chickened out - a long time) doesn't know what's stopping her.</p>	<p><u>Friends 1 and 2:</u> S. in desperate state. Phoned each. Reactions - sympathetic, I don't really know what they felt, they were glad I felt I could tell them, supportive.</p>
<p><u>Others:</u> Has thought about it a great deal; don't see why I shouldn't, but if I tell, I'll be cast in that mould forever (?they don't tell me they're heterosexual).</p>	<p><u>A few friends of partner:</u> Came to know S. indirectly, through partner.</p>
	<p><u>Friend 3:</u> S. met her for lunch day after a really horrendous trauma - had to tell her why in state. Reactions - sympathetic, she didn't know quite what to do, not something we find easy to talk about now.</p>

APPENDIX N: Chi-squared tests on questionnaire data

Table N.1: Frequencies of lesbian and heterosexual subjects mentioning stereotype categories, and Chi-squared tests¹ summary for data where all expected frequencies were greater than five

Item no. & category	no. of lesbian subjects	no. of heterosexual subjects	χ^2	significance
Item II.1 8.2 gentle /unassertive	11	7	0.112	ns
Item II.2 4.2 masculine 1.2 abnormal 8.1 aggressive	19 13 8	10 7 4	1.213 0.600 0.471	ns ns ns
Item II.3 4.2 masculine 1.2 abnormal	16 8	10 4	0.242 0.471	ns ns
Item II.4 none				
Item II.5 16.3 non-existent 6.2 neutral in relation to men	7 9	9 3	1.658 1.762	ns ns
Item II.6 16.3 non-existent	9	9	0.593	ns
Item III.1 1.1 normal 9.1 attractive 4.1 feminine 10.1 maternal /family 6.2 neutral in relation to men 8.2 gentle /unassertive 6.4 sexually in relation to men	18 13 13 16 12 7 6	12 12 10 4 2 7 6	0.108 0.522 0.021 5.651/4.453 5.590/4.254 0.429 0.355	ns ns ns p<0.05 p<0.05 ns ns
Item III.2 4.2 masculine 1.2 abnormal 8.1 aggressive /assertive 15.4 dyke 9.b unattractive 6.4 negative in relation to men	23 16 8 13 11 12	14 10 10 5 6 4	0.671 0.242 1.749 2.071 0.444 2.520	ns ns ns ns ns ns
Interview les. stereo. 4.2 masculine 9.b unattract. 8.1 aggressive /assertive 27 personal thoughts /feelings	20 18 6 28	16 9 11 14	0.144 1.421 4.618/3.487 3.353	ns ns ns ns

1. Values of chi-squared in Table N.1 are Pearson ones calculated by MINITAB. Where they indicated a possible significant difference, chi-squared was recalculated using the continuity correction formula (Siegel & Castellan, equation 6.3, p.116).

APPENDIX O: Analysis of BSRI and PAQ data

The following analysis of the BSRI and PAQ data includes an examination of means scores on masculinity and femininity variables; item total correlations for these constructed variables; correlations between these variables; and then further examination of the data structure of the BSRI by cluster analysis; and of the PAQ by factor analysis. The stereotypes derived from t-tests on the BSRI data, and from a median split on the PAQ data are then looked at. Finally, differences between lesbian and heterosexual groups; male and female subjects; and older and younger subjects, are examined with multivariate analysis of variance.

(Several different ways of categorizing age of subjects were considered. These included splitting subjects at the median age of 35; or dividing subjects into categories representing approximately ten year intervals, i.e. those under 30 years; those in their thirties; those in their forties; and those of 50 years and over. Taking into account hypotheses regarding a possibly different social and cultural climate in the late 1970's/early 1980's, after an initial examination of the data, it was decided to focus on an examination of two age categories: those under 30 years old; and those of 30 years old or over.)

BSRI mean masculinity and femininity scores, and standard deviations, for the personal view of lesbians, and the lesbian stereotype, are shown in Table O.1. It can be seen that mean masculinity scores for the lesbian stereotype tended to be greater than those for the personal view of lesbians, while mean femininity scores for the lesbian stereotype tended to be less than those for the personal view.

Mean ratings on the BSRI and PAQ

Table O.1: Mean masculinity and femininity scores on the BSRI

		personal view of lesbians				lesbian stereotype			
		masc.		fem.		masc.		fem.	
Sub-jects	n	mean	S.D.	mean	S.D.	mean	S.D.	mean	S.D.
les. group	41	96.71	11.58	92.80	10.73	111.49	12.11	58.98	13.77
het. m & f	30	96.53	13.21	79.87	16.90	107.40	14.36	62.23	18.01
het.m	15	102.27	13.79	71.53	18.29	108.47	11.32	61.40	17.86
het.f	15	90.80	10.03	88.20	10.41	106.33	17.22	63.07	18.74
les. <30	16	100.13	7.11	90.81	6.23	108.06	11.31	53.75	12.81
les. ≥30	25	94.52	13.39	94.08	12.78	113.68	12.32	62.32	13.55
het. <30	12	101.67	9.48	76.42	13.84	111.17	11.78	53.67	11.32
het. ≥30	18	93.11	14.43	82.17	18.69	104.89	15.66	67.94	19.59
m.het <30	6	105.17	7.14	66.00	9.65	109.67	9.33	51.33	10.21
m.het ≥30	9	100.33	17.04	75.22	22.11	107.67	12.96	68.11	19.14
f.het <30	6	98.17	10.83	86.83	8.23	112.67	14.58	56.00	12.84
f.het ≥30	9	85.89	5.90	89.11	12.05	102.11	18.33	67.78	21.19
les & het. <30	28	100.79	8.08	84.64	12.34	109.39	11.40	53.71	11.97
les & het. ≥30	43	93.93	13.68	89.09	16.44	110.00	14.33	64.67	16.37

All ages are in years.

Key to abbreviations for table

het: heterosexual
les: lesbian
m : male
f : female

For the stereotype, the highest mean masculinity score was given by lesbians of 30 years old or over, and the lowest mean femininity score by male heterosexuals under 30 years old. This latter group also produced the

highest mean masculinity score and the lowest mean femininity score on the personal view of lesbians. There were, however, only six subjects in the group of male heterosexuals under 30 years old.

Table 0.2: Mean ratings on the PAQ male valued, female valued and sex specific (m-f) scales for the lesbian stereotype

Subjects	n	male valued		female valued		sex specific	
		mean	S.D.	mean	S.D.	mean	S.D.
lesbian group	41	3.75	.56	3.56	.76	3.71 ¹	.57
het. m. & f.	30	3.78	.56	3.07	.82	3.57	.66
het. m.	15	3.85	.55	3.12	.86	3.52	.67
het. f.	15	3.71	.58	3.02	.80	3.63	.67
<30 yrs.	28	3.86	.55	3.66	.62	3.90	.39
≥30 yrs.	43	3.69	.56	3.15	.87	3.48 ²	.68

1. n=40 2. n=42

Table 0.3: Mean ratings on the PAQ male valued, female valued and sex specific (m-f) scales for the heterosexual woman stereotype

Subjects	n	male valued		female valued		sex specific	
		mean	S.D.	mean	S.D.	mean	S.D.
lesbian group	41	2.22 ¹	.54	1.95	.49	1.79 ¹	.47
het. m. & f.	30	2.53	.48	1.95	.57	1.99	.42
het. m.	15	2.55	.50	1.83	.47	1.99	.40
het. f.	15	2.52	.48	2.06	.65	1.98	.46
<30 yrs.	28	2.44	.41	1.87	.44	1.85 ²	.39
≥30 yrs.	43	2.30 ³	.60	2.00	.57	1.89	.50

1. n=40 2. n=27 3. n=42

PAQ female valued, male valued and sex specific (m-f) variables were created by summing the appropriate eight female valued, male valued or sex specific items, respectively, for each stereotype. It can be seen from Tables 0.2 and 0.3 that average ratings of the lesbian stereotype on the PAQ male valued, female valued and sex specific variables were all greater than 3.00, whereas

average ratings for the heterosexual woman stereotype were all less than 3.00. Thus, ratings for the lesbian stereotype were towards the stereotypically masculine pole, and those for the heterosexual woman stereotype towards the stereotypically feminine pole. This was consistent for both stereotypes over the entire population as well as for group means and age category means. Considering the individual PAQ items, all mean ratings for the heterosexual woman stereotype were less than 3.00. For the lesbian stereotype, all but six items had mean ratings greater than 3.00. Of these six items, only two of the cases applied to the means for the entire population (the female valued item, emotional; and the sex specific item, excitability in a major crisis). The other four cases of items with means not greater than 3.00 applied to the ratings of the heterosexual group subjects only. Examination of the frequency distributions of the individual PAQ items indicated that responses to the female valued item 'emotional' were not normally distributed.

