1  The elements of lesbian identity narrative

(My parents) think of me as a stereotypical dyke because I, you know, I've got short hair, I don't wear dresses, I have hairy armpits and I don't mind the odd game of pool. You know, there's so much more to me and to all of my friends and those kind of things. (Participant 57)

A functional group delivers to its members a consistent and clearly defined set of elements, essential for the development of a clear group identity and the conferring of value (Cerulo 1997). The selection and evaluation of events included in autobiographical narrative are therefore subject to lesbian cultural norms. Lesbian identity narrative, if the lesbian group is functional, should, in the first instance, reflect a clear set of narrative elements; if the 'group experience' is sufficiently disparate, there may not be identifiable elements of common concern, or there may be contesting definitions and interpretations about such elements. Identity narratives simultaneously describe an existing self and transform that self in the telling, that is, they can shape the narrator by describing her/him as a particular sort of person. For example, by describing past events in which they exerted control over their environments, or even rehearsing future ones, narrators can reinforce or create an 'autonomous' aspect to their identities. In other words, narrators can foreground certain characteristics, perspectives or life events, and place them in a sequence towards resolution or towards a particular desired ending. These characteristics, perspectives or life events then become the 'referential elements' of identity narrative (Wortham 2000).

What then are the referential elements reflected in lesbian identity narrative, that is, what are the characteristics, perspectives or life events that would reflect a clear group identity and the conferring of value?

1.1 Lesbian identity definitions

Researchers have long sought to establish what it is that constitutes lesbianism. The failure of researchers to standardise the measures of homosexuality may well be responsible for the apparent disparity in the findings in homosexual research (Chung & Katayama 1996). Studies have ranged from the development of self-definition in young lesbians (Russell et al 2001, Lasser 2000, Hunter & Mallon 2000) and the difference between homosexual identity in young females as opposed
to young males (Dempsey et al. 2001, Schneider 2001, D'Augelli & Patterson 2001), to the effects on lesbian identity development of geography (McCarthy 2000), cohort (Parks 1999, Rosenfeld 1999) and class (Valocchi 1999). Studies have also focused on the morphological, hormonal and gender identity correlates among lesbians (Singh et al. 1999), behavioural, attitudinal and physical correlates of self-identified 'butch' and 'femme' lesbians (Singh et al. 1999), and identity and well-being correlates among lesbian community leaders (Bringaze & White 2001). However, in comprehensive reviews of lesbian, gay and bisexual studies, Chung & Katayama (1996), and Shively, Jones & DeCecco (1984) found that in 33% and 82% of studies respectively, sexual orientation was assumed rather than assessed, and that there was lack of consensus about the assessment of sexual orientation in the remainder of studies. Chung & Katayama identified six different indicators of sexual identity: self-identification was used in 33% of studies, a single dimension bipolar scale measurement was used in 13% of studies, a multiple dimension assessment was used in 10% of studies, self-reported sexual behaviour was used in 9% of studies, and sexual preference was the indicator in 4% of studies. The remaining 31% of studies failed to indicate the method of assessment used; participants were assumed to be homosexual because they were recruited through gay and lesbian bars, organisations, events, etc.

Single dimension measures have been criticised for failing to address the multivariable aspects of sexual orientation; assessments basing identity on reports of sexual behaviour ignore the effect of social sanctions on that behaviour, and sexual behaviour is not reliably associated with sexual identity (Malcolm 2000). Further, sexual preference measures often fail to address behaviours or levels of affect: Moses (1978) asked her 80 self-identified participants to use a Kinsey scale to describe their sexual orientation, and found that every point on the scale was indicated by at least one participant. However, Chung & Katayama also found that multiple dimension assessment measures were not standardised in the research, typically including behaviour and feelings, but sometimes using the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (1985) which includes attraction, behaviour, fantasy, emotional preference, social preference, identification and lifestyle, all measured on a Likert-type scale in past, present and ideal time dimensions.
The disparity in the measures in lesbian research reflected and promoted a disparity in the underlying definitions of lesbianism. Early definitions of a lesbian were based on the conceptualisation of lesbianism as a female version of male homosexuality, a manifestation of a 'masculinity complex', a pathological development of the natural state of heterosexuality, a social and psychological 'deviance' (Terry 1990), or a gender inversion: the result of a male dominated brain centre manifested in a woman (Krafft-Ebing 1894). Assumptions were underpinned by the conception of lesbianism as an intrinsically immoral or diseased state of being, related to, or made manifest by, male gender role orientation (Peters & Cantrell 1993). Researchers assumed that sex assignment, gender role, gender identity, sexual orientation and sexual identity varied together and therefore implied an underlying order (Ponse 1978), and lesbian sexual orientation was seen as a consequence of gender role inversion; lesbianism was defined not by the object of desire as much as by the masculine form which presumably made it apparent (Terry 1990).

Researchers have defined and redefined the nature of the relationship between these allegedly correlated variables. Krafft-Ebing, investigating the relationship between gender role and sexual orientation in over 100 women who had undergone psychiatric and physical appraisal, found no consistency in gender role, but concluded that the varying levels of apparent male gender role actually signified four 'grades' of lesbianism (Terry 1990). Similarly, Henry (1941) found lesbians to be in the middle of a gender spectrum, somewhere between male and female: the more masculine in his sample were declared the 'true' lesbians, while the more feminine were declared 'narcissistic' and the indeterminates 'bisexual'. Armon (1960), using projective techniques, found no correlation between gender role and sexual orientation, but Hopkins (1969), using Cattell's 16 Personality Factor Questionnaire, and Carlson & Steuer (1984), using Bem's Sex Role Inventory, found significant correlations. Storms (1980) found correlations in both self-labelled participants and in participants defined by response to the Kinsey scale, while LaTorre & Wendenburg (1983) found correlations between gender role and sexual orientation in self-labelled lesbian participants, but not in erotic preference groupings. LaTorre & Wendenburg also established that sexual orientation covaried with the relationship between levels of masculinity and femininity, rather than with distinct levels of either.
Later findings also claimed that lesbian gender role may vary according to sociosexual context. Kurdek & Schmitt (1986), for example, found that gender role behaviour in interactions between lesbian couples was higher in androgyny than gay male or heterosexual married couples, higher in femininity than gay male or heterosexual cohabiting partners, and higher in masculinity than all other relationships. Rosenzweig & Lebow (1992) measured gender role (via the Bem inventory) and lesbian sexual orientation (via self definition) in sexually specific and non-sexual contexts, and found that femininity scores increased in the sexually specific situations for all participants.

Regardless, in commonsense theory, as in much of the scientific theory, congruence between sex assignment, gender role, gender identity, sexual orientation and sexual identity has only recently been questioned. Lesbians themselves talk of their identity in terms of their gender role and 'almost universally ... have engaged in rating themselves and others in some way on a butch/femme scale' (Loulan 1990:47). However, congruence even between sexual affect, behaviour and identity is seen as more externally than internally motivated (Golden 1987, in Greene & Herek 1994). Indeed, Rosen & Rekers (1980) have proposed a multifactored, multi-dimensional model of sexuality and gender, comprising sexual anatomy, gender assignment, gender identity, gender role, sexual behaviour, sexual object choice orientation and sexual object choice behaviour, and their varying expression at physical, intrapsychic and psychosocial levels.

**Self-definition**

In more recent research, lesbians are assumed to be lesbian by self-definition, but Chung & Katayama (1996), Golden (1996), Diamond (2000) and others claim that self-identification measures over-simplify sexual orientation, ignoring the many interrelated but separately developing components involved, and ignoring the multiple meanings of the term to the participants themselves; some women identify as lesbian even though they are not currently sexually relating to a woman (Rothblum & Brehony 1993), have no interest in relating sexually to a woman (Golden 1994) or currently sexually relate to men (Rust 1993), while some lesbians may not consider other women to be lesbian unless they are sexually involved with a woman (Kennedy & Davis 1993, Stein 1999).
Identity types

Lesbian identity is thought to vary according to person, situation and historical period (Cass 1984b) and spans conceptual and operational bases (Shively et al 1984). Lesbians' widely divergent self definitions are therefore based on a 'very personal' blend of political, affective, behaviour, or attitudinal factors (Cass 1984a, Chapman & Brannock 1987, Sophie 1987), and the literature demonstrates a 'dazzling idiosyncrasy' of sexual identities (Suppe 1984). Researchers have however attempted to identify 'types' among lesbian populations:

♦ Ponse (1978) identified four distinct identification types among her 75 self-identified participants: those with lesbian identity and behaviour; those with lesbian identity and heterosexual, bisexual or celibate behaviour; those with bisexual identity and lesbian behaviour; and those with heterosexual identity with lesbian behaviour.

♦ Kitzinger (1987) used a statistical 'Q-sort' procedure to analyse lesbians' accounts of their own identities, and identified five lesbian types: the previously married who sought lesbianism for personal freedom and fulfilment; those who had positive attitudes toward men and considered the gender of their partners almost irrelevant; those who felt they were born lesbian but it was only a minor part of their total identity; strongly identified lesbians who felt they were born heterosexual but chose to be converted by early experiences or by feminism; and those who felt they were born lesbian and were sick or immoral.

♦ Ettore (1980) distinguished between 'We're sick but not sorry' lesbians, who felt they were born lesbian, accepted the dominant societal concepts of lesbianism, and expressed no regrets about adopting a lesbian identity, and the 'Sorry, but we're not sick' lesbians who saw lesbianism as a way of life that challenges mainstream expectations of women, who identified oppression and who were active in political movements.

♦ Ettore also identified four subtypes of lesbian of lesbian relationship behaviours: 'straight lesbians' who used heterosexual role models; 'status quo lesbians' who rejected heterosexual role models; 'reformist lesbians' who actively and politically sought distinctive lesbian models; and 'fringe lesbians' including lesbian mothers, celibates and bisexuals.

For some, sexuality is not necessarily a dichotomous choice. A bisexual identity is defined as 'the capacity or experience of feeling attraction to people of more than
one gender, or of engaging in sexual activity with people of more than one gender (whether concurrently or serially), or the identification of oneself according to those feelings or experiences' (Michel 1998:536). In challenging the notion of a sexual dichotomy, bisexuality poses a challenge to the coherence of an essential or a constructed lesbian identity (Michel 1998), and has come under attack from both homosexual and heterosexual groups. Increasingly, however, there appears to be a lessening of 'biphobia' and a blurring of the binary concepts and boundaries upon which discrimination depends (Michel 1998). Rust (1993) found that, of her 323 self-identified lesbian participants, 41% had identified as bisexual at some time, and of her 42 self-identified bisexual participants, 30% had identified as lesbian at some time: while the 'lesbians' did not act on feelings of attraction to males, the 'bisexuals' did. For bisexual women in particular, sexual identity reflects a woman's changing social location (Rust 1993), and the sexuality identity conflict attributed to bisexuality stems largely from external pressures to conform to a dichotomous sexuality (Moore 2000).

For others, post-structuralist theorists have challenged theories based on the very idea of a common sexual identity. They either perceive homosexuals as a 'species', or they assert that no-one fits the categories created for them and that therefore no generalisations about groups of people are possible (Stein 1992a). Identity in this context is regarded as 'a literary illusion in need of replacement, just as the omniscient narrator with his or her moral editorialising was replaced or eliminated from the mid-nineteenth century novel' (Manheimer 1992:327). The very idea of a coherent identity is, they claim, a 'culturally and ideologically induced invention' (p328). They also assert multiple histories of homosexuality, and diverse, fluid and multi-faceted sexual identities (Eliaison 1996), and claim that to adopt a particular sexual identity is to position oneself in relation to the dominant sexual codes, privilege sexual identity over other identities, and engage in the continuous process of attempting to stabilise that which is a constantly changing product of language and culture (Weeks 1991).

Queer theory has emerged as one of the more influential post-structuralist challenges to positivist theories of sexuality (Shugar 1999). Queer theory is described as 'a position of inquiry that is de-centred from the norm' (Minton 1997:349). While lesbian identity is grounded in the affirmation of a homosexual identity and freedom from the constraints of heterosexism, a queer identity is
grounded in its affirmation of diversity and its opposition to a normative, essential
sexual identity of any kind. In queer theoretical terms, sexual identity is perceived
in terms of performance; one's experience is central to self- and social-
transformation, and issues of marginalisation give way to 'universalising issues
across the spectrum of sexuality' (p349).

Lesbian identity narrative research
The first known researcher of lesbian identity narrative was herself lesbian; Jan
Gay, in the 1920s and 30s, collected over 300 lesbian case histories, all of which
offered 'a rare glimpse into the shared experiences, sensibilities and struggles of an
underground subculture whose voices were typically silenced in medical and
scientific discourse' (Minton 1997:341). Subsequent accounts of lesbians' stories,
embedded in studies of homosexual men, were largely pathologised until the Kinsey
studies of the 1940s and 50s and Evelyn Hooker's studies of the 1950s and 60s. In
the 1970s, the growth of civil rights movements and the subsequent de-medicalising
of homosexuality facilitated the growth of subjective agency and authority in the
work of gay and lesbian researchers themselves. In the last twenty years however,
lesbians are still under-represented; homosexuality studies have comprised studies
of gay males (34%), lesbians and gay males (24%) and lesbians (20%). The least
represented groups of participants are bisexuals of either sex (1.4%), and lesbian
and bisexual women (2.8%) (Chung & Katayama 1996).
1.2 Transition to lesbian identity

Essentialists contend that sexuality is a biologically determined, pre-existing and permanent phenomenon (see Patterson 1995). In this context, women in a heterosexist society are raised as heterosexual, and a pre-existing lesbian identity must be developed or revealed; this development or revelation usually occurs as a process. In accordance with Erikson's (1963) epigenetic principle, people encountering life transitions develop progressively wider spheres of interaction determined by internal and external forces, and society monitors individual development through role expectations and ceremonial rites of passage or 'marker events' (Sheehy 1976). This assumes 'an orderly sequence of development at particular life stages, each depending on the previous stage for successful completion' (Aguilera 1994:5). Lesbian sexual identity then, is a 'developmental process through which gay people recognise their sexual preferences and choose to integrate this knowledge into their personal and social lives' (De Monteflores & Schultz 1978:59). Despite the fact that 'there is no strong evidence to date that lesbians are biologically sexed or gendered any differently than heterosexual women' (Laird 2000:459), 'difference' is the only option for lesbians within this dominant essentialist narrative; lesbians can argue the essentialism of their sexual identity by looking for signs of homosexuality in their youth, and identifying early and enduring signs of difference (Laird 2000).

Essentialist arguments have been criticised for failing to address the experience and sexual fluidity of many women (Kitzinger & Wilkinson 1995, Golden 1987, Sophie 1986). Indeed, the assumption of a linear, unidirectional identity formation process fails to reflect the anecdotal accounts by lesbians (see Morris, Ojerholm, Brooks, Osowiecki & Rothblum 1995) which reflect women's transition to a sometimes unwanted identity, through a variety of paths, at various times in their lives, and to various end points. According to De Monteflores & Schultz (1978), Faderman (1985), Rust (1993) and others, the transition to lesbian identity occurs for women in a variety of contexts and is affected by a variety of factors, including age (Bradford and Ryan 1988), racial identity (Garnets & Kimmel 1993b), religion (O'Neill & Ritter 1992), social conditions (Faderman 1991) and even geographic location (Bradford & Ryan 1988). It is also appraised in a variety of ways; if it is
perceived as socially or personally undesirable, it can exert a particularly undesirable impact (Goodyer 1990).

Social Constructionists contend that sexuality is the outcome of a conscious 'self labelling' process which is created, maintained and constrained through social interaction (Baumrind 1995). Self-perceptions, behaviours and feelings are communicated to others and modified according to feedback, and sexual identity is the self-evaluation of that feedback within a socially determined range of choices. Indeed, Rust (1993) believes that lesbian sexual identity is a description of a woman's social location, and sexual identity variations reflect a changing social context. Resulting from personal experiences embedded in a sociohistorical context and interpreted through available social constructs, an identity label reflects sociopolitical organisation rather than essential organisation. For example, Faderman (1991) claims that the concept of 'lesbian' as pathological and 'different to other women' was constructed in the early 19th century in order to discredit and counter threats to the patriarchal status quo by women who were increasingly educated, demanding of social, family and political reform and independent of men. At that time, the 'romantic friendships', formerly accepted as 'training' for the marriage bed, were constructed as either sexually perverted or asexual.

However, while social constructionist theories focus on cognitive, social and interpersonal strategies used in the construction of an identity (Eliason 1996), and emphasise the historical and cultural influences on sexuality (see Kitzinger & Wilkinson 1995, Patterson 1995), they have been criticised for falling to address the compulsive nature of lesbianism experienced by some women.

Various combinations of essentialism and constructionism have been posited. Sexual identity has been perceived as the outcome of the interaction between biological, psychological and social events (Baumrind 1995, Kitzinger & Wilkinson 1995, Strickland 1995). Money (1988) contends that both essential or 'obligative' homosexuality, and socially constructed or 'facultative' homosexuality, exist independently in different individuals. Similarly, Ettore's (1980) 'we're sick but not sorry' lesbians felt they were born lesbian, while the 'sorry, but we're not sick' lesbians were more likely to experience lesbianism as a choice. Chapman & Brannock (1987), Morrow (1999) and others contend that individuals construct sexual identity but experience it as stable and essential through 'biographical reconstruction', while still others (Baumrind 1995, Kitzinger & Wilkinson 1995)
report that for many lesbians, sexual orientation feels like a choice made after a period of identifying as heterosexual. Eliason (1996) suggests that the apparent impasse in the essentialist/constructionist debate could be tackled by assuming that everyone has an identity, but that the meaning of that identity will vary according to individual variables, cultures and sociohistoric contexts.

**Transition models**

Regardless of its etiology, lesbian identity development is widely viewed as occurring over a series of stages. Of the many stage models cited in the literature, the following have been based on lesbian only studies, or on studies of both lesbian and gay male participants.

Ponse (1978), a heterosexual researcher, used a social constructionist framework and individual interviews to explore lesbian identity development among 75 lesbians, and identified a 'gay trajectory' consisting of five elements:

1. feelings of difference due to emotional and/or sexual desire for women;
2. labelling these feelings as 'lesbian';
3. assuming lesbian identity;
4. seeking other lesbians; and
5. having lesbian emotional and/or sexual relationships.

Ponse claims that these elements are not linear, but can be experienced in any order, and even simultaneously. She also claims there is an 'identity lag' between recognition of lesbian feelings and adoption of lesbian identity, a lag which is often referred to as the 'coming out' process and which ends with acceptance of a lesbian identity and reinterpretation of the past to make it congruent with the gay trajectory (Eliason 1996). Many of the women in her study perceived their lesbianism as essential and previously repressed, and as a total lifestyle of which sexuality comprised a minor part; they also attributed previous or current heterosexual attractions to socialisation or to their own prior ignorance of alternatives.

Cass' (1979, 1984) model is based on information gleaned from male and female therapy clients, and validated on questionnaire data from 109 male and 69 female respondents. It addresses the 'underlying crisis' of identity formation, that of
achieving congruence between personal perceptions of one's own behaviour, others' perceptions of one's behaviour, and self-identity.

Cass's model identifies 6 stages:

1. identity 'confusion' or recognising one's turmoil;
2. identity 'comparison' or recognising one's difference;
3. identity 'tolerance' or recognising the possibility of a lesbian identity;
4. identity 'acceptance' or owning a lesbian identity;
5. identity 'pride' or making positive one's lesbian identity through political and community action; and
6. identity 'synthesis' or subordinating one's lesbianism to the global 'self'.

Cass claims that moving through these stages allows a lesbian to progressively integrate her own and others' views of her behaviour and identity; failure to successfully negotiate these stages results in 'identity foreclosure' (1979) and arrested identity development. In her validation study (1984), Cass found that some respondents were unable to locate themselves in only one stage, and others found considerable overlap between stages 1 and 2, and between stages 5 and 6, but that there were no gender differences in results. However, the accuracy and generalisability of the sequence of stages for all respondents was not validated.

Cass' model is criticised for its assumption of an orderly progression through stages which is challenged by the experiences of many lesbians. Kahn (1991) found that while many of the 81 lesbian respondents in her study could relate to some or all of Cass's stages, there were five different patterns of progression through the stages. Cass's model is also criticised for the implication that activists and women whose lesbianism is experienced as their central defining characteristic are not fully developed, while women who have never been activists are even less so (Morris 1997). In a study of 500 participants, Jordan & Deluty (1998) found that the length of time for which one had been self-labelled as lesbian was not related to levels of political involvement or lesbian community involvement, even when levels of disclosure were taken into account. Regardless, Cass' model has theoretical and empirical validity (Levine 1997), and is probably the most extensively cited and studied model of homosexual identity development in the psychological research literature (Eliason 1996).
Coleman's (1981), theoretically based model was developed from his experience with lesbian clinical populations. He claims that stages can be experienced in any order and even simultaneously, and do not have an 'end point'; rather, lesbians return to earlier stages as they experience new personal and social situations. He identifies 5 stages in the transition process:

1. *pre-coming out*: characterised by feelings of difference which can be experienced from 3 years of age onwards, coinciding with gender identity development;
2. *coming out*: characterised by self-acknowledgment and disclosure of lesbian feelings;
3. *exploration*: characterised by sexual behaviour;
4. *first relationship*: characterised by desire for intimacy and commitment; and
5. *integration*: characterised by more successful initiation, conduct and termination of relationships.

Sophie (1986) analysed six stage theories of homosexual identity formation, two of which were drawn from clinical populations (Cass 1979 and Coleman 1982, above), two from non-clinical female populations (Raphael 1974 and Spaulding 1982) and two from non-clinical male populations (Plummer 1975 and McDonald 1982). From these she established a generalised stage model based on four stages:

1. awareness of lesbian potential identity and/or feelings, or relevance;
2. exploration of behaviour without identity labelling;
3. acceptance of lesbian identity; and
4. integration of positive lesbian identity with other aspects of identity.

Sophie tested this generalised model in terms of its applicability to lesbians in a repeat interview of women experiencing changes in sexual orientation and/or identity. She found that, while most lesbians conformed to the general stage theory in general terms particularly in the early stages of development, there were marked discrepancies in the order and timing of specific events such as self-definition, disclosure, first relationships, contact with other lesbians, etc.

*p 15*
Chapman & Brannock's (1987) essentialist model based on a survey of 197 women assumes that lesbian identity is a pre-existing condition, which some incongruence brings to light. This occurs through five stages:

1. same sex orientation: feeling connected to other women without self-labelling;
2. incongruence: sensing that one's feelings are different to those of other women, feeling isolated and disinterested in men;
3. self-questioning/exploration: exploring possibility of lesbian identity through contact with lesbian community, lesbian friends, supportive others;
4. self-identification as lesbian: affirmation of a positive self-identity; and
5. choice of lesbian lifestyle: sexually active or celibate.

Hanley-Hackenbruck's (1989) is a theoretically-based, three-stage model, driven by ego-development concepts and the assumption that lesbians need to integrate the stigmatisation of homosexuality into their identity. She identifies 3 stages of transition:

1. prohibition: assimilation of society's prohibitions gives way to accommodation of more positive views of lesbianism, and a new ego ideal is formed through grieving the loss of heterosexual identity. Prohibition occurs in 3 phases:
   a. denial; 'I can't be lesbian because I'm so feminine'
   b. shock/crisis; 'I can't really be a feminine woman because I'm lesbian'
   c. negative/ambivalent labelling; 'maybe all lesbians aren't butch'
2. ambivalence/practising or compulsion/exploration: lesbian behaviour and affirmation that being lesbian and being worthwhile can co-exist.
3. consolidation/resolution: consolidation involves having positive role models and grieving losses associated with a lesbian lifestyle, while resolution involves resolving the contradiction between the need or desire to disclose and the fear of rejection or stigmatisation.

Hanley-Hackenbruck acknowledges the role of individual racial, ethnic, personal and social differences on the disclosure process.
Thompson (1992), working with therapeutic clients, proposes a 5 stage model of the process of grief and loss involved in the transition process:

1. accepting the reality of the loss of heterosexual identity and privilege;
2. acknowledging specifics of the loss of heterosexual identity and looking for ways to 'fit in' with the lesbian community;
3. grieving the loss of heterosexual hopes and dreams;
4. adjusting to life as a lesbian, including celebration; and
5. integration into lesbian life and community.

Thompson contends that stages can be simultaneous and intertwined, and that some will not experience some stages. She contends for example that some women grieve while they are trying unsuccessfully to live heterosexually, while some adopt a lesbian identity after they have achieved heterosexual goals such as long marriages, children, etc.

From an examination of seven studies of lesbians, Garnets and Kimmel (1993) proposed that there are 5 milestones in lesbian identity development:

1. initial awareness of erotic or affectionate feelings towards women; occurs between the ages of 14 and 16 years;
2. lesbian sexual experience; occurs between 20 and 22 years;
3. self-labelling; occurs between 21 and 23 years;
4. commitment to a relationship; occurs between 20 and 24 years; and
5. development of a positive lesbian identity; occurs between 24 and 29 years.

From a social constructionist standpoint, Kitzinger & Wilkinson (1995) researched the adult transition of heterosexual to lesbian identity. They developed their model from the discourse analysis of the responses of 80 lesbians who had identified as actively heterosexual for at least 10 years but who currently identified as lesbian. They identified 3 broad areas in the transition:

1. getting there: preparation for the creation of a context in which transition is possible involves confronting multiple oppressions, including 'compulsory heterosexuality', and developing strategies for avoiding the possibility of a lesbian identity such as denying it or perceiving it as a friendship, a phase, bisexuality, or experimentation;
2. making and describing the transition: transition is described, defined and marked, including defining having sex and/or falling in love as transitional markers or as confirmation or consequence of the transition, identifying a specific moment of dramatic change, and/or identifying autobiographical rupture, or the need or opportunity for identity reconstruction;

3. going on: continuing development of identity, reflections on past and future involves continuing to discover the personal meaning, lifestyle consequences, and definitions of lesbianism, and includes retrospective accounting and future planning to develop a sense of continuity and to deal with losses and new opportunities.

Morris (1997) contends that sexual identity formation is a multi-dimensional process that is 'internal to each woman, yet embedded within a socio-historical context' (p11). She identifies 4 dimensions of lesbian identity development:

1. sexual identity formation: feeling 'different', questioning heterosexuality, feeling sexually attracted to women;

2. disclosure: constant engagement in risk assessment of the environment, weighing up of possible advantages versus potential losses, full, partial or progressive disclosure to lesbian friends, heterosexual friends, family and colleagues;

3. sexual expression and behaviour: first lesbian sexual experience, first lesbian relationship;

4. lesbian consciousness: relationship to lesbian communities, lesbian politics and feminism.

Challenges to Stage Models

Challenges to the idea of linear, stable models of development with beginning and end points are legion. Sophie (1986) found that linearity had some validity for women in early stages of transition to lesbian identity, but 'past the early stages ... many directions of change were possible' (p50); social and historical conditions made it possible for some women to find support for a positive lesbian identity before adopting that identity themselves, hence the negative-to-positive and anger-to-pride developments did not occur. Some researchers have found that sexual attraction to another woman precedes questioning of a woman's own heterosexual
identity (eg. Rust 1993), others have found that self-labelling as a lesbian occurs prior to initiating sexual contact (eg. Savin-Williams & Diamond 2000), and others that exploration of lesbianism occurs concurrently with participation in heterosexual sex and relationships (Dempsey et al 2001). Rust also claims that sexual identity frequently includes periods of self-questioning and uncertainty; just under one quarter of her sample questioned their heterosexuality up to nineteen years before realising an attraction for another woman, and this attraction also occurred about three years earlier for lesbians than for bisexual women in her sample.

Many stage models admit the possibility of developmental alternatives, but do not identify or account for them (Cox & Gallois 1996), hence they fail to account for the experience of those who do not proceed to a positive integrated identity, those who miss stages, those who behave and identify as bisexual, or those who go through further change after adoption a lesbian identity (Sophie 1986). They also fail to account for those who consider that their lesbian identity began in childhood, illustrated by gender inappropriate affect or behaviour (Zevy 1999). Further, few stage models address the importance of relationships in the transition process (Diamond 2000, Deleonardo 2000); for example Schneider (2001) contends that romantic and sexual relationships are pivotal factors in sexual identity development among young lesbians, while Elizur & Mintzer (2001) claim that, for gay males, inner models of social and familial relationships are associated with the formation of sexual identity.

Stage models in general have also been criticised for a lack of consistency and clarity, variously attributed to failure to address the incongruence between sexual behaviour and sexual identity (Rust 1993), to separate personal from social identity (Cass 1984), and to identify cognitive, behavioural and affective components of development (Cass 1984). This confusion limits both validation of models and comparison between models.

Often based on clinical populations, models also imply that psychological well-being depends on timely and orderly progression through stages, and that the failure to reach resolution, integration or consolidation can lead to a troubled or somehow lesser identity (Morris 1997). Theories that rely on average ages at which lesbians experience difficult or common events obscure the variations in approach or
adjustment to those events, and do not account for 'the actual cognitive, social, and interpersonal strategies used to arrive at an identity' (Eliason 1996:53).

Further, stage models imply a 'best' identity: one which is achieved after striving to become 'whole' and 'integrated' (Kitzinger 1987). They do not account for the political dimension of lesbianism (Kitzinger 1987, Rich 1980); for lesbian feminists, for example, sexual experience can occur at the end of transition to lesbian identity, or not at all (Faderman 1985). Interestingly, 'an integrated identity is not particularly confronting to the heterosexual status quo' (Cox & Gallois 1996:9); the most highly evolved lesbian no longer considers her lesbianism to be the most crucial aspect of her identity, is no longer passionately proud or angry, is no longer passionately involved in activist politics, and considers that 'some things about a heterosexual way of life ... seem worthwhile' (Cass 1984:156).

In sum, lesbian identity research based solely on the notion of the linear and sequential development of, or transition to, an essential sexual identity has produced an array of sometimes contradictory, sometimes complementary definitions, measures and typologies, but has failed to yield a normative model of the developmental or transitional process able to account for the volume of cognitive, affective and behavioural idiosyncrasies apparent among lesbian populations. Parks (1999), Rosenfeld (1999) and others argue that lesbian identity formation is affected by family, social and historical circumstances to such a degree that transitional 'identity cohorts' are identifiable among generations and classes of lesbians.

It appears however that while some women begin to question their heterosexuality and gradually progress to a consolidation of their lesbianism, as prescribed by stage or developmental models, 'variations on this experience are too common to be considered deviations from the norm' (Rust 1993:68). Indeed, general stage theories may seem accurate only because they are so general (Sophie 1986). The process of lesbian identity formation may be more one of 'detypification' over time, as the label 'lesbian' becomes more concrete, precise and enriched (McDonald 2001).
1.3 Lesbian group identity

The consideration of that which constitutes a lesbian identity has been expanded in more recent years to include the interactional aspect of identity. The idea that identity, sexual or otherwise, could be constructed in relation to others reflected a paradigm shift in social psychology in the 1960s (Parker 1997). The self in relation to others was recognised as one's 'group identity', also referred to in the literature as 'social identity' or 'collective identity', and reductionist laboratory experiments involving decontextualised behaviours increasingly gave way to social contextual observations and a focus on 'group research'.