Item total correlations for the PAQ and BSRI variables

Considering the PAQ data from all subjects, item total correlations for both the lesbian stereotype variables and the heterosexual woman stereotype variables were generally highly significant ($p < 0.001$). The only item total correlation falling below this level was that for the m-f item 'excitable in major crisis' on the lesbian stereotype ($r = .266$, $p < 0.05$).

For the lesbian group subjects, item total correlations for the male valued and female valued variables, for both the lesbian stereotype, and the heterosexual woman stereotype, were all highly significant ($p < 0.001$). Item total correlations for the two stereotypes for the sex specific variables were mainly highly significant ($p < 0.001$). Three items contributing to the lesbian stereotype sex specific

variable, and one item contributing to the heterosexual woman stereotype sex specific variable were correlated at the 0.01 level of significance.

For the heterosexual group, on the lesbian stereotype, seven of the eight female valued items; seven of the eight male valued items; and six of the eight sex specific items were highly correlated with the total variables ($p < 0.001$). The remaining male valued and female valued items were correlated at the 0.01 level. One sex specific item was correlated at the 0.05 level, but the item 'excitable in a major crisis' was not significantly correlated with the total sex specific variable. For the heterosexual woman stereotype, all of the male valued items, and seven of the eight female valued items were highly significantly correlated with their respective total variables ($p < 0.001$). The remaining female valued item, 'emotional', correlated at the 0.01 level. For the heterosexual woman stereotype, sex specific variable, item total correlations were highly significant for five of the eight variables ($p < 0.001$). Two further sex specific items correlated with the total at the 0.01 and 0.05 levels of significance. The remaining sex specific item, 'need for security' was not significantly correlated with the total variable.

Item total correlations for the BSRI masculinity and femininity variables were generally satisfactory. For both personal view and lesbian stereotype masculinity variables, item total correlations were all significant ($p < 0.05$). For the femininity variables, all items, except for one personal view item, and one stereotype item, correlated significantly with the total variables ($p < 0.05$). The items that were not significantly correlated were 'does not use harsh language' for the personal view, and 'gullible' for the lesbian stereotype.

Correlations of PAQ and BSRI variables

Table O.4: Correlations between the PAQ male valued (m), female valued (f) and sex specific (m-f) variables, for the lesbian and heterosexual woman stereotypes

all subjects

les.stereo ■	.41***				
les.stereo. ■-f	.82***	.60***			
het.stereo f	-.40***	-.31**	-.47***		
het.stereo ■	-.42***	-.38**	-.42***	.47***	
het. stereo. ■-f	-.37**	-.39***	-.48***	.53***	.75***
	les.st.f	les.st.■	les.st.■-f	het.st.f	het.st.■

lesbian group

les.stereo ■	.29'				
lesbian stereo. ■-f	.82***	.52***			
het.stereo f	-.42**	-.15 ^{NS}	-.55***		
het.stereo ■	-.27'	-.36'	-.35'	.53***	
het.stereo ■-f	-.19 ^{NS}	-.36'	-.35'	.51***	.70***
	les.st.f	les.st.■	les.st.■-f	het.st.f	het.st.■

heterosexual group

les.stereo ■	.63***				
les.stereo ■-f	.84***	.71***			
het.stereo f	-.42'	-.51**	-.40'		
het.stereo ■	-.49**	-.48**	-.48**	.46**	
het.stereo ■-f	-.52**	-.49**	-.63***	.60***	.80***
	les.st.f	les.st.■	les.st.■-f	het.st.f	het.st.■

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001
(one tailed significance)
^{NS} not significant

On the PAQ, considering the data from all subjects, male valued and female valued variables were significantly correlated for both lesbian stereotype ($r=.41$, $p<0.001$) and the heterosexual woman stereotype ($r=.47$, $p<0.001$). There were also significant correlations between the sex specific (m-f) variables and the male and female valued variables for each stereotype ($p<0.001$). Significant correlations also occurred when the subject groups were considered separately. For the heterosexual group, male valued and female valued variables were significantly correlated for the lesbian stereotype ($r=.63$, $p<0.001$) and for the heterosexual woman stereotype ($r=.46$, $p<0.01$), and there were significant correlations between the m-f variables and their respective male and female valued variables ($p<0.001$). For the lesbian group, male valued and female valued variables were significantly correlated for the lesbian stereotype ($r=.29$, $p<0.05$) and for the heterosexual woman stereotype ($r=.53$, $p<0.001$). There were also significant correlations between the m-f variable, and male and female valued variables for the respective stereotypes ($p<0.001$).

Considering all subjects together, the PAQ male valued variables for the two stereotypes were negatively correlated ($r=-.38$, $p<0.01$) and the female valued variables were also negatively correlated ($r=-.40$, $p<0.001$). Similarly, the m-f variables for the two stereotypes were negatively correlated ($r=-.48$, $p<0.001$). For the groups taken separately, there were also significant correlations between these variables ($p<0.05$).

Table 0.5: Correlations between BSRI personal view and lesbian stereotype masculinity (m) and femininity (f) variables

all subjects (n=71)

lesbian stereo. m	.41 ^{***}		
personal view f	-.17 ^{ns}	.10 ^{ns}	
lesbian stereo. f	-.26 [†]	-.18 ^{ns}	.35 ^{**}
	personal view m	lesbian stereo. m	personal view f

lesbian group (n=41)

lesbian stereo. m	.16 ^{NS}		
personal view f	.37 [†]	.34 [†]	
lesbian stereo. f	-.26 ^{ns}	-.14 ^{ns}	.27 [†]
	personal view m	lesbian stereo. m	personal view f

heterosexual group

lesbian stereo. m	.66 ^{***}		
personal view f	-.63 ^{†††}	-.19 ^{ns}	
lesbian stereo. f	-.26 ^{ns}	-.20 ^{ns}	.54 ^{**}
	personal view m	lesbian stereo. m	personal view f

^{*} p<0.05 ^{**} p<0.01 ^{***} p<0.001 (one tailed significance)

^{NS} not significant, p>0.05 (one tailed)

[†] p<0.05 ^{††} p<0.01 ^{†††} p<0.001 (two tailed significance)

^{ns} not significant, p>0.05 (two tailed)

On the BSRI, the masculinity and femininity total variables were not correlated with each other under either of the conditions (personal view of lesbians, $r = -.17$, $p > 0.05$, 2 tail; lesbian stereotype, $r = -.18$, $p > 0.05$, 2 tail). The masculinity score for personal view was significantly correlated with the masculinity score for the lesbian stereotype ($r = .41$, $p < 0.001$, 1 tail), and similarly, the two femininity scores were correlated ($r = .35$, $p < 0.01$, 1 tail).