Social Identity theory contends that people have a variety of group memberships, that is, social categories or 'reference groups' with which they identify and all of which impact differently but profoundly on their self-concept and psychological functioning (Hogg 1996). Membership of reference groups is primarily a psychological state; a person's social categories determine much of the identity's content (Denis 2001), while the 'construal of the relation of the self to relevant social categories determines much of the structure of the self' (Miller & Prentice 1994:452). Research on lesbian group identity formation is informed by the findings of research into the formation of group identities in general, which is outlined below.

1.3.1. Group vs Individual Identity

The rise of individualism in western and many European cultures has seen the failure of group research to challenge individual epistemology, and group identity is often seen as stemming from the individual within the group, perhaps because, in part, too great a divergence from individual processes threatens the very boundaries of social psychology as a discipline (Parker 1997). However, Parker contends that the psychoanalytic theory holds two keys to a comfortable liaison between individual and group identity. The first was espoused by Freud (1921); the group is seen as the primitive, irrational basis of self-knowledge, and as the individual identifies with 'heroes' or significant others who increasingly differentiate from the group, so the individual's identity differentiates from the group, or 'emerges'. The second was espoused by post-Freudians (Bion 1961,
Wolfenstein 1990 in Parker 1997): the group is seen as a fundamental unit of human behaviour, and self-knowledge is the property of the group relationship. When that relationship breaks down the shared knowledge is deliberately fragmented or forgotten, and isolation and anxiety occurs. The 'individual' emerges as a defence against the breakdown of the group in times of crisis. Individual identity then is constantly produced and reproduced in the context of the group; the group sets up and constrains the very notion of individuality (Parker 1997).

Taylor (1989) has also attempted to account for the connection between individual and group identities. He claims that while group and personal identities co-exist, the formation of the group identity is the keystone of the self-concept; without a group identity, the individual has no reference upon which to forge or evaluate a personal identity. In his Theory of Self (1989) Taylor contends that people can experience both group and personal identity and self-esteem via four components of the self-concept:

- *personal identity* involves comparing the self to others to determine characteristics that make one unique, ie personal characteristics that distinguish the self, such as aggressive, intelligent, etc.;
- *self-esteem* involves a comparison with a person's reference group to obtain evaluative feedback about her/his personal characteristics, such as an assessment of whether aggression and intelligence, are valued by the reference group;
- *group identity* includes characteristics that the person shares with other members of the group, such as history, values, rituals, language, etc. This may be perceived via stereotypes imposed by the dominant culture, or via stereotypes established within the group itself;
- *group-esteem* involves a comparison with other groups to obtain evaluative feedback about the groups to which the person belongs, or 'ingroups'.

Hermans (1996) contends that individual and group identities function relatively autonomously: people can criticise the groups to which they belong, and, 'in a process of negotiation between personal and collective positions, new thoughts, stories, and ideals may emerge that return not only to the personal part of the self but also to the collectivity in which the self participates ... (producing) ... a never-ending process of change and innovation' (Hermans 1996:47). Categories featured
in group identities vary with context, as does the relative salience of group and personal identities (Miller & Prentice 1994). These theories can be accommodated by cognitive psychology's 'location' theories. The 'one location' theory posits that a single cognitive structure stores both private and group self cognitions, and the probability of retrieving one type over the other depends on the relative number of that type in the totality of self-cognitions (Tramifow, Triandis & Goto 1991). A 'two-location theory' posits that the two are stored separately, with private-self cognitions stored in a general private self-concept and group-self cognitions stored in a general group self-concept; retrieval of either type of cognition is dependent on the accessibility of the self-concept with which the particular cognition is associated (Ybarra & Tramifow 1998).

1.3.2 Developing a Group Identity

According to Levine & Moreland (1994), there are three phases of development of a group identity: investigation, socialisation and maintenance. As members move through these phases their perception of the group changes in order to accommodate their changing relationship to the group.

Investigating the Group

A woman may investigate the lesbian group via contact with one other group member. Individuals are seen as possessing more 'entativity' (Campbell 1958); they have clearer boundaries and are more coherently organised. Evaluators of individuals can search for underlying patterns, in a serial or on-line processing procedure, while groups demand an independent coding of features (Hamilton & Sherman 1996); evaluations of individuals are therefore made more confidently and are more extreme than group evaluation (Coovet & Reeder 1990). Therefore while she may perceive the lesbian group in terms of stereotypes and stereotypical evaluations, she is more likely to perceive one lesbian as either similar to herself, and/or as having desired characteristics. In the former case, similarity is thought to breed liking (Sears 1983), therefore she will evaluate the lesbian more positively than the group; in the latter case, growing interpersonal similarity over time may contribute to a positive evaluation (Locke & Horowitz 1990).
Alternatively, a person may investigate a group if she suspects she may be a member. Categorisation of an individual as an in-group member influences cognitive and motivational processes and leads to more positive evaluations of the group, including greater recall of positive information and an increase in the perceived similarity of beliefs (Dovidio, Gaertner & Validzic 1998). A lesbian group would therefore be judged according to whether or not the evaluator is, or could become, lesbian. Permeability, or the perceived possibility of achieving group membership, strongly influences perception of social groups at the investigative phase; for example if a woman perceives herself as a member of the lesbian group before she encounters stereotypical group members, she may be less likely to perceive those members as stereotypical than if she perceives herself as a lesbian after she encounters stereotypical group members (Johnson, Schaller & Mullen 2000).

Prototypicality, or the perception of the self in relation to other group members, also strongly influences perception of social groups at the investigative phase (Jetten, Spears & Manstead 1998). If an evaluator perceives that the differences between herself and various group members are less than the differences among other group members, she is more likely to evaluate the group positively (Clement & Krueger 1998).

Socialising to the group

The second developmental phase, socialisation, involves other cognitive strategies, including group identification, self-categorisation and self-stereotyping.

Group identification is defined as a measure of the extent to which an individual perceives herself as a group member and finds that group identity salient, ie the degree to which the group identity is integrated into the self-concept (Jetten, Spears & Manstead 1998). Membership of a group can be ascertained by five factors: boundaries which determine who belongs and who doesn't; shared symbol systems which consist of myths and stories; emotional safety; personal investment; and the psychological importance of membership and feelings of acceptance (Sonn & Fisher 1996). In lesbian communities, boundaries and symbol systems are negotiated along behavioural (Zipkin 1999, Cogan 1999), affective (Stein 1999) and cognitive lines (Laird 2000).
Self-categorisation (Turner et al. 1987) is the tendency to describe oneself in terms of in-groups versus out-groups, for example, as lesbian versus as heterosexual, and appears to be a 'major determinant of social perceptions and behavioural intentions' (Ellemers, Spears & Dossje 1997:625). According to Turner et al (1987), self-categorisation exists at the superordinate level (as a human being), intermediate level (as a group member), or subordinate level (as an individual). Cox & Gallois (1996) also note that a characteristic can be part of a personal identity for one person, and part of a group identity for another; self-categorisation as lesbian can therefore be incorporated into personal identity, group identity, or both (McDonald & Hudack 2001), and hence it is seen by some as a category, but by others as only a behaviour. For example, lesbian sexual behaviour may belong to a woman's personal identity, while all dimensions other than sexual behaviour may be part of a heterosexual group identity; this woman would 'identify' as heterosexual and view her sexual behaviour as independent of her group identity.

Self-stereotyping is a measure of the extent to which a member sees herself as prototypical of the group, that is, how the individual forms part of the group. Self-stereotyping is more likely to follow from, rather than predict, identification (Klein & Azzi 2001).

**Maintaining a Group Identity**

The third developmental phase involves maintenance of the group identity. According to Cinnirella (1998), maintaining a group identity involves negotiating positive identities in changing social contexts. She contends that the degree to which possible selves are past or future in orientation provides insights into group identity construction and maintenance. Given that individuals and groups are motivated to attain desired possible selves and avoid realisation of feared possible selves, future possible group identities are crucial to group processes and identity maintenance, but if the group's past is more conducive to positive identity than its current or predicted future, then ingroup members are more likely to focus on past-oriented group identities.

When the group increases in number there is an increase in the range of possible group identities, and members may become increasingly concerned with socially shared or contested identities. If a more powerful outgroup defines the group's past identity, then the ingroup may attempt to devalue the outgroup's legitimacy, or
focus on more positively evaluated possible future group identities. However, a
group's ability to control its possible identities will depend on its societal power
relative to that of outgroups, for example, as the in-group becomes the focus of
mass media, it may lose the freedom to generate uncontested and positive possible
identities, and become engaged in an ideological struggle against negative possible
identities emerging from the more powerful out-group.

Group identity then is a multidimensional construct incorporating cognition and
emotion (Cameron & Lalonde 2001). Group identity is grounded in the shared
psychological, dispositional and/or structural attributes around which members
coalesce, and which members internalise to create a 'singular social experience, a
single canvas against which social actors construct a sense of self' (Cerulo
1997:386). However, developing and maintaining a positive lesbian identity
appears to be most effective when a woman establishes new priorities, activities and
relationships with like-minded others of her group (Heatherton & Nichols 1994). In
a heterosexist society, a lesbian's group identity is formed in interaction with a
subculture, and may comprise expectations, goals and personal standards that may
be 'independent of average norms and standards in the society' (Pulkkinen & Ronka

1.3.3 Developing a lesbian group identity

Lesbian sexual orientation is rarely shared with one's first family, and many
lesbians have broken with, or been expelled from, traditional family lifestyles and
families of origin (Berger & Kelly 1986); lesbians therefore rely on 'peer-group
families' for support and affirmation. Young lesbians need role models and frames
of reference for their sexuality (Schneider 1989, Hunter & Mallon 2000), as media
images are scarce and incidental information is often derogatory, stereotypical, or
alienating (Hetrick & Martin 1987). They also need an appropriate social scene in
which to practise adult lesbian skills and networks (see D'Augelli & Patterson 2001
for review). Meeting just one other lesbian peer is often considered a milestone in
lesbian identity formation (Schneider 1989); lesbian community can allay feelings
of unique isolation, at a time when peer affiliation is developmentally important
(Jackson & Sullivan 1994) and can help with the adolescent tasks of separating
from family in a healthy manner, forming appropriate interpersonal boundaries and attachments, and creating a sense of a synthesised 'self' (Peters 1997).

A crucial factor in lesbian group identity development then, is 'the influence of stigma and the person's psychosocial resources to deal with the environmental demands and pressures created by stigma' (Adelman 1990:28). Coping with a stigmatised status involves lifelong cognitive and behavioural processes responsive to changing social environments; consequently, lesbians experience 'turning points' which generate different lesbian identities or lifestyles (Adelman 1990). Stigmatised people tend to develop individualised patterns of coping behaviours according to current circumstances, and, to a lesser extent, demographic and personality characteristics such as gender, income, age, employment status, value systems, perceived self-efficacy, physical and social environment, and community and family support (Miller & Kaiser 2001, Ebata & Moos 1994, Holahan & Moos 1987, Moos & Schaefer 1987, Lazarus & Folkman 1984, Billings & Moos 1981). When coping is maladaptive, internalised homophobia can underpin drug addiction (Guss & Drescher 2000), self-esteem and depression (Earle 2000), loneliness and depression (Westefeld et al 2001), poor interpersonal skills in adolescents (Moix 2000), and mental health problems and suicide risk in adolescents (McDaniel et al 2001). The effectiveness of a coping response is strongly influenced by its social context, and especially by the responses of the person's significant others (Aguilera 1994).

Members of stigmatised groups demonstrate 'patterned phases of reactions' (Aguilera 1994) in their group identity formation. Two types of social strategy used by members of stigmatised groups are 'social mobility' and 'social change'. Social mobility occurs when a member of a subordinate group identifies with the dominant group by making salient those identity features which conform to the dominant group. If members of a low-status group perceive themselves to be socially mobile, they may notice attributes in themselves that are consistent with higher status groups, or they may simply notice those of their attributes which others would find socially acceptable (Swan & Wyer 1997). Social change occurs when members of the subordinate group cognitively restructure their perceptions of the group so that they can simultaneously identify with the group and develop or maintain a positive identity. These two strategies of group identity formation are now examined in turn.

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Social mobility and disclosure

Among lesbian groups, social mobility takes the form of 'passing' as a heterosexual by denying, avoiding or hiding a lesbian identity. This is most likely to be used early in the transition process, when she views lesbian sexual orientation as part of her personal rather than social identity. Over time, as factors such as the presumption of heterosexuality cause lesbian aspects of the self to become relevant to more social situations, these aspects may come to form part of her group identity, and she may feel the press to disclose her 'hidden' identity.

Disclosure has been declared vital for confirmation of lesbian identity and self-actualisation (Sophie 1987, Cass 1984), and the costs of not disclosing are deemed to be poor mental health (see Rosario et al 2001, Jordan & Deluty 1998) and poor psychological adjustment (Selvidge 2001, Morris, Waldo & Rothblum 2001, Jordan & Deluty 2000, Miranda & Storms 1989). Jordan & Deluty (2000) also found that level of disclosure was associated with relationship satisfaction, and that the greater the discrepancy between two partners' levels of disclosure, the lower were the levels of relationship satisfaction. However, whether disclosure leads to self-acceptance or self-acceptance leads to disclosure is not established.

Whitman et al (2000) claim that, regardless of stage of lesbian identity development, lesbians identity management and disclosure decisions are based on considerations of self-esteem and safety. Lesbians are more likely to disclose to other lesbians than to straight friends, family or colleagues (Bradford, Ryan & Rothblum 1994). LaSala (2001) sees disclosure to one's parents as a differentiation task for lesbians; in poorly differentiated families, disclosure to parents often provokes guilt, disappointment, rejection and verbal and physical abuse, although parent-child relationship have been found to improve with time after initial disclosure (Beeler & DiProva 1999, D'Augelli et al 1998). Disclosure to one's parents is greatly influenced by gender of the parent (Savin-Williams 2001), while disclosure to children is primarily influenced by, and centred around, the perceived needs of the child (Lynch & Murray 2000).

Following an initial disclosure, there is often a 'motivation to preserve integrity by disclosing to others' (Morris 1997:12). However, Montini (2000) claims that disclosure is an interaction, and that successful disclosure depends on the reception of the audience. Many heterosexuals prevent, deny or reverse a disclosure to maintain 'closed awareness'. Disclosing a lesbian identity violates social norms, and
can result in physical, economic, or social sanction and loss of prestige; lesbians are therefore constantly involved in risk assessment of their social environment, which can give rise to a continual existential crisis (De Monteflores & Schultz 1978). Early negative responses to a lesbian's disclosure are associated with less community involvement, less positive attitudes towards her lesbian status and poor adjustment (Rabin & Slater 1993). Indeed, where environmental conditions make disclosure dangerous or disadvantageous, gaps of several years can occur between the recognition of same-sex attraction and disclosure to even one other person (D'Augelli 1989).

However, Gregory (1999) claims that although lesbians anticipated predominantly negative responses and consequences of disclosure, they actually experienced more positive than negative consequences. Oswald (2000) found that disclosure resulted in changes in communication such as engaging in conflict and questioning self and others; changes in relationship structures such as building community and engaging in closeness and distancing; and changes in beliefs such as the nature of one's own sexuality and opinions about bisexual and homosexual others. Early positive responses to disclosure are related to higher perceived levels of social support, lower levels of anxiety, more positive affect and higher self-esteem (Jordan & Deluty 1998).