Considering the subject groups separately, for both lesbian and heterosexual subjects, the personal view of lesbians femininity score was correlated significantly

with the lesbian stereotype femininity score (heterosexual group, $r=.54$, $p=0.001$; lesbian group, $r=.27$, $p<0.05$). However, while there was a significant correlation between the personal view and stereotype masculinity scores for the heterosexual group ($r=.66$, $p<0.001$), there was no significant correlation between the personal view and stereotype masculinity scores for the lesbian group ($r=.16$, $p>0.05$). For the lesbian stereotype, the masculinity and femininity scores were not significantly correlated for either group (heterosexual group, $r=-.20$, $p>0.05$; lesbian group, $r=-.14$, $p>0.05$). However, for the personal view of lesbians, heterosexual group masculinity and femininity scores were significantly negatively correlated ($r=-.63$, $p<0.001$), while for the lesbian group, masculinity and femininity scores were significantly positively correlated ($r=.37$, $p<0.01$).

Table 0.6: Correlations between BSRI and PAQ masculinity (M) and femininity (F) scales for the lesbian stereotype

	All subjects (n=71)			Heterosexual subjects (n=30)			Lesbian subjects (n=41)		
BSRI F	-.18 ^{ns}			-.20 ^{ns}			-.14 ^{ns}		
PAQ M	.64 ^{***}	-.39 ^{††}		.76 ^{***}	-.52 ^{††}		.57 ^{***}	-.29 ^{ns}	
PAQ F	.33 ^{††}	-.70 ^{***}	.41 ^{†††}	.44 [†]	-.75 ^{***}	.63 ^{†††}	.18 ^{ns}	-.67 ^{***}	^{ns} .29
	BSRI M	BSRI F	PAQ M	BSRI M	BSRI F	PAQ M	BSRI M	BSRI F	PAQ M

[†] $p<0.05$ ^{††} $p<0.01$ ^{†††} $p<0.001$ (one tailed significance)
^{ns} not significant, $p>0.05$ (one tailed)

[†] $p<0.05$ ^{††} $p<0.01$ ^{†††} $p<0.001$ (two tailed significance)
^{ns} not significant, $p>0.05$ (two tailed)

Correlations between the PAQ and BSRI variables are shown in Table 0.6. For the lesbian stereotype, there was a significant correlation between PAQ and BSRI masculinity scores ($r=.64$, $n=71$, $p<0.001$). There was a significant negative correlation between PAQ and BSRI femininity scores for the lesbian stereotype ($r=-.70$,

n=71, $p<0.001$). The negative relationship between the femininity scores is due to the scoring system used with low scores on the PAQ indicating high femininity, while on the BSRI, high scores on the feminine items indicated high femininity. Masculinity and femininity scores on the BSRI were also significantly correlated with the PAQ m-f variable for the lesbian stereotype ($r=.40$ and $r=-.64$ respectively, $p<0.001$). All these significant correlations between PAQ and BSRI variables for the lesbian stereotype also occurred when the subject groups were taken separately ($p<0.001$, except for the correlations between the BSRI masculinity score and PAQ m-f variable, where for the heterosexual group, $r=.43$, $p<0.01$, and for the lesbian group, $r=.36$, $p<0.05$).

Considering all subjects together, the PAQ male valued variable for the heterosexual woman stereotype was not correlated with the BSRI personal view of lesbians masculinity score ($r=-.10$, $p>0.05$), but was correlated negatively with the BSRI lesbian stereotype masculinity score ($r=-.40$, $p<0.001$). Similarly, the PAQ female valued variable for the heterosexual woman stereotype was not correlated with the BSRI personal view of lesbians femininity score ($r=.12$, $p>0.05$), but was correlated positively with the BSRI lesbian stereotype femininity score ($r=.26$, $p<0.05$). (Because of the scoring system, the latter positive correlation indicates a negative relationship.)

BSRI cluster analysis

The proximity measure selected for the cluster analysis was City-Block. This is defined such that

"The distance between two cases is the sum of the absolute differences between the values of the clustering variables"

$$\text{Distance } (x,y) = \sum_i |x_i - y_i|$$

(SPSS-X User's Guide, p.407)

For the lesbian stereotype variables, cluster

analysis using average linkage produced a two cluster solution in which all the masculine items fell into cluster 1, and all the feminine items into cluster 2. (Seven of the social desirability items fell into cluster 1, and 13 into cluster 2). The three cluster solution was the same as the two cluster solution apart from the social desirability scale item 'conventional' falling into cluster 3.

The personal view of lesbians data produced a different pattern of clustering to the lesbian stereotype. Using the average linkage clustering method, for the two cluster solution, all the masculine items fell into cluster 1, together with 12 of the feminine items. The other eight feminine items fell into cluster 2. (Fourteen of the social desirability items fell into cluster 1, and six into cluster 2). The three, four and five cluster solutions, using average linkage, did not improve on the differentiation of masculine and feminine items. Use of the single linkage clustering method produced cluster solutions with the majority of items falling into cluster 1, and individual items only falling into the remaining clusters.

The complete linkage clustering method, however, produced a five cluster solution for the personal view variables that did differentiate between masculine and feminine items. The masculine and feminine items within the five clusters are shown in Table 0.7. Feminine items formed clusters 2, 3 and 5, with one masculine item 'athletic' falling into cluster 2. All the other masculine items fell into clusters 1 and 4. The dendrogram indicated the strongest link was between clusters 1 and 3, and then between clusters 4 and 2. Observation of the items included in these clusters indicates that a possible interpretation of this grouping may be that clusters 1 and 3 contain more positively perceived masculine and feminine characteristics, while those in clusters 2 and 4 are perhaps less positively

perceived characteristics.

Table 0.7: the five cluster solution for the personal view of lesbians using City Block proximity measure with complete linkage clustering method

cluster 1 masculine	cluster 2 feminine*	cluster 3 feminine	cluster 4 masculine	cluster 5 feminine
self-reliant	athletic(m)	cheerful	assertive	gullible
defends own beliefs	yielding	affectionate	forceful	childlike
independent	shy	loyal	analytical	does not use harsh language
strong personality	flatterable	sympathetic	leadership abilities	
willing to take risks	feminine	sensitive to needs of others	makes decisions easily	
self sufficient	soft spoken	understanding	dominant	
willing to take stand		compassionate	masculine	
individualistic		eager to soothe hurt feelings	aggressive	
		warm	acts as leader	
		tender	competitive	
		loves children	ambitious	
		gentle		

* This cluster contains one masculine item - 'athletic'.

Considering the lesbian and heterosexual groups separately for the personal view of lesbians variables, a clustering solution was found that distinguished between masculine and feminine items for the heterosexual group subjects. Using average linkage, at the four cluster solution for the heterosexual group data, all masculine items fell into cluster 1, 18 out of 20 of the feminine items into cluster 2, and the remaining two feminine items (gullible and childlike) into cluster 3. A similar cluster analysis of the lesbian group data, personal view variables, did not produce a solution that distinguished between masculine and feminine items.

The heterosexual group data relating to personal view of lesbians was further analysed by considering heterosexual male and female subjects separately. For the male subjects, an average linkage cluster analysis

produced a two cluster solution in which all masculine items fell into cluster 1, and all feminine items into cluster 2, with the exception of 'loyal', a feminine item, that fell into cluster 1. For heterosexual female subjects, average, single and complete linkage methods all failed to differentiate between masculine and feminine items.

Factor analysis of the PAQ data

Principal components (PC) analysis and principal axis factoring (PAF) with varimax rotation and oblique rotation were carried out separately on the lesbian stereotype variables and the heterosexual woman stereotype variables. Loadings greater or equal to the absolute value of .35 were examined.