Disclosure management is mediated by an array of personal and environmental factors (see Elizur & Mintzer 2001, Blando 2001, Patterson 1995, Harry 1993, Herdt 1992, Faderman 1991, Bradford & Ryan 1988 and others). For example, Harry (1993), in a study of gay males' disclosure patterns such as choosing when and to whom to disclose, found a stronger relationship between disclosure patterns and lifestyle factors such as income, perceived social support and type of occupation, than between disclosure patterns and transition stages. Morris, Waldo & Rothblum (2001) found that predictors of a lesbian's degree of disclosure were:

- identification as lesbian rather than bisexual;
- the number of years of identification as lesbian; and
- level of involvement in lesbian community.

Gregory (1999) also found that the majority of lesbians in her study disclosed less than they wanted to. However, successful disclosure or affiliation with another lesbian is often followed by cognitive restructuring to develop a positive meaning for one's identity (Sharp 1997), or 'social change'.

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Social change

As the location of lesbianism moves from personal identity to group identity, social mobility becomes ineffective as an identity enhancement strategy, and social change becomes necessary. Among lesbian groups, social change can take the form of 'accommodating' negative social stereotypes (Friend 1987). Brown (1998) identified three forms of cognitive restructuring involved in social change. Lesbians can find new dimensions upon which to compare themselves with heterosexuals, claiming, for example, a greater independence and autonomy. They can redefine the value attached to an existing comparative dimension, for example, they can redefine the value attached to childlessness by referring to heterosexuals as 'breeders'. They can also select different groups or sub-groups with which they can compare favourably, such as transsexuals. The choice of 'comparable others' is not self-evident, and not necessarily a dichotomous variable, such as black/white, male/female, etc. Indeed, comparisons can be made along any dimensions that define a meaningful common category (Verkuyten 1997), including a common imagined origin and culture (Hutnik 1991). Categories can also be established at the intersection of multiple comparable other groups; the framework of comparisons is itself a construction, and changes according to dimensions used (Verkuyten 1997). Further, while oppositional identities can be affirming for stigmatised groups (Ogbu 1990), 'we' may be defined in opposition to an undefined 'not-us', rather than to a particular 'other' (Verkuyten 1997).

Choice of Management Strategy

Choice of stigma management strategies is affected by degrees of social dependence, or the extent to which one needs a particular group membership over other group memberships. A person may be highly dependent on a particular group identity if they have relatively few others, or if their status in the group is high relative to their status in other groups. Cox & Gallois (1996) claim that strategies can be predicted from varying levels of dependence on and solidarity with the group; low levels of both are likely to result in social mobility strategies, while high levels of both are likely to result in social change strategies. Members with high levels of solidarity and low levels of dependence can maintain membership of stigmatised groups without needing to alter the status quo, while low levels of
solidarity and high levels of dependence, such as feeling that membership is involuntary but unwanted, can lead to psychological maladjustment. Ellemers, Spears & Dossje (1997) contend that in stigmatised groups, low-identifiers show a greater inclination to leave the group, regardless of whether or not this is perceived as possible, whether or not there is a common threat, and whether or not they accept collective responsibility for the group's low status, although where membership is based on common traits or discrimination such responses are far less prominent.

However, in some situations members may be constrained from using these strategies; the situational press may prohibit selective comparison or the dismissal of the out-group's opinion, and the context may be central to the self and hard to devalue (Brown 1998). In their 1997 study, Spears, Dossje & Ellemers found that under threat conditions, individuals who identified strongly with the group tended to rank themselves as more prototypical, or record higher levels of self-stereotyping, than those who identified weakly with the group. They also found that, in response to a threat to the group, stronger group identifiers tended to increase their levels of self-stereotyping, and to use group responses such as closing ranks to deal with a threat to the group. However, weaker identifiers decreased their levels of self-stereotyping in response to a threat to the group, and dissociated from the group via individualistic means, such as social mobility or overestimations of group heterogeneity. In other words, when their group identity is threatened, low identifiers set themselves apart from the group further, while higher identifiers show movement towards the centre of the group. Further, when a threat to group identity is experienced in a highly valued dimension, enhanced in-group bias may lead to increased group self-esteem, but only for prototypical, not peripheral, members (Jetten, Spears & Manstead 1997).

Existing theories of social identity assume that minority groups' ingroup behaviours are a response to perceived inferiority in relation to dominant major groups (Verkuyten 1997), but threats to group identity can also stem from threats to group distinctiveness by comparison with similar groups (Micki & Ellemers 1996, Worchel, Coutant-Sassic & Grossman 1992, Diehl 1990, and others). There is a growing body of literature about the effect on social identity caused by the threat of a higher-status comparison out-group, or by the threat to in-group distinctiveness caused by a similar out-group, but many of the findings are contradictory or
inconclusive, to such an extent that it is difficult to explain variations or identify predictors. Social Identity theory asserts that a similar outgroup may be seen as a threat to ingroup distinctiveness, and ingroup members will positively differentiate their group on relevant dimensions to preserve their social identity. Self-categorisation theory also asserts that a similar outgroup will be seen as a threat, but that people categorise themselves and others so as to maximise intergroup differences and minimise intragroup differences, and intergroup distinctiveness facilitates this differentiation (Jetten, Spears & Manstead 1998). Here there is an apparent contradiction between identification and categorisation theories: the former predicts that more positive differentiation is needed to restore distinctiveness when the outgroup is similar to the ingroup, while the latter predicts that greater levels of differentiation will occur as the ingroup becomes more distinct from the outgroup. Jetten, Spears & Manstead (1998) account for this by asserting that there is a curvilinear relationship between similarity and distinctiveness, such that differentiation is most likely to occur when groups are similar, but not too similar to undermine distinctiveness; differentiation is therefore an emergent property of similarity and distinctiveness in combination.

It appears that the level of the perceived threat to group identity can affect ingroup bias, perceived group homogeneity and out-group (Spears, Dossje & Ellemers 1997). Reichl (1997) found that members of stigmatised groups showed greater ingroup bias about features that were unrelated to the stigmatised dimension than those that were related. He attributed this to 'social creativity' (Tajfel & Turner 1986, Turner & Brown 1978); there are structural constraints on the expression of superiority within dimensions that clearly reflect recognisable and widely accepted social hierarchies, but members will use ingroup bias along unrelated dimensions to attempt to establish or restore a positive identity (Reichl 1997).

1.4 Lesbian Dyadic Relationships

Taylor (1989) claims that some group identities can emerge from a small group or even a dyad. Extensive analyses of lesbian dyads (Kurdek 1994a, Peplau & Gordon 1982, Tanner 1978, and others) have more recently been supplemented by specific issue analyses, such as relationship quality (Davis 2000, Dunne 2000, Kurdek 1995, and others), relationship satisfaction (Jordan & Deluty 2000, Finch 1999 and
others), factors contributing to longevity of long-term relationships (Littlefield et al 2000), autonomy and commitment (Kurdek 2000), bereavement patterns (Deevey 2000), open relationship patterns (Labriola 1999, Rothblum 1999), violence (see Burke & Follingstad 1999 for review), and sexual coercion (see Waldner-Haugrud 1999 for review).

Research into the development of lesbian dyads is limited. Sarantakos (1996) defined two types or phases of lesbian relationship: 'sexual cohabitations', which are temporary and focused on widening sexual experience in pursuit of the ideal partner; and 'social cohabitations', which are permanent, exclusive, stable and committed, with emphasis on companionship and the feeling of being a couple. Sarantakos found that while most lesbians experience three to four break-ups during their lifetime, usually in the early sexual cohabitation phases, most expect their current relationships to last forever, do not experience serious conflict, and turn to lesbian friends for assistance with relationship problems in the social cohabitation phase.

Aspects of lesbian relationships specifically impacting on lesbian identity development include the claim that lesbians in dyadic relationship are vulnerable to 'fusion'; female socialisation can lead to heightened intimacy, empathy and connectedness between female-to-female partners, which in turn can lead to a heightened interdependence and an undermining of one's own and one's partner's independence (cf. Krestan & Bepko 1980, Hill 1999, LaSala 2001). There are challenges to this claim. If homosexuals are differently gendered, they may not enact rigidly feminine attributes thought to put couples at risk of fusion (Green et al 1996). If they are not differently gendered, gender exchanges may heighten a woman's sense of gender, and signal an escape from the limitations of gender categories altogether (Burch 1995). In response, Finch (1999) distinguishes between fusion as intrusiveness and fusion as closeness. Fusion as closeness, or heightened intimacy, is exactly what lesbians say makes their relationships special and valued (Laird 2000) and has been associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction (Finch 1999). Fusion as intrusiveness, or excessive interdependence, is not characteristic of lesbian dyadic relationships generally (Finch 1999, Hill 1999), and becomes problematic only where the couple is isolated from family and social support (Hill 1999).
Laird (2000) claims that lesbians construct their dyadic identities from the same cultural context as heterosexual women:

- family relationships are seen as the relationship between two dichotomous variables, male or female sexuality and masculine or feminine gender;
- sex and gender are the primary and irreducible variables in the organisation of family life, while class, colour, etc are second-level variables because they rarely vary within the family;
- lesbian relationships are troubled because both partners are socialised to 'feminine' and therefore risk 'fusion' or 'merger'; therefore
- 'butch-femme' relationships, or heterosexual imitation, is necessary for lesbians to organise their affective, domestic and sexual responses.

'Butch-femme' stereotypes have organised lesbian communities by providing 'a unique organising system of personal representation, interpersonal interaction and community participation' (Rubin 1992:176). They represent ways of coding identities and behaviours simultaneously connected to but distinct from normative social roles. Femmes tend to conform to normative gender roles for women except that they form emotional and sexual relationships with other women, while butches tend toward gender non-conformity in appearance, in behaviour and in forming emotional and sexual relationships with women.

Laird (2000) found that the butch-femme metaphor has been applied to lesbian relationships by lesbians themselves in a variety of historical and cultural contexts, and not as much in imitation of heterosexuality as a means to gain male prerogative (Kennedy & Davis 1993), to extend sexual practice (Jeffreys 1993), or to describe a flexible and non-hierarchical way of organising relational tasks. 'Not only do gendered behaviour and identity seems to have different sets of meanings for each partner in every relationship, but the nuances of how those relationships are played out in everyday life are enormously variable and complex, and the role divisioning is far more flexible than in most heterosexual couples.' (Laird 2000: 460).

Crawley (2001) provides a comprehensive literature review of the 'butch-femme' stereotypes and points to the myriad of assumed or implied definitions, alongside the dearth of explicit definitions in the literature. She attributes this to the fact that theories about them are often embedded in the period in which they were formed, and fail to account for the dynamic and situated nature of these stereotypes. She
argues that, in response to changing cultural conditions, the butch-femme stereotypes have variously represented:

- **non-standard gender identities**: butch-femme stereotypes originated during the formation of semi-public lesbian communities of the early to middle 1990s, and, coming to prominence in the 1950’s working-class bar culture, they were seen as a necessary means of challenging heterosexual men and gaining access to male privilege. They are commonly assumed, in the literature, to be more the domain of working-class women than those of the middle or upper classes, who had ready access to social privilege;

- **non-standard sexual identities**: criticised by middle-class radical feminists as imitations of socially constructed oppressive heterosexual power structures, butch-femme stereotypes re-emerged as essential sexual identities (cf. Singh et al 1999). Butch-femme interactions were viewed as a 'natural' sexual desire for the opposite sexuality within a same-sex partner, and simultaneously as 'signals to dominant society of women's erotic independence from oppressive heterosexual norms' (Crawley 2001:177);

- **non-standard sexual performances, or erotic play**: post-modernists contend that erotic tension develops via dichotomous positions (Butler 1996, Faderman 1992), and 'the butch-femme couple can, through their own agency, move through a field of symbols ... free from biological determinism, elitist essentialism and the heterosexual cleavage of sexual difference' (Case 1989:298).

Crawley argues that butch-femme stereotypes have been used as vehicles of protest at a personal and community level in politically unfriendly historical periods where women's wider social movements are in abeyance. She claims that the stereotypes function to challenge dominant dichotomous gender roles, to promote visibility and political agency, and to provide sexual scripts from which lesbian relationships depart or to which they conform; they are not reducible to gender, identity or performance alone, but are a dynamic interplay of all three.

1.4.1 Lesbian families

Group identity is also reflected in small group development, or 'lesbian families'. Laird (2000) contends that little about lesbian families was reflected in the marriage

Heterosexual families are presented as natural and biological. When lesbians come out, they often anticipate or experience loss or alteration of the 'biological' or 'blood' ties with their families of origin, and supplant these with 'chosen' families based on a fluid and unpatterned structure of kinship ties arising from friendship, shared social identity and emotional commitment (Dalton & Bielby 2000). While emotional support from chosen families and friends is often more important to relationships satisfaction and psychological well-being than that from family of origin (Kurdek 1988a), LaSala (2001) argues that homosexuals may be disavowing family importance; among an older participant group, friends were found to provide socialising support, while partners, siblings and other relatives were found to provide emotional support (Grossman, D'Augelli & Hershberger 2000). Further, among young lesbians, maternal acceptance was associated with self-esteem and comfort with being lesbian, satisfaction with relationship and relationship quality (LaSala 2001), and among community leaders, positive identity development was associated with family acceptance, as well as to associating with other lesbians.

Child-rearing is powerfully linked to the dominant concept of the natural-heterosexual family, and lesbian co-parenting has limited recognition in social or legal terms. Lesbians in co-parenting relationships challenge normative biological conceptions of family and parenthood. Factors such as the unavailability of traditional divisions of labour based on gender, lack of support from intergenerational familial ties, or ideological commitment to more equitable family roles, have forced lesbians to develop alternative co-parenting models. For example, many lesbian parenting couples form divisions such as 'biological mother & social mother' or 'biological mother & adoptive mother', reflecting non-gendered notions of 'provider & caregiver' (Dalton & Bielby 2000), and non-gendered balancing of affective and household responsibilities (Dunne 2000, Sullivan 1996).
1.5 Life events and lesbian identity narrative

The selection and evaluation of events included in identity narrative, that is, the referential aspect of identity narrative, are subject to cultural norms about which there may or may not be contested definitions and interpretations. Kaufman (1997) identified a series of common life events which gay men and lesbians addressed in their adjustment to homosexual identity. These included: realising a homosexual identity or a difference in or interruption to a heterosexual identity; perceiving others' views of homosexual identity; mapping a transition to homosexual identity; developing cognitive and behavioural strategies for managing the stigma associated with homosexual identity; and developing dyadic family and/or community relationships. Given the domination of lesbian identity research by these considerations, it seems reasonable to assume that they may constitute the referential elements of lesbian identity narrative as defined by the lesbian group. Confirmation of this assumption with regard to lesbian identity narrative, rather than researcher-elicited accounts of specific aspects of lesbian identity, has not yet been attempted, and this comprises the first task of the current study.
2. **Narrative structure**

Well, fortunately or unfortunately, I have a strong sense of narrative, linear narrative, and clearly that will be part of what you’re interested in, I suppose. (Participant 23)

But that sort of a linear chronology of how I came to be a lesbian, that’s kind of dull ...

(Participant 60)

If a story is to impact upon the listener, it must be heard from a personal perspective, with listeners able to vicariously experience the event (Goffman 1974). Apart from the referential aspect of identity narrative then, do particular narrative structures promote the legitimacy of lesbian identity narrative within the lesbian group?