(i) The lesbian stereotype

A principal components analysis with varimax rotation of the PAQ lesbian stereotype variables produced six factors with eigenvalues greater than one. Together these factors accounted for 68.8% of the variation. Factor 1, accounting for 35.8% of variation, was based mainly on seven of the eight female valued items together with two m-f scale items. The remaining female valued item ('emotional') as well as three other m-f scale items also had loadings greater than .35 on to factor 1, but loaded more heavily on to other factors. Factor 2, accounting for 10.7% of variation, was mainly defined by four male valued items, together with other m-f scale and male valued items which were split on to different factors. The items loading most highly on to factor 3 included three m-f scale variables and the female valued item, 'emotional'. Three other female valued items also loaded on to factor 3, but had greater loadings on to factor 1. The first three factors together accounted for 53.9% of variation. Factors 4 and 5 were each mainly defined by one male valued and one m-f scale item, and factor 6, by two male valued items.

With a criterion of three factors, principal components analysis with varimax rotation produced a first factor defined by the eight female valued items together with six m-f scale items (see Table 0.8). Four of the m-f items loading on to factor 1 had smaller split loadings on to other factors. The female valued item 'able to devote self to others' was split between factors 1 and 3, with a smaller and negative loading on to the latter factor. Factor 2 was based primarily on five male valued items (independent, competitive, self-confident, active and feels superior) together with the m-f scale item 'home-oriented/worldly'. Factor 3 was based mainly on three male valued items (never gives up easily, stands up well under pressure and can make decisions easily) together with the m-f item 'excitability in a major crisis'.

Principal axis factoring with varimax rotation and a criterion of three factors accounted for 47.5% of variation. The structure of the three factors was quite similar to those in the principal components analysis with varimax rotation.

Principal components analysis with an oblique rotation, like that with varimax rotation, produced a first factor consisting of the eight female valued items together with six m-f scale items. Factor 2 was mainly based on the m-f item 'excitable/not in a major crisis' and the male valued items 'never gives up easily' and 'stands up well under pressure'. This corresponds to factor 3 of the PC and PAF analyses with varimax rotation. The third factor produced by the principal components analysis with oblique rotation was mainly based on masculine items together with the m-f item 'home oriented/worldly'. All items for factor 3 loaded negatively. The rotation converged in 28 iterations.

Principal axis factoring with oblique rotation produced a first factor consisting of the eight female valued items together with five m-f items. The female

valued variable 'emotionality' had the highest loading on to factor 1. This was similar to the first factor arising from the PC analysis with oblique rotation, but did not include the m-f item relating to aggressiveness. Factor 2 was mainly defined by six male valued items together with the m-f item, 'home oriented/worldly'. One other male valued item and one m-f item had split loadings on to factor 2. Factor 3 was based on the m-f item, 'excitable/not in a major crisis', and the male valued items, 'stands up well under pressure' and 'never gives up easily', the last item having a split loading. The female valued item, 'devotes self to others', had a split negative loading on to factor 3. Factors 2 and 3 were quite similar to those produced by the PC analysis with varimax rotation.

(ii) The heterosexual woman stereotype

Principal components analysis with varimax rotation on the heterosexual woman stereotype variables produced six factors accounting for 65.5% of the variation. The first factor, accounting for 30.7% of variation, was mainly based on the female valued item 'emotional'; three m-f scale items (hurt feelings, cries, excitability in major crisis); and two male valued items (feels superior, stands up well under pressure). Factor 2 was mainly based on the m-f scale items 'submissive-dominant' and 'aggressiveness', together with male valued items including 'never gives up easily', 'competitive', 'self confident' and 'independent'. (The means on these male valued items indicated that the heterosexual woman stereotype was perceived as towards the opposite pole on these dimensions, i.e. not competitive, not independent etc.). Three other male valued items and one female valued item (devotes self to others) also loaded on to factor 2, but were split, loading on to other factors more heavily. Factor 3, accounting for 7.7% of the variation, was defined by seven out of the eight female valued items. Only the female valued item relating to

emotionality failed to load on to this factor with a loading greater than 0.35. Factor 4 was mainly based on the m-f variable 'home oriented/worldly' and female valued variable 'gentle'. Two male valued items, one other m-f item, and one other female valued item had split loadings on to factor 4. Factor 5 was defined by the m-f scale item 'need of approval', together with the male valued items 'makes decisions' and 'active'. The final factor was defined mainly by the m-f variable 'need for security'. The item relating to devoting self to others had a split negative loading on to this factor.

The first three factors together accounted for 48.5% of variation. With a criterion set of three factors only, the first two factors produced by principal components analysis with varimax rotation were based mainly on a mixture of m-f and male valued items (see Table 0.9). Factor 2, however, also included the female valued item relating to emotionality, and it was this item that had the largest loading for the factor. Factor 1 included items relating to submissiveness/dominance; aggressiveness, competitiveness; independence; home oriented/worldly; giving up, and passive/active. In addition to emotionality, the second factor included items relating to excitability in a major crisis; hurt feelings; making decisions; crying easily; feeling inferior/ superior; standing up under pressure; self confidence; need for security, and need for other's approval. Factor 3 was defined by seven of the eight female valued items with only the female valued item relating to emotionality not loading on to this factor with a loading greater than 0.35.

A principal components analysis with oblique rotation produced a first factor based mainly on three m-f items (submissive/dominant; aggressiveness; home oriented/worldly) together with four male valued items (competitiveness; independence; giving up; active/passive). Factor 2 was based on seven of the

eight female valued items. The final factor was mainly based on four m-f items (excitability in major crisis; hurt feelings; cries; need for security), the remaining female valued item (emotionality), and four male valued items (making decisions; feels superior/inferior; standing up under pressure; self confidence).

Using principal axis factoring and varimax rotation, with a criterion of three factors, 41.9% of the variation was accounted for. The first factor, accounting for 28.5% variation, was composed mainly of those items that defined factor 2 in the PC analysis with varimax rotation. The second factor, accounting for 8% of variation, consisted of those items that loaded on to the first factor of the PC analysis with varimax rotation. Factor 3, accounting for 5.5% of variation, included seven of the eight female valued items (the remaining female valued item - that relating to emotionality - providing the highest loading for factor 1).

Principal axis factoring with an oblique rotation produced a first factor derived from the female valued item, emotionality, together with three m-f items and four male valued items. This first factor was similar to factor 2 of the PC analysis with varimax rotation. Factor 2 for the PAF, oblique rotation, was based on the remaining seven female valued items, and thus corresponded to factor 3 of the PC analysis with varimax rotation. Factor 3 produced by the PAF, oblique rotation, consisted mainly of three m-f items together with four male valued items, all of which loaded negatively. These were the items constituting factor 1 of the PC analysis with varimax rotation.