Although the structure of narrative thought is still debated (cf. Russell & Luciarello 1992, Pennington & Hastie 1988, 1986, Trabasso & van der Broek 1985, Mandler 1984) it appears to be interactive with paradigmatic thought. Paradigmatic thought involves context-free abstractions, organised in hierarchical categories and concepts, which aim to uncover a single unitary truth (Baumeister & Newman 1994), while narrative thought involves coherent thought about particular experiences such as human intention, action and consequence, organised in temporal sequence, and tending toward the generation of multiple meanings and truths (McKeough, Templeton & Marini 1995). People tend to preserve and communicate knowledge in narrative form and may abstract principles and assumptions from their narratives, along with previously learned principles of coherence and plausibility, to provide frameworks for future stories (Baumeister & Newman 1994). Indeed, cultures use particular identity narrative forms to amass 'life truths' by connecting certain events with a culturally acceptable evaluation, or 'ready interpretation' (Olson 1988). While identity narratives employ a protagonist, a plot and a moral or ethical evaluation (Brockmeier 2000), ready interpretations are discernible through time and meaning formats. Hence there are two forms of narrative thought: 'narrative processing', or the creation of vivid imagery, sequential plots, characters and goals; and 'autobiographical reasoning', or the interpretation and evaluation of remembered experiences (Singer & Bluck 2001).

Life experience itself however is not originally perceived in the form of a well-made story, with coherent beginnings, middles and ends (Ryan 1998); the structure of a
story communicable to others is imposed by the group (Miller et al 1990), and becomes a culturally recognised tool for self-construction.

2.1 Development of narrative structures

The development of identity narrative structures begins in childhood. Tomkins (1979) claims that affects comprise the primary motivational life force and hence the structural building blocks of autobiographical narrative. According to his 'script theory' (1979, 1987, 1991), an affect plus the object of that affect such as people, place, time, event, etc, form 'scenes', which are co-assembled according to their similarities and differences. Through a process of 'psychological magnification', these scenes yield rules for interpreting and responding to families of co-assembled scenes. These rules, or 'scripts' eventually come to determine the individual's experience of subsequent scenes, and become the tools for the construction of identity narrative. Scripts are generalised to subsequent situations and give rise to an individual's expectations about the order and occurrence of culturally stereotypical events, which govern both understanding and behaviour.

Identity narrative is not merely a collection of scripts however; it is a 'reflexive construction' (Brockmeier 2000) in a structured, communicable format. According to Miller et al (1990), children are exposed to their culture's versions of storytelling via routine and guided participation:

♦ stories about the child are told by adults in the child's presence (the adult implicitly appropriates the child's experience);
♦ child and adult organise and tell stories jointly (the two are in intimate relationship and are co-owners of the experience);
♦ the adult intervenes in the child's attempts to construct its own stories (the child is author of its own experience but the adult is editor); and finally
♦ the child tells its own story (achieving adult status when fully in possession of its own experience).

Early stories initiated by the adult focus on the child's actions or attributes, the significance and organisation of its experiences, and the child as actor, if not yet author, in its own right. The participating structure, that is, the child's readiness to contribute to stories about itself rather than to stories about others, is apparent by the age of two-and-a-half years. The nature of on-going experience is transformed...
as more elaborate schemata involving longer stretches of autobiographical time are developed (Sass 1998).

Personal identity narrative first emerges in recognisable form in adolescence (McAdams 1988). An adolescent's narrative typically includes repudiations and assimilations of childhood identifications in a structure that includes plot, character, settings, scenes and themes (Berman 1992/3). Early identity narrative structure then is characterised by an acquisition of cultural norms and standards, while later narrative identity structures reflect greater attunement to history, emotion, contradiction and transformation (Labouvie-Vief et al 1995). Similar repudiations and assimilations often occur in the identity narratives of people experiencing identity crisis or change.

2.2 Authorial structures

In recent times, the conceptualisation of a single individual identity has given way to a revival of William James' (1890) concept of 'multiple selves'. The cognitive system is first used to differentiate oneself from another person by gender, then by increasingly complex categorisations leading to 'social selves' (James 1890), 'families of selves' (Cantor & Kihlstrom 1987) 'self-schemas' (Markus & Cross 1990) or 'self-representations' (Westen 1992). While there are as many group identities as there are groups of other people about whose opinions one cares (James 1890); those identities more central to the person's self-definition stimulate more reflection and connection to others (Singer 1995).

James (1902) conceptualised the interrelationship between multiple selves as the interaction between the "I-self", or 'knowing identity', and the "Me-self", or 'known identity'. According to James' theory, the I-self is consciously self-reflective. It interprets experience subjectively, organising continuity, distinctiveness and a sense of volition or agency (Damon & Hart 1982). The Me-self comprises "Me" and "Mine", in the broadest sense of that which one can call one's own. James likened the relationship between identities to that of a herd of cows; the individual beasts (Me-selves) wander alone or with 'accidental mates' (other Me-selves or others' Me-selves), but the mark of unity is the brand, which is recognised by the farmer (I-self). The I-self's observation of itself is always context-based, hence we have
multiple Me-selves, with cognitive, affective and motivational information that differs depending on the role imposed by the context (Singer 1995).

The collection of role identities is organised in an 'identity salience hierarchy' (Stryker & Serpe 1982), salience being determined by social and emotional commitment and performance satisfaction associated with particular roles. In other words a global identity structure is determined by the satisfaction and commitment people feel towards their various social roles (Roberts & Donahue 1994). Although global and specific identity views are strongly related, they are not necessarily equivalent (Pelham & Swan 1989, Marsh 1986, Hoge & McCarthy 1984) and can even be incongruent (Woike & Baumgardner 1993). As the cognitive system defines various Me-Selves, the affective system evaluates each for its comparative worth to the individual, and the subsidiation system organises them in temporal and instrumental order, one identity serving another.

Various Me-Self identity types have been identified in narrative identity literature:

- The 'private self' is that which controls covert information about the self, such as thoughts and feelings, while the 'public self' is that which controls information that can be observed by others, such as appearance, behaviour, and expression of feelings. Hence when the private identity is salient, people will articulate and evaluate the self from a private vantage, and when the public identity is salient people will articulate and evaluate the self from a public vantage (Nasby 1996);

- The 'moral self' is defined by the way in which the individual inhabits social roles, and self-regulates by way of socially shared criteria (Oyama 1993). The 'ideal self' possesses attributes that a person wishes to have, and the 'ought self' possesses attributes that a person believes should be possessed (Nasby 1996). Higgins et al (1994) claim that 'ideal' identities are concerned with approaching desired end states, while 'ought' identities are concerned with avoiding feared end states, and that discrepancy between actual and ideal selves is related to sadness, while discrepancy between actual and ought selves is related to fear.

- The 'future self' or 'possible self' comprises a multi-staged process of interest, exploration, goal-setting and commitment (Nurmi 1991). There is evidence that the complexity of future or possible identities mediates affective response to future goals; indeed, with regard to affective processes it seems that actual and
possible identities are organised independently (Hermans 1996, Niedenthal, Setterlund & Wherry 1992).

The authorial I-self can establish a perspective, or 'position' (Davies & Harre 1990) which interacts with the environment for a period of time, and new knowledge can result from this dialogical interchange (Hermans 1996). For example, on a temporal level one can move to a future self to evaluate a present self, or, as Markus & Nurius (1986) demonstrate, to a 'possible' self in order to provide images of a desired or feared future self. 'The different positions in the dialogical self may each have their own views, wishes, motives, feelings and memories ... (and) ... may agree and disagree, interrogate, criticise and even ridicule one another' (Hermans 1996:42). Authoring therefore involves establishing several different perspectives, positions and 'voices', or relationships between narrator and plot (Hyden 1995).

A person's identity is therefore derived from various social life domains, not only contingent and dynamic but 'multiply determined, multiply interpreted, (and) expressed in a multitude of storied forms' (Hermans 1996:210), located at the fluid intersections of multiple social groupings such as gender, class and ethnicity (Denis 2001), and the 'site not only of integrative tendencies but also of tendencies toward fragmentation and distortion' (Labouvie-Vief et al 1995:404). Imposing structure on such a proliferation of identity domains in order to achieve socially identifiable identity narrative coherence is the task of the 'authorial' self.

2.3 Authorial time and meaning

Another task of the authorial self is to impose structure on life events. Real events do not offer themselves as stories. Life goes on from one event to another and 'stretches along the line of time from birth until death' (Freeman 1998:29); its very formlessness calls out for the 'consolation of narrative' imbuing life experience with some point, some 'meaning' (Ricoeur 1984). Connections with others' stories reveal a sense of interrelated personal experience.

We experience some form of pre-narrative connection between events; children are able to perceive causal connections they cannot yet describe (Sass 1998), and the present always includes a sense of recollection and of anticipation (James, in Sass 1998), but narrative is the scaffolding by which personal experience is structured,
or, some believe, made incongruent, by a socially shared meaning (Nelson 1998). While unique sets and twists of narrative arise from genetically inherited characteristics, sociohistorical events, and socioeconomic peculiarities such as country, class, race, religion and gender, people interpret their lives in the context of local cultures (Gubrium 1993). Even emotions make sense to people only in terms of the social plots they elicit (Sarbin 1995) and are differently structured or delineated within a particular historical epoch.

**Narrative time**

As identity narrative involves reflexive and directive construction, it necessarily involves the ongoing inter-relating of temporarily distinct events, involving flashbacks, flash-forwards, gaps, intersections, overlaps, etc. Brockmeier (2000) argues that identity narrative is not merely a chronological construction, but one that 'emerges in a continuous synthesis of various times and time orders' (p56) and 'shaped by visions of time suggested by the canonical narrative repertoire of a culture' (p57) such as folk tales, novels, case histories, texts, obituaries, references, even psychological reports. He identifies six distinct forms of identity narrative time, any or all of which can be used in a single identity narrative:

- **the linear:** This conceptualises time as 'arrow and flow', and is found in simple narrative genres such as the folk tale. In these tales of development and progress, life is seen as a 'journey', a 'process', a 'striving', and life experiences are woven into a linear chronology to demonstrate causality and purpose;

- **the circular:** Presupposing a view in hindsight, this format presents a re-configuration of the past to align with the present; the end is known at the beginning. As in the modern autobiography, goal directed development is presented as if the present was an automatic or logical outcome of the past, an unfolding rationality;

- **the cyclic:** Commonly found in psychoanalytic theory and folk psychology, and using a 'theatre of life' metaphor, this is a time format in which life events are presented as a series of repetitive structures, re-appearing in slightly different form or context throughout the life course;

- **the spiral:** Life experience is ordered around a central theme, the protagonist's 'hunger for life' continuously widening the theme and 'increasing' the experience. This reflects an 'opening of doors' metaphor;
the static; Revolving around one central, usually catastrophic, theme such as trauma or illness, this time format presents an immovable picture of an all-dominating experience or of irresolvable contradictions and conflicts. This reflects stagnant 'frozen in time' metaphors;

the fragmentary; Life experience is presented as discontinuous, shifting or polycentric, reflecting 'patchwork', 'snapshot' or 'mosaic' metaphors. Increasingly evident in post-modern identity narrative, this format reflects the openness and flux of life.

Brockmeier claims that, while there are only graded differences between the first four 'developmental' time ordering formats, the latter two seem to lack developmental trajectory, life process, direction or goal; they are 'timeless' models of narrative identity.

Narrative meaning

Freeman (1998) distinguishes between three forms of meaning in identity narrative; the archaic, the historical and the paradigmatic:

The archaic. One 'ready interpretation' for invoking meaning in identity narrative is to perceive one's experiences as connected to those of all who have gone before. Circular or cyclic time formats project personal experience into mythical time, every significant act or event having been performed or experienced in the first instance by a god, an ancestor or a heroine. Life experience is then inherently meaningful; it is manifested in ancient stories, or 'moving forms, at once musical and narrative, which inform people's sense of the story of which their own lives are a part, of the moving course of their own action and experience' (Freeman 1998:32). The individual exists with others in an interdependent eternal recurrence, an essential sameness, and the group maintains its identity in spite of the constant renewal of its members (Gusdorf 1980).

When identity narratives employ this meaning-making format, narrators can story themselves 'largely outside of conscious awareness' (Demorest 1995:572); the self 'unfolds' in a pre-determined sequence. One inherits one's destiny, and the 'accidental' is catalytic or incidental (Freeman 1998). These identity narratives have a fundamentally archetypal quality, that is, stories are not
merely created, they are revealed or discovered with a 'sort of foreknowledge or faint inkling of the thing you are going to find' (Jung, in Covington 1995:411).

The historic. The second 'ready interpretation' for invoking meaning in identity narrative is to perceive one's experiences as connected to those of one's own which have gone before. Spiral or linear time formats project personal experience into an historical trajectory, a 'thematic line', which organises and directs the flow of the identity narrative, through a beginning and a middle and towards a desired end-point (Singer 1995a). Reflecting the 'liberation of humanity from nature' (Freeman 1998), the individual self is conceptualised as unique. In this meaning format, rather than being embedded in time, we experience time transactionally as we move through birth, adolescence, partnership, work, death, etc. and we develop through it. If stories fail to cohere, we risk losing meaning, and hence a sense of self, altogether (Nelson 1998).

The formless. The third 'ready interpretation' for invoking meaning in identity narrative is to reject the consolation of narrative form altogether. Static and fragmentary time formats project personal experience into a 'documentary' or narrative argument: the 'cinematographic' (Lloyd in Freeman 1998). As reality is unorganised, narrative order distorts by imposing order and renders identity fictitious; human experience is therefore ordered in space rather than time (Nelson 1998). In this format, the present moment is conceptualised akin to a threaded bead, accidentally related to the moments around it, and always presented as part of a contextually defined ensemble. The self in this meaning format 'may in fact appear to be little more than a collection of such moments, strewn through historical time' (Freeman 1998:44), or composed of multiple narrative threads: a 'textual self' (Ryan 1998).

These three meaning formats are not necessarily discrete. Indeed, the historic may be a modern form of the archaic, with the myth of eternal return giving rise to the myth of the 'ever-new central and sovereign being' and the formless, in its quest to experience something larger than human narrative constraint, may be, unwittingly and in the ultimate circular formation, paving the way for a return to the archaic (Freeman 1998).

Therefore, while people may have preferences for particular affectional states, shaped by affectively similar past incidents, archetypal characters, background
values and beliefs and strongly held desires for future outcomes, they are nonetheless constrained within the culturally determined scenarios available to them (Singer 1995). Our culture, transmitted through myths, stories, art, song, etc., dictates a finite number of patterns within which we can assign affect and categorise events. The authorial self imagines the future, reconstructs the past, and describes the present (Hermans 1996), making choices from the cultural menu in more or less conscious ways, and inevitably 'proving' inherent ideologies and prejudices (Greenberg 1995) determined by social constraints and cultural expectations (Singer 1995). While not entirely reflective of a basic level of experience, cultural forms of narrative are the means by which we come to experience and contest causality, connection and coherence; they are the means by which we negotiate the moral and relational demands society places upon us (Singer 1995).

2.4 The structure of lesbian identity narrative

In a marginalised lesbian sub-culture, the question arises whether narrative structures are constrained by the dominant heterosexual cultural group, or modified to accommodate the minority lesbian cultural group. Individual women come to lesbianism at a variety of ages and in a variety of circumstances (Rust 1993). According to their age and/or identity development, they are likely to have pre-existing scripts and ready interpretations, developed through early experiences in company with family and social support networks. However, these must then be applied to the structuring of lesbian identity roles, events or behaviours. It seems reasonable to question then whether lesbian-specific 'thematic lines', occur in lesbian identity narrative. Homosexual researchers have attempted to identify archetypes recognised by gay and lesbian community members (cf. McFarland & McMahon 1999) in order to foster positive ready interpretations of homosexual identity throughout the developmental stages. If lesbian-specific thematic lines do exist, again it seems reasonable to question whether they reflect mainstream narrative myths and formats or lesbian cultural narrative myths and formats, that is, whether they conform to the dominant culture's meanings and interpretations about lesbian identity, or reflect meanings and interpretations specific to the lesbian group. This becomes the second task of the current study.
3. **Performed identity narrative**

(I was) trying to sort of build up the nerve to say to someone ... 'I am really totally out of my depth, I want to talk to someone, I want to sort of work some stuff out'. (Participant 10)

I joined the Lesbian Choir and so in a sense came out very publicly every time I sang (Participant 8)

If identity is created in interaction with others, how does the presence of another affect the authoring of identity? Communication with another is not a matter of transferring private ideas from one person to another, but of one person occupying a particular 'position' in a discourse and attempting to influence another (Shotter 1993). Narrators can demonstrate, or construct, a desired identity, in part, not simply by foregrounding referential aspects of narrative, ie. descriptions of the self as the desired person, but by acting and reacting to the audience as that person (Wortham 2000).

There are two explanations of the way in which an audience affects a narrative. One contends that the self is positioned in relation to a 'private audience', present or imagined, specific or generalised, actual or fantasised (Lucius-Hoeve & Depermann 2000, Baldwin & Holmes 1987). Studies (Baldwin et al 1990, Anderson & Cole 1990) suggest that, even more than stereotypes, 'significant others form rich, unique and accessible internal representations that may function as a private audience that watches or listens to the person and responds to him or her with affect-laden evaluations' (Hermans 1996:39). Further, 'imaginal dialogues are always at work and influence one's daily life to a significant degree. They exist beside actual dialogues with real others, and, interwoven with actual interactions, they constitute an essential part of one's narrative construction of the world' (p:41).

Indeed, Caughey (1984) and Watkins (1986), reject the distinction between 'inner' and public worlds, claiming that the only difference is the interaction with imagined versus actual people.

The second explanation contends that a person positions him/herself in relation to a public audience: we must position ourselves in relation to others if we are to be judged by them as legitimate. Cognitive representations of generalised social relationships, or 'relational schemas', provide expectations about how a particular
interaction will proceed, a schema for how the self will be experienced in that situation, and a schema for how the other person will expect the interaction to proceed (Hermans 1996). The listener is therefore a 'co-author' of the narrative, as much through 'communicative listening' such as displaying attention, understanding, displaying appropriate affect, etc., which prolong or invite redirection of the story, as through the assumptions made about each other from prior, or anticipated subsequent, contexts (Lucius-Hoene & Depermann 2000). The distances between our own position and that of others 'constitute the "semantic landscape" into which our attempted formulations must be directed' (Shotter 1993:382). Different people will ask different questions, and the same question, when asked by different people, will lead to different explanations. People experiment with dialogue to get a feel of the gaps between them, a sense of what is within their agency to affect, and to decide the best course of action in a particular circumstance (Hermans 1996).

3.1 Positioning in narrative

The narrator uses phonological, lexical and syntactical cues to implicitly and explicitly 'highlight' certain aspects of the narrative (see Lucius-Hoene & Depermann 2000, Wortham & Locher 1996), from which the audience must infer the interactional positioning. A (real or imagined) listener 'understands' an utterance by connecting it with what was uttered before it, hence the narrator's position 'emerges' from the 'sequential implicativeness of the story' (Wortham 2000:231) and from 'what it has amounted to' (p233). Gregg (1995) uses a musical analogy to explain the association between identity and its performance. He contends that the listener unconsciously produces multiple and simultaneous interpretations as on a piece of music, while a 'selection function' (similar to that used in linguistic and visual processing) designates one as salient. This salient interpretation generates anticipations, which will either be confirmed, or disconfirmed, prompting a shift to an alternative salient interpretation. Affect is generated by the realisation or violation of one's expectations and the tension produced by the presence of conflicting out-of-awareness structures. Extending this musical analogy, Gregg contends that identities are as notes on a particular scale; once the first few notes have established the scale, a tone (or particular identity) is
heard as a sense of departure from or return to the octave end-points (or global identity).

3.2 Positioning within the group

Group identity defines an individual's position in interaction with others of the group, simultaneously motivating particular activities or role performances, imbuing them with personal meaning (Cameron & Lalonde 2001, Burke 1980, Stryker 1980, Foote 1951, and others), and providing opportunities for self-verification and for identification and categorisation by others (Riley & Burke 1995). In a group, influences include not only the link between the person's identity, motivation and behaviour, but also the maintenance of that link in the face of others' expectations, motivations and behaviour (Riley & Burke 1995). Groups create, maintain and employ a 'highly selective use of collective imageries, vocabularies, and mythologies' (Strauss 1995:10) in order to interpret each other's behaviour and co-ordinate interaction, and performances are assessed in terms of meanings of identity generated in interaction (Burke & Reitzes 1981, Swan & Lineham 2000). Group identity is therefore achieved and maintained through communication and negotiation with other group members (McCarthy 2000). Perceiving a gap between one's self-concept and others' feedback often leads to distress and dissatisfaction, either with the self or with the group, for 'each person has a "reputation" to win and to keep if their claimed social identity is to be credible' (Emler & Hopkins 1990:113).

A narrator's negotiating of her group identity may necessitate complex positioning in dialogical exchange (real or imagined) with other group members, which may also be affected by the extent to which she experiences her identity as complex and differentiated from others (Labouvie-Vief et al 1995). With age, and the evolution of cognitive structures that are not strictly tied to age, the self becomes increasingly complex and differentiated from primary others, transcending institutional descriptions and contextual constraints, and moulded by complex psychological and historical conflictual and multivalenced processes (Labouvie-Vief et al 1995). Autobiographical narratives can also be affected by the way in which an individual has come to 'know' herself, a function of the way she relates to knowledge itself. A woman's 'knowing' can range from passive acceptance of others' views or official
opinion to a contested positioning in relation to dominant paradigms (Belenky et al 1986).

Strongly identified group members perceive themselves and their group differently to peripheral members; their narratives may reflect different levels of private and/or public group esteem, different stages of investigation and socialisation, and varying degrees of social change. Distinct positioning strategies, according to the type and level of group identification, have been identified in the literature. For example,

♦ Brewer & Weber (1994) claim that people are driven by two conflicting needs, inclusion and uniqueness; high identifiers tend to describe the uniqueness of the group, while low identifiers tend more to describe their own uniqueness within the group.

♦ Dickerson (2000) reveals that self-categorisation performed in discourse can be used to deprecate the self in relation to others; it can also be used to distance oneself from certain other categories (Widdicombe 1998) or to position the self favourably in relation to others (McKinlay & Dunnett 1988).

♦ DeCremer (2001) claims that group members may maintain or enhance their group identity by positively differentiating the in-group from a relevant out-group evaluatively and in reward allocation; there is therefore a direct relationship between a person's need to maintain self-esteem and her level of intergroup differentiation. There is a debate about whether intergroup differentiation is a cause or product of self-esteem (see Long & Spears 1997, Rubin & Hewstone 1998 for reviews). Engaging in in-group favouritism may elevate self-esteem, or low self-esteem may prompt people to engage in in-group favouritism or bias. Similarly, people high in private collective self-esteem enhance in-group status by displaying in-group bias, while those low in private collective self-esteem protect the group by displaying out-group derogation (DeCremer 2001).

♦ Klein & Azzi (2001) maintain that self-stereotyping will vary with the situational salience of group membership and with the group membership of the audience; high identifiers tend to conform to contextually salient group norms and to exert themselves on behalf of the group more so than low identifiers, but when responses are public and when the audience is the in-group, low identifiers may
feel more accountable to the group and hence modify their presentation to appear to conform to in-group expectations (Barreto & Ellemers 2000).

3.3 Positioning a stigmatised identity narrative

As a member of a stigmatised identity group, a lesbian must position herself in relation to stigmatised others. Her identity narrative is therefore affected to varying degrees by her attitudes to her stigma, her levels of homophobia (Nungesser 1983) and/or by her perceived level of family and social support (Morrow 1996). The stigma of her lesbian identity may also affect the level of anxiety the narrator has in regard to the impressions that her narrative may be creating. Social Anxiety is defined as 'a psychological discomfort in the presence of others' (Watson et al 1996), and appears to stem from individuals' perceptions of the impression others are forming of them (public self-consciousness), and from an unrealistic schemata for the ideal self combined with an underestimation of the real self (Monfries & Kafer 1994). Social anxiety has been correlated with selective memory for negative interactions, internal attributions for failure situations and negative reactions of others, and external attribution for favourable evaluations (Monfries & Kafer 1994). Narrators with high levels of fear of negative evaluation may seek non-evaluative social situations, fear evaluative situations, and/or expect evaluation where none is intended, and create a need or preference for privacy, or for disclosure of selective aspects of her lesbian identity. Accordingly, she may narrate her identity from a primarily private or a primarily public vantage point (Nasby 1996).

When prompted for identity narrative by another person, the narrator may recall perceived negative or positive life events which will best enhance her prevailing narrative and/or personal goals and purposes; recall of life events for autobiographical narration is influenced by prevailing affect, more so than affect at the actual time of the event (Debats, Drost & Hansen 1995). When negative life events occur in salient identity roles, feelings of well-being decrease significantly (Krause 1994); this in turn affects personal narratives of current life circumstances and personal standards or ideals (Rapkin & Fischer 1992) or the ability to find or reflect meaning in life (Debats, Drost & Hansen 1995).
If lesbian identity narrative is performed in relation to other lesbians, it seems reasonable to assume that such narrative will evidence positioning strategies, and result in patterned evaluative closures. The third task of the current thesis then is to establish whether or not different types of narrative reflect different narrators' accommodation to lesbian identity, reflected in 'positioning' in relation to another group member.
The functions of identity narrative

My first homecoming was finding my community of women, and my second homecoming was coming out as a lesbian (Participant 43).

The development of identity narrative is deemed fundamental to an individual's sense of self, the means by which one is able to live an examined life (Myerhoff 1992). McAdams' (1988) life-story model of identity suggests that 'from birth to death, individuals are engaged in the constructive work of self-definition; their primary tool in the forging of an identity, of a sense of "who I am", is a narrative, the tale of their own lives' (Singer 1995a:258).

One's life experiences can never be regulated with predictability or consistency, but they can be engaged and analysed as they occur (Morny 1993), and in an attempt to find meaning, humans order their experiences for short term understanding or for more sustained comprehension (King 1995). Narrative interpretation then is a way of contextual knowing, one marked by the constant interaction of lived experience and the learned social structures or parameters of knowing. Involved in this interaction, in 'ceaseless dialogue', are both explanation, or evaluation of content, and understanding, or assimilation of material (Phinney 2000, Morny 1993). Narrative identity, or the storied self, 'emerges as a by-product of the interactive process of sustaining a definition of the situation' (Miller et al 1990:293).

Freeman (2001) perceives identity itself as an individual's unique narrative style, embodied in life narrative and affected by autobiographical consciousness, narrative imagination and narrative connectedness. Narrative construction can capture the diversity of identity-shaping experiences, the contemporary and historical changes within family, friends, institutions and broader culture which shapes identity (Yi & Shorter-Gooden 1999).

Identity narrative reflects one's life experience, but is both the end and the means; it is simultaneously the process of formulating the individual's albeit temporary summation of her/his response to social and contextual experience, and the means by which s/he conveys that response to others. It can have authority and legitimacy only if recognised by the audience, and is therefore necessarily subject to culturally imposed constraints.
That which frames the group's identity also defines the group's existence as moral, right and good, and underpins its very right to exist (Taylor 1989). The group therefore provides narratives that inform social negotiations, and that supply for the individual member moral support, social comparison for defensive strategies, and protection from negative cultural messages (Frable, Platt & Hoey 1998, Cogan 1999, Zipkin 1999). Group narrative establishes a 'moral frame' within which one determines, event by event, what is good or valuable and what to endorse or oppose, and by which one relates one's personal life to a wider community and historical tradition (Taylor 1989); the criteria for evaluating moral identity roles 'are constructed from one's imaginings as influenced by cultural narratives' (Sarbin 1995:219).

Structural forms of identity narrative developed by western cultures provide causal linkages, evaluative closure (Gergen 1986), and a dynamic situatedness of self in face-to-face interaction (Goffman 1959). The temporal dimension of identity narratives (Ricoeur 1984) allows for the representation of 'self-continuity' and hence self-awareness (Hallowell 1955). Identity narrative then is the means by which the individual can interpret her/himself within a narrative framework provided by and negotiated with other individuals within the group, and through which s/he can demonstrate a culturally acceptable existence.

Identity narratives may sometimes correspond only minimally with the interpretations of others, but whether a narrative is 'true' or 'untrue' is an erroneous distinction; they must have flexibility sufficient to satisfy the demands of the many and varied contexts in which they are constructed, and the many and varied identity constructions their authors wish to convey. People seek to create plausible identity narratives; 'a good narrative is likely to suggest many different interpretations (which) reflect the culture wherein the interpreter resides, meaning that the "same" text changes meaning over time' (McAdams 1995:209). To achieve coherence and overcome confusion or contradiction in social information, they can add missing details or omit redundant ones (Baumeister & Newman 1994), and to negotiate institutionalised and social forces they can distort self-understanding to assert agency, authenticity and self-actualisation (Sloan 1992). 'Like a good many of our beliefs and constructions, (identity) narratives, for many, appear to be beneficial untruths' (Freeman 1998:28).
Because they employ a range of evaluative devices to convey their meaning or significance to the narrator, identity narratives can reveal implicit propositions about the self (Miller et al 1990), and are often used to 'provide formal evidence toward important life goals' (Gerrig 1994:714). They are therefore used to serve a particular purpose at a particular time (Baumeister & Newman 1994, Murray & Holmes 1994, Gonzales, Haugen & Manning 1994).

4.1 Regulative function

An important goal of narrative identity is self-regulation. Baumeister (1991) claims that identity narratives are used to simultaneously develop and demonstrate what the narrator strives to be. He claims that they reflect four basic human needs:

♦ the need for a sense of purpose, motivating an interpretation of events as causally linked to actual or possible subsequent events and the construction of sometimes exaggerated accounts of fulfilment arising from certain actions;

♦ the need for a sense of right and wrong, which motivates the construction of a justification of specific actions;

♦ the need for a sense of efficacy and control, which motivates the maximising or minimising of personal responsibility for actions and the construction of a stable, predictable world; and

♦ the need for a sense of self-worth, which motivates the exaggeration of one's virtue, often by adding extraneous materials to emphasise self-worth, and the defusion of potential threats to one's self-worth.

Identity narratives are also a means of regulating behaviours towards a desired future outcome (Showers & Cantor 1985). Individuals authors themselves to fit desired identity outcomes or goals by establishing comparisons between a current status and a desired endpoint (Karoly 1993); indeed, organisation and retrieval of autobiographical memories are thought to be related to goal-specific categories rather than to decontextualised conceptual knowledge (cf. Conway 1990, Rubin 1986). Singer (1995) claims that self-defining memories are linked to personal values, have an increased affective intensity when related to current life goals, and are rated as more important than other memories. In autobiographical recall, which serves both cognitive and affective functions, we select memories that either relate to the achievement of desired goals and produce positive affect, or to the avoidance

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of feared ends and produce negative affect; during recall, avoidance strivings stimulate negative memories related to non-attainment of goals, while attainment strivings stimulate positive memories related to goal achievement (Moffitt & Singer 1994). Reiser (1983 in Singer 1995) suggests that recall of a given memory is a function of a hierarchical ordering of goals; events linked to higher level goals will be more salient and retrievable. Affective responses to events are closely related to the perceived contribution of those events to personal goals (Roseman, Spindel & Jose 1990), and represent the meaning of the event to the individual at the time of recall rather than at the time of the event (Holmes 1970), that is, they are related to the individual's perceived positive or negative value of (some of) her/his current 'personal strivings', or long-term goals (Emmons 1986). Identity narrative serves to regulate the individual because it is relevant to what s/he still seek to attain or avoid, and serves to 'comfort' by providing a picture of success, or to 'warn' by providing a picture of failure (Moffitt & Singer 1994).