Table O.8: Principal components analysis with varimax rotation of the PAQ lesbian stereotype variables

Item	Scale	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
understanding	f	.83		
emotional/not	f	.82		
hurt feelings	m-f	.80		
helpful/not	f	.79		
warm/cold	f	.70		
gentle/rough	f	.70		
cries	m-f	.69	.35	
aware of others'				
feelings	f	.69		
kind/not	f	.67		
submissive				
/ dominant	m-f	.59	.53	
devote self to				
others	f	.55		-.45
need for security	m-f	.52		
aggressive/not	m-f	.52	.47	
need of others'				
approval	m-f	.51		.42
independent/not	m		.71	
competitive/not	m		.70	
self confident				
/ not	m		.68	
active/passive	m		.62	
home oriented				
/ worldly	m-f		.54	
feels superior				
/ inferior	m		.46	
excitability in				
major crisis	m-f			.75
gives up/not	m			.68
standing up under				
pressure	m			.63
making decisions	m		.36	.41
<hr/>				
Eigenvalue		8.60	2.56	1.78
% of variation		35.8	10.7	7.4
cumulative %		35.8	46.5	53.9

Table 0.9: Principal components analysis with varimax rotation of the PAQ heterosexual woman stereotype variables

Item	Scale	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
submissive				
/dominant	m-f	.80		
aggressiveness	m-f	.76		
competitive/not	m	.75		
independent/not	m	.62		
home oriented				
/worldly	m-f	.57		
gives up/not	m	.55		
active/passive	m	.49	.38	
emotional/not	f		.74	
excitability in				
major crisis	m-f		.71	
hurt feelings	m-f		.66	
making decisions	m		.62	
cries	m-f		.59	
feels superior				
/inferior	m		.59	
standing up				
under pressure	m	.51	.54	
self confident				
/not	m	.43	.51	
need for security	m-f		.46	
need for other's				
approval	m-f		.35	
understanding/not	f			.77
helpful/not	f			.76
warm/cold	f			.73
kind/not	f			.71
aware of other's				
feelings	f			.68
devote self to				
others	f	.40		.50
gentle/rough	f	.35		.48
<hr/>				
Eigenvalue		7.37	2.42	1.86
% of variation		30.7	10.1	7.7
cumulative %		30.7	40.8	48.5

The stereotypes

The perception of the lesbian stereotype derived from individual subject t-tests on the BSRI data was predominantly masculine for both lesbian and heterosexual subjects, as shown in Table 0.10. The personal view of lesbians, based on the BSRI data, tended to be more androgynous (see Table 0.11). Some difference between the lesbian and heterosexual subjects may be indicated here. The modal category for personal view of lesbians was 'androgynous' for the lesbian group, and 'masculine' for the heterosexual group.

Table 0.10: Perceptions of lesbian stereotype derived from individual subject t-tests on BSRI data

	Number of subjects perceiving lesbian stereotype as:				
	masculine	near masc.	androgynous	near fem.	feminine
L.Group(n=41)	39	1	1	0	0
H.Group(n=30)	28	1	0	1	0

Table 0.11: Personal view of lesbians derived from individual subject t-tests on BSRI data

	Number of subjects perceiving lesbian as:				
	masculine	near masc.	androgynous	near fem.	feminine
L.Group(n=41)	7	11	15	7	1
H.Group(n=30)	16	1	6	5	2

Using the PAQ scores from across both lesbian and heterosexual woman stereotypes, the median male valued score was 24 and the median female valued score, 19. Male valued scores less than or equal to 24 were taken as indicating low masculinity, and those greater than 24 as indicating high masculinity. Female valued scores greater than or equal to 19 were taken as indicating low femininity, and those less than 19 as indicating high femininity. Perceptions of the lesbian and heterosexual woman stereotypes were then classified as masculine (high

male valued score, low female valued score); feminine (high female valued score, low male valued score); androgynous (high male valued and female valued scores) or undifferentiated (low male valued and female valued scores). As Table 0.12 indicates, approximately three quarters of the subjects perceived the lesbian stereotype as masculine, the remainder mainly perceiving this stereotype as either androgynous or undifferentiated. The heterosexual woman stereotype was perceived as feminine by approximately three quarters of the subjects.

Table 0.12: Perceptions of lesbian and heterosexual women stereotypes derived from median split of PAQ data

	undifferentiated	feminine	masculine	androgynous
Lesbian stereotype				
Les.grp.(n=41)	6	0	33	2
Het.grp.(n=30)	2	2	20	6
All subjects (n=71)	8	2	53	8
Heterosexual stereotype				
Les.grp.(n=40)	5	32	1	2
Het.grp.(n=30)	5	22	1	2
All subjects (n=70)	10	54	2	4

Taking a median split on the PAQ data (i.e. across lesbian and heterosexual woman stereotypes) provides a picture of the stereotypes in relation to each other. Thus, the masculinity of the lesbian stereotype and the femininity of the heterosexual woman stereotype are relative to each other and not absolute.

Multivariate analysis of variance

Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) on the PAQ data, with the within subjects factors of stereotype (i.e. lesbian/heterosexual woman) and scale (i.e. female valued/male valued/sex specific); and the between

subjects factors of group ((a) lesbian/heterosexual and (b) heterosexual males/heterosexual females/lesbians), and/or age category, was carried out. (In reporting the multivariate tests of significance, where approximate values of F were given in the MANOVA output, Hotelling's T is given here, and the approximate value of F corresponding to this test. Where the MANOVA output produced exact values of F , these applied to the Pillai's, Hotelling's and Wilks' tests, and only the F value is shown here.)

MANOVA with the between subjects factor of group (lesbian/heterosexual) indicated a significant effect of group ($F=2.83$, $df_1=8$, $df_2=59$, $p=0.01$). There were highly significant effects of stereotype ($F=28.77$, $df_1=8$, $df_2=59$, $p<0.001$) and of scale ($F=11.34$, $df_1=16$, $df_2=51$, $p<0.001$). Neither the group by stereotype, nor the group by stereotype by scale interactions were significant. However, there were significant interactions between group and scale ($F=1.98$, $df_1=16$, $df_2=51$, $p<0.05$) and between stereotype and scale ($F=10.81$, $df_1=16$, $df_2=51$, $p<0.001$). The univariate homogeneity of variance tests Cochran's C and Bartlett-Box F indicated that assumptions of equal variances between the groups were probably met by most variables. Two items may have violated the assumptions. These were both heterosexual stereotype, female valued items: 'emotional' and 'devote self to others'. The multivariate Box M test for the homogeneity of the matrices could not be performed as there was a singular variance-covariance matrix for all cells.

Considering the subjects as three groups - heterosexual males, heterosexual females, and lesbians - multivariate tests indicated a significant effect of group (Hotelling's $T=.56$, $F=1.996$, $df_1=16$, $df_2=114$, $p<0.05$). As before, highly significant effects of stereotype and scale were indicated ($F=21.18$ and $F=10.60$ respectively, $p<0.001$). Interactions between group and stereotype, between group and scale, and between group,

stereotype and scale, were not found to be significant by the multivariate tests. However, a significant effect of group by scale was found by considering the averaged multivariate test of significance ($T=.42$, $F=1.59$, $df_1=26$, $df_2=393$, $p<0.05$). Degrees of freedom were adjusted by the Huynh-Feldt epsilon, since the Mauchly sphericity test indicated that assumptions relating to the variance-covariance matrix may not have been met. Cochran's C and Bartlett-Box F tests indicated that most variables met the assumption of homogeneity of variance. Five heterosexual woman stereotype items (i.e. 10.42% of the 48 items) may not have satisfied this assumption.

Further investigation of the effect of group (male heterosexual, female heterosexual, lesbian) was carried out with one way analyses of variance on the male valued, female valued and sex specific variables. No significant effect of group was found for any of the three heterosexual woman stereotype variables. There was also no significant effect of group for the lesbian stereotype male valued and sex specific variables. However, for the female valued, lesbian stereotype variable, there was a significant effect of group ($F=3.48$, $df_1=2$, $df_2=68$, $p<0.05$). A set of orthogonal contrasts, based on pooled variance estimates, indicated a significant difference between heterosexual subjects and lesbians ($W=-7.91$, $t=-2.61$, $df=68$, $p<0.05$); and no significant difference between male and female heterosexuals. The means showed that lesbians' perceptions of the lesbian stereotype were less feminine than those of heterosexual subjects overall. Scheffe's test indicated that no two groups were significantly different at the 0.05 level.

With the between subjects factor of age category, which divided subjects into those under thirty years old and those of thirty or over, a significant effect of age was found by the multivariate tests ($F=2.42$, $df_1=8$, $df_2=59$, $p<0.05$). There was a significant interaction between age and PAQ scale ($F=2.68$, $df_1=16$,

$df_2=51$, $p<0.01$). Neither the interaction between age and stereotype, nor the three way interaction between age, stereotype and scale, were significant. Homogeneity of variance assumptions appeared to be satisfied for all variables except for four heterosexual woman stereotype items and one lesbian stereotype item.

A MANOVA with the two between subjects factors of group (male heterosexuals, female heterosexuals, and lesbians), and age category, indicated significant effects for both age ($F=2.66$, $df_1=8$, $df_2=55$, $p<0.05$), and for group ($T=.53$, $F=1.80$, $df_1=16$, $df_2=108$, $p<0.05$). There was no significant interaction between group and age. Cochran's C and Bartlett-Box F tests indicated that five of the heterosexual stereotype items and one of the lesbian stereotype items (i.e. 12.5% of the total items) may not have met homogeneity of variance assumptions.

(On the PAQ, half the subjects had been presented with the lesbian stereotype first, and half with the heterosexual woman stereotype first. A MANOVA indicated no significant effect of order of presentation ($F=0.93$, $df_1=8$, $df_2=59$, $p>0.05$). There was, however, a significant interaction between scale and presentation ($F=1.86$, $df_1=16$, $df_2=59$, $p<0.05$), although the averaged multivariate test for this interaction was not significant. Analysis of variance on the scale variables indicated a significant difference for presentation order on the female valued heterosexual woman stereotype variable. Subjects presented with the lesbian stereotype first rated the heterosexual woman stereotype as more feminine than those presented with the heterosexual woman stereotype first. There were no other significant differences related to presentation order.

Multivariate analysis of variance on the BSRI masculinity and femininity variables, with the within subjects factors of view (personal view of lesbians/perception of lesbian stereotype) and scale (masculine or feminine) was carried out. Between

subjects factors tested included group ((a) lesbian/heterosexual, (b) heterosexual males/heterosexual females/lesbians) and/or age category.

Multivariate tests of significance with the between subjects factor of lesbian/heterosexual group indicated a significant effect of group ($F=2.49$, $df_1=20$, $df_2=50$, $p<0.01$). The hypothesis and error degrees of freedom were equal to 20 and 50 respectively throughout this MANOVA. The effect of view (personal view of lesbians or perception of lesbian stereotype) was highly significant ($F=9.68$, $p<0.001$). The effect of scale (masculine or feminine) was also highly significant ($F=24.94$, $p<0.001$). The interaction between group and scale was significant ($F=2.72$, $p<0.01$), but there was no significant interaction between group and view. There was a significant three way interaction between group, view and scale ($F=2.15$, $p<0.05$); and also a highly significant interaction between view and scale ($F=11.88$, $p<0.001$). As there were two levels of the view effect and two levels for the scale effect, in each case average tests were identical to the multivariate tests of significance. Cochran's C and Bartlett-Box F tests indicated that assumptions of homogeneity of variances were probably satisfied by most variables. Only five variables (6.25% of the total of 80 variables) were indicated as possibly not satisfying assumptions. These were three feminine variables, two of which were personal view and one lesbian stereotype; and two masculine variables, both of which were lesbian stereotype variables.

Using the three groups of heterosexual males, heterosexual females and lesbians for the group factor, a significant effect of group was indicated by two of the multivariate tests (Hotelling's $T=1.41$, $F=1.69$, $df_1=40$, $df_2=96$, $p<0.05$; Wilks' Lambda $W=.37$, $F=1.57$, $df_1=40$, $df_2=98$, $p<0.05$). However, Pillai's test did not indicate a significant effect (Pillai's Trace $V=.74$, $F=1.45$, $df_1=40$, $df_2=100$, $p>0.05$). Multivariate tests indicated

that the effects of view and scale were significant ($F=7.24$ and 22.36 respectively, $df_1=20$, $df_2=49$, $p<0.001$). The interaction between group and scale was significant ($T=1.94$, $F=2.33$, $df_1=40$, $df_2=96$, $p<0.001$), but the interaction between group and view was not significant. There was a significant three way interaction between group, view and scale ($T=1.49$, $F=1.78$, $df_1=40$, $df_2=96$, $p<0.05$). Cochrans C and Bartlett-Box F tests indicated nine BSRI items may have violated homogeneity of variance assumptions. These consisted of six masculinity items of which three related to the stereotype and three to the personal view; and three femininity items, all relating to personal view. A further nine items (five masculine and four feminine) were indicated as possibly not meeting variance assumptions by Cochrans C test, but their Bartlett-Box F tests were satisfactory. Thus, eighteen of the eighty items (i.e 22.5%) may not have met homogeneity of variance assumptions.

The effect of group (male heterosexual, female heterosexual, lesbian) was further analysed by one way analyses of variance on the BSRI masculinity and femininity total score variables. A significant effect of group was found for the two personal view variables (masculinity score: $F=3.56$, $p<0.05$. Femininity score: $F=15.68$, $p<0.001$). There was no significant effect of group for the lesbian stereotype masculinity and femininity scores. A set of orthogonal contrasts, based on pooled variance estimates, indicated no difference between heterosexual and lesbian groups on the personal view masculinity score, but a significant difference between male and female heterosexuals ($W=11.47$, $t=2.67$, $df=68$, $p=0.01$). Scheffe's test of pairwise comparisons indicated male and female heterosexuals' ratings on the personal view of lesbians masculinity score as significantly different at the 0.05 level. Observation of the means indicates male heterosexuals perceived lesbians as more masculine than female heterosexuals did.

For the personal view femininity score, a set of orthogonal contrasts indicated a significant difference between the lesbian group and the two heterosexual groups ($W=-25.88$, $t=-4.27$, $df=68$, $p<0.001$), as well as a significant difference between male and female heterosexuals ($W=-16.67$, $t=-3.62$, $df=68$, $p=0.001$). Scheffe's tests indicated a significant difference between the male and female heterosexuals at the 0.01 level; and a significant difference between the male heterosexuals and the lesbian group at the 0.001 level. The mean values for the three groups on the personal view femininity score indicated that lesbians perceived lesbians as most feminine, while the male heterosexuals perceived lesbians as least feminine. The mean score of female heterosexuals fell in between those of the other two groups.

Multivariate analysis of variance of the BSRI masculinity and femininity items with the between groups factor of age category (under thirty years old/thirty years or over) indicated a significant effect of age ($F=1.95$, $df_1=20$, $df_2=50$, $p<0.05$). Interactions between age and view; between age and scale; and between age, view and scale were not significant. Cochran's C and Bartlett-Box F tests indicated that fourteen of the BSRI variables (17.5%) may not have satisfied homogeneity of variance assumptions. These consisted of eight masculine items, of which half were personal view, and the other half, stereotype; and six feminine items of which two were personal view, and four, stereotype.

A multivariate analysis of variance with the two between subjects factors of group (heterosexual males; heterosexual females; lesbians) and age category did not indicate a significant effect of age ($F=1.50$, $df_1=20$, $df_2=46$, $p>0.05$). The effect of group was on the border line of significance (Hotelling's $T=1.36$, $F=1.53$, $df_1=40$, $df_2=90$, $p=0.05$). Pillai's and Wilks' tests did not indicate a significant effect of group. The group by age

interaction was not significant. There were significant interactions between age and scale ($F=2.21$, $df_1=20$, $df_2=46$, $p<0.05$), and between group and scale ($T=2.03$, $F=2.28$, $df_1=40$, $df_2=90$, $p=0.001$). Interactions between age and view, and between group and view, were not significant. Both Cochran's C and Bartlett-Box F tests indicated that nine variables may not have met assumptions of homogeneity of variance. A further 15 variables were indicated as possibly unsatisfactory by the Cochran's C test only, while one further variable was indicated as violating assumptions by the Bartlett test only. Thus, 25 of the BSRI masculinity and femininity items (31.25%) possibly did not satisfy assumptions of homogeneity. The items consisted of 17 personal view variables, seven of which were masculine, and ten, feminine; and eight stereotype variables, seven of which were masculine, and one, feminine.