4.2 Reconstructive function

Another of the important goals of identity narrative is to create an intelligible, consistent and unbroken life story (Covington 1995). Failure to achieve set goals, or disruptions to desired identities, can lead to post-decisional regret, cognitive dissonance, or 'crystallisation of discontent' and prompt a reappraisal of identity (Klingemann 1991, Stewart, Franz & Layton 1988, Stewart et al 1986). This can result in dramatic changes in life regard (Debats, Drost & Hansen 1995) and may threaten basic assumptions about the meaning of life and the extent of personal vulnerability, control and self-worth (Fiske 1993). Hence major disruptive events can impel a 'quantum change', that is, a sudden, unexpected and profound change in core values, attitudes, perceptions, goals and behaviours; reconstructive narrative is a means of sustaining one's identity in this context (Crossley 2000, Hyden 1995), providing a sense of consistency and progress, stability and change, by aligning current identities with past identities.

For individuals who reflect a successful adaptation to change in life regard, identity narratives often comprise the resolution of a major challenge, an escape from an aversive or intolerable situation, a focal event or critical incident which led them to realign their behaviour with their overall self-perception, and/or a change in
identity which enabled them to 'bracket off the behaviour as reflective of the past and not predictive of the future' (Heatherton & Nichols 1994:673). They also depict change as a response to external circumstances, an external threat, a 'significant other' role model, a focal event that happened to someone else, a crystallisation of discontent and/or a flash of insight, and their change is related to increased self-knowledge and understanding and a reappraisal of goals. For example, Heatherton & Nichols (1994) found that respondents who had achieved life changes produced narratives which followed the 'happily-ever-after' structure: a protagonist overcomes major challenges and obstacles to find reward and happiness. Reconstructive narrative seeks a happy ending; promised redemption is an ancient story type, common in ancient myth and all major religions (McAdams et al 2001). One way to construct a happy ending is to assert that the protagonist has grown in some way because of the experience (King 2001). Benefiting from adversity scripts have been associated with better recovery and adjustment; trauma survivors report broader self-understanding, greater self-knowledge, greater emotional expressiveness in relationships, changed philosophies of life, and/or changes in existential or spiritual beliefs (Tedeschi & Calhoun 1995). Reconstructive narratives have also been found to emphasise benevolence over malevolence, meaningfulness over randomness, self-worth over self-abasement (Janoff-Bulman 1992). McAdams et al (2001) identified 'redemption' sequences within life story episodes, and found that redemption sequences, or the transformation from a negative life scene to a subsequently positive life scene by changing to a positive situation (e.g. alcoholism changing to sobriety) or by producing a positive outcome (e.g. grief leading to personal growth), were positively associated with high levels of self-reported well-being, adaptation, self-esteem and sense of coherence. Indeed, redemption sequences were more positively associated with well-being and life-satisfaction than was the overall affect in the narrative. McAdams et al also found that, in narrative accounts of major life turning points, redemption sequences contained a great deal of negative affect, but ultimately affirmed hope and positive outcome and/or affect. They were also less frequent than pure-positive sequences but held more power and value to the narrators. The challenge was not in the present; rather, past challenges were interpreted in such a way as to show that good things can come from bad life events. For some people, bad things were followed by good, but for others, antecedents and consequences

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were framed to attach a positive outcome to an otherwise negative event. For example Bauer (1999) found that narratives of personal worth, continuity and connection to others following the death of a spouse predicted more adaptive long-term adjustment. Heatherton & Nichols (1994), in an analysis of autobiographical narratives about a recent major life change, found that people tended to 'discredit the former source of meaning and justify their change by emphasising past difficulties' (p666). Reconstructive narrative then may actually reflect the 'hard work of accommodation' in which people 'perceive themselves as changing through their important life transitions, as moving from being naïve (but perhaps happy) to being quite troubled, to being happy again, but wiser for the experience' (King 2001:57).

Pals (2001) found that not all reconstructive narratives reflect positive identity. She identified four distinct constructions of self after difficult life experiences: 'transformed' identity, characterised by open and resolved emotions; 'conflicted' identity, characterised by open and unresolved emotions; 'distanced' identity, characterised by closed and resolved emotions; and 'threatened' identity, characterised by closed and unresolved emotions. These constructions, she claims, were related to personality patterns and processes in earlier life, and predicted psychological outcomes in later life.

However, narrative can only be told when the narrator knows the ending (Brooks 1984). In some narratives, such as chronic illness or disorder narratives, there is no distinct ending, and the narrator must search for a temporary endpoint, or 'platform', from which to order relations among actions and with which to connect the current disruptive event with one's previous life narrative, goals, and central moral values (Davidson & Strauss 1992). It also entails establishing a 'voice' with which to establish the relationship of author to event, and a 'frame' within which to determine events and persons involved and to allocate blame and responsibility to self, other or chance (Hyden 1995). For example, in a study of people who had developed a mental illness of some sort, Hyden (1995) found that reconstruction not only involved creating or sustaining a self-image or identity, it also involved sustaining one's morality and allocating responsibility for the disease; one must come to terms with not only what happened, but why it happened. Early (1982) also found that women's illness narratives provided biographical context for illness,
imbued diagnoses with personal meaning and connected personal experience with dominant cultural illness narratives.

From a social identity perspective then, identity narratives are not the reflection of an essential nature that constitutes an identity. Rather, our experience of our identity differs according to the role we occupy, that is, the static, formal and ritualistic aspects of interaction (Swan & Lineham 2000), and our narration of it constitutes the way we are positioned in relation to others, that is the dynamic and situational aspects of interaction (Davies & Harre 1999). Our identity narratives are the means by which we can demonstrate a culturally embedded existence.

4.3 A stigmatised identity narrative

The development of a lesbian identity narrative is necessarily influenced by the perception of the lesbian group as stigmatised. Stigma has been viewed as a stable, pervasive and enduring negative experience associated with characteristics that cannot be eliminated, and being culturally stigmatised can lead to personal and institutionalised rejection. However, Brown (1998) contends that stigma may be contextual, that is, 'inextricably connected to the social context and to one's relationship to others in that context' (p164). Members of stigmatised groups do not necessarily have more negative self-concepts than members of valued groups (for review see Crocker & Major 1989); rather, certain situations lead members of stigmatised groups to expectations of being devalued in those situations. However, if those situations occur across several domains, they may become central to the self-concept, or even 'chronically accessible' (Brown 1998).

Research suggests that this is more likely to translate into negative self-perception for those with a concealable stigma, such as a lesbian identity, than those with a non-concealable stigma, such as a physical disability, primarily due to the former's more restricted access to similar others (Frable, Platt & Hoey 1998). Those with concealable stigmas have the most difficulty finding similar others. The dangers of judging others incorrectly or disclosing inappropriately are ever-present, and this increases vulnerability to feelings of social isolation and negative self-perception. Frable, Platt & Hoey found this to be true regardless of the nature of the concealable stigma, differences in group identity or perception, or distinctive

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context. Intuitively, exposure to other stigmatised group members may make salient the disadvantages of having such a stigma, so social isolation may be perceived as providing some protection against rejection. However, Frable, Platt & Hoey found to the contrary: over time, the presence of similar others was the only factor that increased self-esteem in students with a concealable stigma. Stigmatised identities regularly seek to appear in the light of their own definitions and interpretations, creating a moral explanation to counter the established cultural interpretations (Myerhoff 1992).

When a woman adopts a lesbian identity in a heterosexist society she becomes a member of a stigmatised group. Social forces can make the price of identity change, for women in particular, very high. Social and cultural expectations primarily constrain a woman's identity within the domain of responsibility, or an understanding of the importance of taking care of others; a woman's identity is therefore influenced by the competing demands of self and other (Gilligan 1982). For the essentialist, this is a matter of balancing 'erotic' or 'ethical' drives; the erotic emphasises individual difference or separateness, and stems from the need or desire for rebellion, autonomous agency, empowerment, pleasure and danger, while the ethical emphasises interrelatedness, and gives rise to the need for community, accountability, and entrustment (Morny 1993). For the social constructionist, it is a matter of developing either 'self-defining' or 'socially-defined' identities (Jenkins 1996). Self-defining women are those with 'internally developed' identity and behaviour that reflects personal preferences, while socially-defined women are those whose identity comprises socially established definitions and behaviours that conform to cultural norms, or the preferences of others. Jenkins claims that the identity narratives of the two groups demonstrate distinctive emotional and cognitive organisation of experience. Self-defining women show complex and integrated causal cognition, are more autonomous and goal-oriented, see themselves as causal agents capable of focused and purposive action and see the world as rational, ordered and responsive to their initiatives. They are more likely to achieve identity through exploration, and, in order to negotiate constraining social prescriptions, may create or join sub-systems which support the desired identity. Socially-defined women, in contrast, are organised non-causally, are focused on mental states and show less reflective thinking, assimilate to established relationship and social roles, take less instrumental initiative, reflect rather than act

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on their internal experience, and view the world as chaotic. They are more likely to achieve identity through consistent, supportive and elastic relationships, and are more likely to ask for help from powerful others in order to assimilate to social norms.

4.4 Lesbian identity narrative

The unintended consequences and negative social reflections for a woman's script that suddenly challenges the status quo may be difficult to weave into the intended life story (McKeegan 1992). In formulating and conveying her response to her experience of lesbianism a woman is bound by the narrative constraints provided by the dominant heterosexual culture which restrict her response to illness or deviance formats. As marginalised identities, lesbians are denied their own 'voice' in describing their lives and determining their identity, and are judged on the basis of dominant group standards. For example, the dominance of heterosexuality leaves homosexuality to be defined by its lack of heterosexual properties; the latter becomes the 'ground', while the former is the 'figure', and so is judged as deviant (Sampson 1993). As lesbians attain less power, prestige and status than female heterosexuals and/or male homosexuals, they do not have the opportunity to decide the dimensions upon which they will be differentiated. It is therefore comparatively problematic for lesbian groups to develop positive distinctiveness and enhance and maintain positive social identities or a clearly defined culture, and they may be forced into separatist or reactive domains in order to establish their group identity (Taylor 1989). Consequently they are denied a culturally acceptable existence.

Lesbian identity research claims that a lesbian will seek lesbian community as part of her identity transition process, and that disclosing a lesbian identity to others is a formulative part of that transition. Narrative research would imply that this is possible because the lesbian community provides narrative constraints that do allow for a culturally acceptable interpretation of lesbian experience. Disclosure within lesbian community then is a means of both formulating, conveying, and achieving recognition for, an acceptable existence. Lesbian identity narrative is drawn from individual experiences and from the cultural menu of myth, media representation, and symbol systems by which they are interpreted, resulting in
'dramaturgical' rhetoric, in which the actor is the author engaging in various strategies for advancing a moral or otherwise advantageous position, and 'dramatistic' rhetoric, in which cultural narrative, literary stereotype, art form and folklore become the author, providing an interpretation of others' conduct, and a guide for one's own (Sarbin 1995).

However, although groups and individuals show patterned reactions to situations that confront or challenge group identity, post-modernists challenge the social constructionist view of a uniform group experience. Researchers tend to approach lesbian studies with the assumption that lesbians are a homogeneous group, but very few studies are devoted to the differences between lesbians, possibly because sample sizes are characteristically small and participants are representative of only the 'out' or clinical populations, (although see Golden 1987, Eisner 1982). However, as post-modernists point out, there are often more differences than similarities among lesbian populations, and the assumptions of homogeneity plaguing both essentialist and constructionist based theory render a great deal of individual lesbian experience invisible. For example, while some women struggle to create a positive identity, many lesbians assert feelings of profound and joyful self-discovery, sexual liberation or personal integration on realisation or performance of a lesbian identity (Sharp 1997).

Further, community is 'dynamic, historically determined, and complex' (Wiesenfeld 1996:345) and plagued with social and personal power inequalities. Chapple, Kippax & Smith (1998) found that among older gay males, social class, as defined by education and occupation, afforded individual members widely differing contexts within which experience, meaning and community involvement could be interrelated. Group existence can be complex and even contradictory in nature; variation within identity categories can be as important as variation between categories and multiple identity affiliations create further variations in the experience of the individuals within a group (Cerulo 1997). While the cohesive view of 'we' may imply that group members have internalised the group's definitions and a sense of social desirability, this does not necessarily reflect the daily experience of its members.

The final task of the current thesis then is to determine what functions are performed by lesbian identity narrative that afford lesbians with widely differing experiences of lesbianism a 'culturally acceptable existence'.
5. Rationale

A summary of the literature
Lesbian identity researchers have investigated definitions, typologies, etiologies, gender role correlates, and genetic, psychological and socio-historic influences on lesbian identity. The transition to lesbian identity is variously depicted as the progressive emergence of an essential identity, the progressive construction of an alternative identity, the progressive recognition and management of a stigmatised identity, the progressive acceptance of loss of heterosexual identity, and the progressive development of a lesbian consciousness.
Although lesbian identity research lacks specific lesbian group differentiation models, it is plausible that lesbian group identity development parallels generalist group identity developmental processes to a large degree. However, lesbian group identity is stigmatised to lesser or greater extents, and group members must adopt behavioural and interactive strategies to maintain self-efficacy and establish positive identities.
In the reflexive ordering of such an identity, an identity narrative is created, comprising 'scripts', or ready interpretations of familiar scenes from which identity narratives are developed. A functional group assists in the development process, providing for its members a dramatistic repertoire of narrative scripts, themes and structures by and within which individual members can organise and direct their identities. For lesbians, dramatistic repertoires asserted by the dominant heterosexual culture include constructions of lesbianism as immoral, as pathologically deviant, as socially or biologically confused, as sexually 'inverted', as genetically inevitable, or as social and sexual alternatives. Individuals in transition to this stigmatised group identity may seek to construct their narratives within the affirming constraints of the stigmatised group, contesting the repertoires of the stigmatising culture.

The current study
Although researchers have investigated particular aspects of lesbian identity expressed in narrative, few have investigated the structure and purpose of lesbian narrative as an identity narrative in its own right, that is, as a reflexive synthesising of all that a lesbian considers to comprise her lesbian identity. Further, although
the exercise of developing or communicating identity narratives which reflect or challenge group constraints would, intuitively, be accomplished in social interaction with like others, to date there has been little research into the difference in impact on lesbian identity development of disclosure to lesbian others as distinct from disclosure to others generally.

This thesis seeks to address a gap in the lesbian identity literature by determining whether identity narratives do reflect group narrative constraints on the reflexive organisation and communication of lesbian identity, and, if so, what role these narratives play in the development of lesbian identity.

Specifically, the thesis addresses the following questions:

- Question 1. Are there life events common to the experiences of lesbians?
  If so,

- Question 2. Do common life events comprise the elements of a lesbian identity narrative?

- Question 3. Are there identifiable 'scripts' in lesbian identity narrative?
  If so,

- Question 4. Are these scripts reflective of lesbian identity development, or accommodation to lesbian group identity?

- Question 5. Are there identifiable 'thematic lines' in lesbian identity narrative?
  If so,

- Question 6. Are these thematic lines reflective of lesbian identity development, or accommodation to lesbian group identity?

- Question 7. What functions do lesbian identity narratives perform in the development of lesbian identity?

Prior to an outline of the method of the thesis is an overview of the philosophy of research designs, and of factors to be considered when developing a research design; this provides a justification for several of the research design factors subsequently incorporated into the method of the current study.
6. Research design

6.1 Design philosophy

To maximise the congruency of a research project, the research design, including methodology, data gathering and analysis, must 'fit' the research objectives and, as far as possible, be congruent with and palatable to both the researcher and her perception of the participant population. In the current study, the development of the research design involved consideration of:

♦ the participant group
♦ marginality of the participant group,
♦ the scope of the study as specified and reflected by the narrative prompt and variables, and
♦ the applicability of established methods of analysis to the current research task, each of which is now addressed in turn.