APPENDIX P:

Threatened identities model - operational definitions (Based on Breakwell, 1986)

Coming out to self

- (i) continuity of feelings:
indications that subject has experienced feelings of attraction towards women over a period of time.
- (ii) conflict of continuity of feelings with negative distinctiveness:
expression of initial reluctance or difficulty in identifying one's feelings as lesbian, linked with an awareness of negative views of lesbians/lesbianism.
- (iii) conflict of continuity of feelings with self esteem:
any suggestion that identifying as lesbian is/was perceived as decreasing subject's sense of personal worth or social value.
- (iv) conflict between any of the identity principles (continuity; distinctiveness; self esteem) and need for affiliation:
suggestions that need for friendship or family attachments (or other interpersonal connections) conflict with one's identification, distinctiveness or self esteem as lesbian.
- (v) interaction of identity principles with identity processes:
effects of interaction of continuity, distinctiveness and self esteem on processes of assimilation-accommodation and evaluation relating to coming out to self e.g. identity principles may inhibit process of assimilation-accommodation of self as lesbian, or affect evaluation of perception of self as lesbian.

Coming out to others

Situations may include one or more of following:

- (i) need to support self-esteem against negative distinctiveness
- (ii) need to maintain attachment/affiliation
- (iii) need to maintain continuity between self as lesbian and other aspects of identity(/life)

These may all be interacting. One may predominate on decision to come out to other or not.

Coming out to others is not necessarily undertaken in situation of experiencing threat to self. However, threat to identity may occur particularly in first coming out experiences and/or coming out to significant others. Further, the reaction of the other person may potentiate the occurrence of threat to identity.

Operational definitions

(i) self esteem v negative distinctiveness:

A situation where one's sense of personal worth or social value has been, or is in danger of being, seriously undermined by awareness of negative distinctiveness of lesbian identity.

This may act as a force either for or against coming out:

a decision to come out would be aimed (at least partly) towards gaining some support and thus increasing self esteem.

a decision in this situation not to come out to a significant other might arise from fear of further damage to one's self esteem in the event of a negative reaction.

Possible examples include coming out in desperation and often, probably, first coming out experiences.

(ii) attachment/affiliation:

indicated by wish to maintain or improve friendship/family relationship/ positive interaction with work colleagues or others through either telling person(s) about oneself; or by choosing not to reveal one's lesbian identity to the person(s) concerned, so as not to endanger/ damage the friendship or relationship.

(iii) continuity:

coming out to other(s) perceived as leading to reduction in conflict between continuity of self as lesbian, and self as perceived by others

example: subject does not want to 'lead a double life' anymore.

(discontinuity - lowered self esteem?)

COPING STRATEGIES

A. Intra-psychic

I Strategies based on assimilation-accommodation

1. Deflection strategies

1.1 Denial

- (i) denial that one is lesbian
- (ii) denial that being a lesbian is threatening to self
- (iii) denial that being a lesbian requires any change to identity structures or that the identity principles are challenged, even though the position is recognized as threatening
- (iv) denial of emotional reaction towards having modified identity content to include the notion of lesbian

1.2 Transient depersonalization

the lesbian perceives herself from a detached point of view

1.3 Real selves and unreal selves

self-image as lesbian perceived as unreal (e.g. 'it's just a phase')
this coping strategy probably fails with recurrence of lesbian feelings

1.4 Fantasy

this may involve wishful thinking with some more acceptable reality replacing the threat of lesbianism

1.5 Reconnstrual & re-attribution

reconnstrual

(i) re-definition or re-interpretation of properties relevant to identification as lesbian - possibly diminishing or ignoring its importance; modifying its meaning by broadening the context; and/or inventing new properties

(ii) redefining of the reason for being lesbian - usually involves re-attribution - for example, the lesbian might begin to attribute her sexuality to external rather than internal forces

2. Acceptance strategies

2.1 anticipatory restructuring

Coming out to self is often gradual, thus possibly allowing the lesbian some opportunity for assimilation of (some of the) content elements involved before defining herself as a lesbian. However, it is unlikely that the full demands of identifying oneself as lesbian would be known in advance. Also, as the woman would be likely to be

coping in isolation at this stage, assimilating the content elements without support is probably overall a rather negative experience.

2.2 compartmentalism

Probably widely used in initial stages of coming out to self.

Indicated by woman assimilating the notion that she is lesbian, but keeping this separate from the rest of her identity, not modifying her perception of self or behaviour in order to accommodate this new content.

2.3 compromise changes

This involves making an alternative modification to identity, rather than the change that the threat requires.

An example of this may be where a woman defines herself as bisexual rather than lesbian although her feelings are actually exclusively homosexual. Bisexuality may be perceived by her as involving less stigma.

2.4 fundamental change

Where the identity structure has been modified to accommodate the implications of being lesbian, the threat and its associated anxiety should disappear, although distinctiveness, continuity and/or self esteem may have been sacrificed. However, if this fundamental change concerns only self (i.e. coming out to self) and does not include general relations with others, threat would seem likely to recur not only through attempts to revive any of the identity principles damages as suggested by Breakwell, but also through a variety of social interactions and outside forces (e.g. derogation in the media or by peers)

2.5 salience of principles

A change of emphasis among the three identity principles may be made. This would seem particularly likely to occur between coming out to self and coming out to others. While continuity of feelings may be given priority on coming out to self, self esteem and/or the need for affiliation may predominate in the coming out to others situation. Within the coming out to self situation, initially, concerns with negative distinctiveness may predominate, and it may not be until continuity of feelings is given priority, that a woman eventually comes to identify herself as lesbian.

II Strategies based on the process of evaluation

Breakwell describes two sources determining freedom available in the process of evaluation. Different value systems will have been created corresponding to the ideologies of different social groups. Therefore, an individual will probably have available a choice of value systems and will make the choice aimed at saving self esteem. The second source concerns the value of an identity element being relative rather than absolute. Comparisons may be made between an individual's present and previous identity content, or between the individual and others. Intra-personal comparison may also be made between present and potential identity structures

Two tactics are used in defence of identity by the evaluation process:

1. Re-evaluation of the existing identity content.
Tactics include
 - (i) devaluation of the identity element that must go. Thus, a lesbian woman may begin to question the value of heterosexuality and the nuclear family.
 - (ii) attention may be refocussed on another identity element giving it increased value e.g. the woman might focus on her career identity rather than her lesbian identity
 - (iii) self-efficacy to recover self esteem within a context the lesbian perceives as socially valuable.
2. Re-evaluation of prospective identity content
This would involve individual revision of the negative evaluation of lesbianism
Tactics may include
 - (i) using different criteria to judge the issue e.g. focusing on the advantages of a lesbian relationship/lifestyle
 - (ii) association of lesbianism with some characteristic that is positively valued
 - (iii) questioning whether others who have no experience of being a lesbian can make a legitimate judgement.

B. Interpersonal coping strategies

(i)isolation - the woman isolates herself from others in an attempt to minimize the effect of occupying the threatening position of being lesbian.

(ii)negativism - using this strategy, the woman confronts the attack directly. 'Coming out' could be seen as a form of this.

(iii)passing - refers to allowing oneself to be perceived as belonging to some social category or group under false pretences, and hiding one's membership of the social group that constitutes the threat. Thus the lesbian allows herself to be perceived by others as a heterosexual woman.

(iv)compliance - the person behaves in the way expected of those occupying the particular threatening position - i.e. the lesbian conforms to the stereotype, maybe dressing in a 'butch' manner.

C. Intergroup coping strategies

(i)All individuals have multiple group membership. Thus, membership of some other group(s) may modify or neutralize the effect of threat arising from membership of one particular group. Lesbians may emphasize gender, occupation, or ethnic origin, for example, rather than lesbian identity.

(ii)Group support in the form of social and information networks; and consciousness-raising or self-help groups. For lesbians availability of group support is greater now than in the past.

(iii)Group action may be taken by pressure groups or through social movements to minimize or remove the threat. In recent years, beginning with the Women's Movement and Gay Liberation Movement, there has been increased group action.

Limits to coping

Strategy choice will be determined by

(i)type of threat originating internally or externally; long or short term; stable or unstable. A woman's perception of the nature of her lesbian identity may vary on all these dimensions.

(ii)social context involving ideology; interpersonal network; availability of group membership; availability of caring professions. This would vary for lesbians with, for example, historical time period, and location.

(iii)identity structure including level of self esteem

(iv)cognitive resources such as attributional style and attributional biases

There may be phases in coping with a succession of different strategies used in response to a threat. Strategies are likely to change as the lesbian comes out into the lesbian community and/or tells family or friends about herself.

Social comparison may be used for self-enhancement, but in some cases of threat, social comparisons may limit coping. Lesbians may make comparisons with Women as a group.

APPENDIX Q:

Case study within a threatened identities framework of a woman in the early stages of coming out

Subject 13 had attended her first lesbian meeting only a week before the interview. She was thirty one years old. There was evidence of some continuity of lesbian feelings, conflicting with self esteem, arising from perceptions of negative distinctiveness; and the use of some form of denial as a coping strategy. Thus, she recalled:

"..on and off for a few years I've thought [I might be gay] ... it passed through my mind and I've pushed it back, and not really given it any thought, not even for five minutes ... I keep diaries and sort of I read back through some of my diaries ... mentions thinking 'Oh dear', you know 'Maybe' for a few years, but I've never actually sort of given it any serious thought until about - oh, some time last year I think ... even now I don't think I've really acknowledged it, I'm just trying to come to terms with it I think"

The negative distinctiveness of lesbianism for subject 13 was reflected in a number of ways including a stereotypical image of lesbians held before coming out to others and negative feelings about the words lesbian and gay.

"...very big, butch women who totally hate men"

"I don't like either of them [the words lesbian and gay] really ... I can't think of anything to use instead, but I don't like any of them"

Her perception of how most heterosexuals feel about lesbians was also negative.

"I think men feel threatened because they wonder what they have got, why a woman has to go to another woman. And I think some women feel threatened in case they're going to be leapt on. And I think society feels threatened because it's not normal..."

A further reflection of subject 13's rather negative perceptions of homosexuality is provided by her response to the question concerning possible similarities of coming out with other minority group experiences.

"..all I can really think of is like telling someone you've got some contagious disease, I suppose, because you don't want anyone to know in case you do get rejected or ... You know, it's like saying to someone 'I've got AIDS' or 'I've got cancer' because people have the same sort of reaction, they move back because they don't want to catch it"

There was evidence of conflict in assimilating a lesbian identity related to perceptions of continuity regarding expectations for life generally that subject 13 had held for many years.

"..I often thought I'd get married .. I wanted to have six children or seven children, but then again, I also knew that I wouldn't get married ... half of me still wants to get married, but the other half knows I won't..."

"...the two don't go together, being a Catholic and being gay. And it's very difficult, so I'm going through quite a traumatic time at the moment, trying to decide. It goes against everything I was taught and it's very difficult to change an attitude that's been put there since you were very tiny..."

Coping on the interpersonal level, the conflict between the perceived negative distinctiveness and subject 13's need for affiliation was reflected in her use of strategies of isolation and passing, and her decision not to come out to friends or family.

"... I haven't really been associating with my friends recently because I've been trying to sort myself out. I've become quite a hermit..."

"There are a couple of friends I think I would like to [come out to] but I won't, because of that risk again of rejecting me, changing their attitudes towards me"

There was evidence of the strain of using this method as a means of coping.

"It is very difficult keeping it all to yourself, and wanting to tell them, but not telling them. It's very, very difficult"

Subject 13 suggested she would deal with not coming out to her heterosexual friends using a form of compartmentalizing her life, and the interpersonal coping strategy of passing.

"I just start a new set of friends, and have one set, and the other set, and keep them separate"

For family too, subject 13 was choosing not to come out. The aim was to maintain affiliation.

"I don't think I want to [tell family], I don't think so. It would change everything, and I don't want everything to change, because we get on well..."

Maintaining the continuity in her relationship with heterosexual friends and family was most important for subject 13. She was very concerned not to upset her parents.

"I'm the eldest in my family. I'm the one that's supposed to be the good example to all my brothers and sisters, and so I could never tell my parents. My mother would just die on the spot, and my father wouldn't be very far behind I don't think ... I think too much of my parents to put them through that"

This subject was only just beginning to make use of inter-group strategies. She had contacted a counselling service (PACE).

"- it's like a transitional period from one life to another..."

She expressed uncertainty about her identity.

"I don't really know if I've accepted it [being gay] yet. I'm still a bit ambiguous I think. I can't make up my mind how I feel about it. I don't fully accept that I am, but I think, well, I'm not exactly a heterosexual, I suppose. I'm not too sure what I am at the moment. I'm still trying to decide, and I can't make up my mind about it. I think maybe I am, but I don't want to accept it"

There was some evidence of modifications in the subject's perceptions of homosexuality arising from involvement with other lesbians. Her stereotypical notions of lesbians were disappearing.

"... it's not like that at all, just ordinary women. I was very surprised really. Quite pleased to have that image shattered anyway"

Subject 13 had not perceived lesbianism as a choice.

"If it is a choice then I don't know why I made it, because it makes life very, very difficult and, you know, there's a part of my life that I can't share with my friends or my family, and it cuts you off from a lot of things - marriage and everything else - and you're not accepted as part of normal society. So, I don't think - if it is a choice - I think people are mad to make it, really, I mean absolutely crazy..."

At the lesbian discussion group, it had been suggested that 'people were not born that way, but decided to be that way', and subject 13 was attempting to incorporate this understanding of lesbianism into her own views.

Subject 13's response regarding the main benefits of coming out stressed the difficulties of 'passing', and like many of the lesbian subjects, emphasised the notion of 'being yourself'. This may possibly be understood in terms of a need for authenticity or integrity.

"I think if you do [come out] you're not so alone and you have people to talk to, and you can relax more because you haven't got to hide anything. And you can go where you want, say what you want and - if you do keep it to yourself then you have to act differently, you have to be very furtive and you can't enjoy yourself. You're on the lookout all the time in case anyone's watching or there's anyone you know, that sort of thing. And I think it makes you probably have a nervous breakdown because you're so worried about things, on edge all the time. I think it's the fact that you can just act the way you want to act, and be yourself, I think that's the most important"

In summary, subject 13 had experienced, and was still experiencing considerable threat in attempting to assimilate the notion of herself as lesbian into her identity. For some years, she had coped with this largely through the use of the intra-psychic deflection strategy of denial. Now, she was beginning to use the acceptance strategy of compartmentalism. On the interpersonal level, subject 13 had for a while coped through isolation, and was now emphasising the use of the strategy of passing. Continuity of lesbian feelings had conflicted with the perceived negative distinctiveness of lesbianism, and thus, seriously challenged self esteem.

The subject's present strategy on the interpersonal level of passing was aimed at maintaining her positive relationship with family and friends. In this situation, lesbianism was a serious threat to the social value aspect of self esteem, and the subject's need for affiliation was paramount. Intergroup coping strategies were just beginning to be explored by the subject.

This case may be seen as providing an example of an account that fits well into the threatened identities model. However, the accounts of some of the other subjects who were in the initial stages of coming out into the lesbian community (e.g. subjects 21 and 14) did not display as much evidence of threat to identity.

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