6.2 The participant group

Gay and Lesbian Rights movements have destabilised definitions of masculinity, femininity, sexuality, relationships, family, etc., providing 'crucial cultural and historical changes that concern the constitution of bodies of knowledge and knowledge of bodies' (Britzman 1995:151). Yet this expanse of social change lacks reflection in the research; indeed, there is a marked absence of gay and lesbian theorising in the sexual or social identity formation and narrative research literature.

Early research processes themselves may have contributed to this situation. Traditional, positivist approaches which seek objectivity and universal laws have used comparative studies to highlight the marginal, but comparative group methods hold potential pitfalls. Critics claim an androcentric bias in mainstream psychology; women are either excluded from study or evaluated in comparison to a male-defined baseline (Yoder & Kahn 1993). Comparison groups analyses assume that control groups differ from experimental groups only on those factors manipulated by the researcher (Campbell & Stanley 1963), so that the experimental category's contribution to difference is exaggerated. Comparing women to a male-defined
baseline may therefore result in overgeneralisations, exaggerations of difference and evaluations of deficiency. A parallel bias develops if the white, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied woman is adopted as the female norm against which other female groups are evaluated (Yoder & Kahn 1993). Similarly, the differences between males' and females' experience of homosexuality are well documented (Kitzinger & Wilkinson 1995, Rust 1993, Gonsiorek & Rudolph 1991, Sarantakos 1998, De Monteflores 1986, Hart & Richardson 1981, De Monteflores & Schultz 1978) and have been identified in areas encompassing behaviour (Diamond 2000, Morris 1997, Bohan 1996), affect (Greer & Broussard 1990, Simon & Gagnon 1986) cognition (Rothblum & Brehony 1993, Frye 1983) and developmental trajectory (Dube 2000, Savin-Williams & Diamond 2000). Yet many conclusions about homosexuality are in fact applicable more to, or sometimes only to, male homosexuals. Much of the existing research fails to distinguish between the two populations, and women and bisexuals are still under-represented in current studies of homosexuality (Chung & Katayama 1996). The concept of sexual identity in males is often associated with sexual activity, for example, while the strong emotional and political elements of the lesbian experience are ignored. To ignore the diversity between male and female homosexual populations invites a consolidation of the theoretical bias apparent in early research; to address it was not the purpose of this thesis.

In the search for universal laws then, lesbians have predominantly been located in relation to male, male homosexual, or female heterosexual populations; rarely have they been accorded a position 'unhinged from the dominant conceptual order' (Britzman 1995:165). Lesbian studies are necessarily reflections of difference, but sexual orientation and other personal and social variables are intertwined; the concept of 'lesbian' cannot be understood in isolation from the other variables of identity that each lesbian embodies, just as the concept of 'woman' cannot be understood in isolation from the other concepts each woman embodies (Spelman 1988). Britzman (1995) challenges researchers to move beyond the simple inclusion of lesbian and gay differences, to engaging difference itself as the very basis of sociality, community and politics.

In light of the above, the current study avoided comparative analyses; specific to the lesbian experience, it was aimed toward the enrichment of lesbian theory in the sexual or social identity formation and narrative research literature.
6.2.1 Marginality of the participant group

Despite an increase in the diversity of female populations sampled in female studies in the 1980s, by far the most common sample is the white, American, able-bodied, presumed heterosexual, college student (Fine & Gordon 1989). While the aim in the current study was for the participant group to be as inclusive as possible of demographic differences among the lesbian population, the comparative invisibility of older, working class, and homophobic lesbians and lesbians of minority racial or ethnic groups (due to perceived greater levels of homophobia and/or lack of female autonomy in those groups, or to middle-class, white, heterosexual and/or 'out' researchers) is a problem which plagues a great deal of lesbian research, the current study being no exception.

Due to the difficulty in recruiting large numbers of lesbians in diverse categories, and hence the risk of missing or overgeneralising the contribution of minority culture factors to narrative structures, the ethnic or racial origin of participants was not taken into consideration. Socioeconomic location of participants was also not taken in into consideration, as established socioeconomic measures often distort more than they reveal about women's social location (Sharp 1997) and could therefore confound analysis rather than contribute to it. Hence the effort to recruit a diversity of participants was concentrated in the areas of age and length of time identifying as lesbian. These two factors were considered reliably measurable and crucial to the analysis, as the narratives of younger lesbians compared to those of older lesbians could, for example, reveal any effects of the supposed increased level of permissiveness in western societies in more recent times, while the narratives of newly-identified lesbians as compared with those of longer-identified lesbians could reveal information pertaining to stages in group identity development.

6.3 The research process

As an interactive process, a publicly narrated story is influenced by the (real or imagined) audience, the setting, the timing, and the trust developed between participant and researcher. Although the identity narrative is influenced by the goals of the audience, 'the informant may wish to construct, reflect on or rewrite a
life for purposes that in no way correspond to those of the interviewer' (Rubinstein 1995:193). Attitudes to telling one's story may range from presenting an 'ideal' self, assuming an 'appropriate' perspective, signalling one's group membership or getting the job done, and 'contexts of meaning are explored and illuminated at one particular time from one particular perspective' (Walsh 1996:379). Narrative itself therefore conceals, just as it reveals, aspects of lived experience (Walsh 1996); the stories themselves may reflect a fairly coherent 'press release' which masks deeper ambivalence and contradiction (Gregg 1995).

Porter (1995) claims that the researcher should be 'immersed in context' to gain a sense of the teller's perspective, but can specify the framework used for understanding context to allow for the appraisal and analysis of data. However, Janhonen (1993) claims that her immersion in the nursing profession had both positive and negative effects on the interviews she conducted with other nurses about nursing; her subject knowledge enabled her to design questions for a deeper understanding of the stories, but participants perceived her as knowing and therefore tended to give an idealised rather than informative view.

In the current study, the researcher was lesbian, and was known to be so by all participants. Power imbalances were minimised by the informality of the interview setting, and the initial narrative prompt, 'Tell me your story as a lesbian', allowed the participants to define for themselves the meaning, parameters and format of their response. The interactive process between researcher and participant was minimised as there was no interruption, comment or further prompting during the narration. Given that the goal of the current research was not to prove the veracity of the content but to identify alternatives employed in narrative itself, the fact that the participants may have idealised their stories or pursued goals which differed from, or were aimed to accommodate, those of the researcher, was irrelevant. If anything, such a situation may have facilitated a greater range of alternative narrative structures for analysis.
6.4 The research method

6.4.1 Lesbian narrative prompts

In autobiographical narrative research, careful consideration must be given to the manner in which narratives are to be elicited from the participant group. Identity narrative research designs commonly invite the participants to review their lives in their own way, in response to a cue or question; subsequent narrative responses are then distilled for common themes, structures or particular features. In the research literature, identity narratives have been analysed for features such as the strategies that lesbians used to promote self-acceptance (Sophie 1987), strategies used by lesbians to protect themselves against perceived or anticipated homophobia in the medical profession (Stevens 1994), the motives, meanings and processes involved in conscious efforts to change one's behaviour (Heatherton & Nichols 1994), consistency and change in ego-identity across cohorts (Helson, Stewart & Ostrove 1995), ethnic identity development (Yi & Shoter-Gooden 1999), and life events common to women involved in transition to lesbian identity (Kaufman 1997).

Identity narratives have also been analysed for structures such as cognitive and evaluative differentiation in self-description (Showers 1992, Pelham 1991), the narrative representation of interpersonal experiences (Demorest et al 1994), the relationship between narrative style and later-life satisfaction and adjustment (Sherman 1994), the complexity of self-representation (Labouvie-Vief et al 1995), recognition and predictability in autobiographical narrative (Clarke 1995), 'story line' trajectories (Sherman 1994, Gergen 1988), narrative coherence (Chance 1999), and the extent and effect of cognitive and evaluative differentiation on well-being during a life transition (Showers & Ryff 1996). Further, culturally specific themes have been identified in the narratives of successful business executives (Penef 1990) and of couples in transition to parenthood (Harold et al 1995). In lesbian research, Hall (2000) examined sequences in lesbian partnership narratives and identified themes of fateful first meetings and of triumphs over adversity which she claims may be the hallmarks of marginalised identities. Wesley (2000) examined the sequences in narratives of women who adopted a lesbian identity after becoming
mothers, and identified themes of facing fears, transcending hurdles and experiencing unprecedented peace and joy.

Departing from the usual question prompts for narratives to be analysed for structure, McAdams et al (2001) asked mid-life participants and college students to consider their lives as a book divided into chapters, and then to describe eight specific scenes, including a high point, a low point, a turning point, an earliest memory, important childhood, adolescent and adult scenes, and one other important scene. They then correlated redemption and contamination sequences in narratives with demographics, parenting, social support, political & religious involvement, generativity, well-being measures and overall affect, or 'emotional tone', finding that redemption sequences were associated with generativity, positive well-being, and positive emotional tone, while contamination sequences were associated with negative emotional tone.

There are variations in the cues or questions to prompt autobiographical response, some of which elicit 'micronarratives'. 'Micronarratives' are identity stories that represent what the person believes is important, and have become increasingly used in studies of dimensions difficult to research with traditional laboratory methods, such as anger, guilt, termination of relationships etc. (cf. Heatherton & Nichols 1994). Micronarratives are often evoked with prompts which focus respondents on the researcher's area of interest and often precede open-ended interviews. For example, in a study designed to reveal the strategies that lesbians used to protect themselves against perceived or anticipated homophobia in the medical profession, Stevens (1994) used an initial prompt to focus participants on the area of interest, 'What's it been like for you to get health care?', and only after the initial telling of stories were probes and reflective statements used to encourage clarification. Similarly, Edwards (2000) elicited micronarratives about sexual transition, Hill (1999) examined lesbians' interpretation of 'fusion' and 'closeness' in relationships, Hall (2000) examined micronarratives of relationship issues and events, and Deevey (2000) identified patterns in bereavement experiences among lesbian communities.

Not all prompts are questions: Orne (1995) administered the Near Death Experience Scale as a prompt for an initial unstructured interview about near-death experiences and followed this with a 'probe' interview. In a study of first-time parents, Harold et al (1995) provided a skeleton narrative structure comprising
several common life events or 'platforms' for their participants; this prompted a series of micronarratives, or a 'guided identity narrative', from each participant, which was compared and contrasted with others to provide information about adjustment processes.

Prompts for 'self-defining memories' are more likely than mere autobiographical requests to yield themes of self-discovery and understanding (Singer & Moffitt 1991/2), just as 'key scenes' in personal narrative explain the origin or transformation of personal identity (McAdams 1989). For example, Ussher & Mooney-Somers (2000), analysing the self-defining narratives of young lesbian adults, found that initial sexual encounters were cited as turning points to self-identification, repression of lesbian identity, and or development of management strategies. Dalton & Bielby (2000), analysing the self-defining narratives of lesbian co-parents, found that the decision to become parents signalled a commitment to the relationship, the development of a new 'lesbian-mother' identity, and the development of new strategies for negotiating a 'lesbian-family' status with outside agencies such as schools, etc. Neumann (1999) examined the meanings of rituals such as commitment ceremonies in the self-defining narratives of lesbian couples, finding that they signalled feelings of recognition and validation of relationships in the wider lesbian community.

A prompt which is more likely to elicit identity narrative for exploratory research may simply be a straightforward request for a story about a particular idea, time or event which is then analysed for emerging structure or theme. For example, Keller (1991) explored the narration of post-operative experiences among cancer patients, and found a 'seeking normalcy' process which identified and separated stages of survival, restoration and recovery, Gergen (1988) identified 'story lines' within the personal narratives of elders, and Sherman (1994) identified typologies in the narrative structures of elders. In studies focusing on narrative time perspectives, Brockmeier (2000) and Jansari & Parkin (1996) elicited life memories via verbal cues, Kornfeld & Marshall (1987), Goldrich (1967) and Wallace (1956) elicited them via projective tests, and Fingerman & Perlmutter (1995) and Whitbourne & Powers (1994) elicited them via time line cues.

Prompts can also direct identity narrative more stringently towards the area of interest to the researcher: Taylor (1983) asked cancer victims to describe their coping strategies, in order to assess continuity between cause and course of illness.
and prognosis; Conway & Ross (1984) asked students to describe their study effectiveness, in order to assess perceptions of improvement; McKeough, Templeton & Marini (1995) asked participants with varying literacy levels for 'a story about someone who had a problem to solve', in order to assess comparative levels of perceived action, intention, or motivation; and Showers & Ryff (1996) asked participants to describe how they 'felt different' in their new situation, in order to examine cognitive and evaluative differentiation during relocation to a retirement village or nursing home.

Prompts may also take the form of a task that the participant is required to complete: Orr & Lusczc (1994) administered problem-solving tasks in order to measure relativistic thought in identity narrative about the tasks; Riley & Burke (1995) presented a group dilemma and administered problem-solving tasks in order to assess the generation of identity in social interaction; Kornfeld & Marshall (1987), Goldrich (1967) and Wallace (1956) administered thematic apperception tests to assess time perspective in identity narrative; and Whitbourne & Powers (1994) administered 'life-drawing tasks' to assess attitude to life events. Several researchers have administered sentence completion tasks in order to analyse micronarratives for information about ego development (Loevinger 1979), personal aspirations (Lapierre, Bouffard & Bastin 1992), levels of complexity in self-reference (Labouvie-Vief et al 1995), and styles of identity construction (Jenkins 1996). Prompts may also comprise multiple tasks: Moffitt & Singer (1994) asked participants to recall a series of 'self-defining memories', list fifteen important goals, rate their goals along given dimensions, and rate the relevance of their self-defining memories to their goals. Alternatively they may comprise a single task over multiple instants, such as self-assessments at regular intervals during the course of a romantic relationship (Miell 1987) or during a life-changing event such as pregnancy (Smith 1994). They may also take the form of action research: Morrow (1996) conducted a 10-week group intervention designed to elicit ongoing autobiographical narratives or micronarratives about lesbian identity and disclosure issues.

In the current study the main aim was to identify the identity narrative options available to lesbians in interaction with each other. To focus the participants on a particular area of interest, task or self-assessment would be to risk the distortion of
narrative structures or the eliciting of 'micronarrative'; even requesting a 'life review' would limit narratives to those concerned with past issues or current evaluations.

The cue decided upon for this study was 'Tell me the story of you as a lesbian'. This admitted differing definitions of a 'story' and of a 'lesbian story' in particular, and therefore had the potential to elicit the widest range of available identity narrative structures. It also had the advantage of allowing the narrator to determine what was of interest and import (Froggart 1985), empowering her to draw the distinction between public and private (Elbaz-Luwisch 1997), to release her creativity in the pursuit of personal insight and goals, and to position herself in relation to the real or imagined audience. However it also inherited the disadvantage of allowing participants to focus on a particular issue or event if they wished, and thereby risked evoking micronarratives.

Husserl believed that 'the study of lived experience must be grounded in the life-world' (in Porter 1995:32). The current study adhered to this maxim in that participants were interviewed in their homes or appropriately informal social settings where autobiographical narratives might naturally occur, but it departed from 'life-world' experience in that, in order not to interrupt the narrative structures, there were no further cues, comments, questions or mutual elaborations from the researcher during the storytelling; hence some narratives may have been truncated as participants shied away from 'holding the floor'.

6.4.2 The variables

In order to investigate the influence of personal factors on identity narrative, a number of variables thought to influence narrative identity were chosen for assessment. Methods of assessment in prior studies are outlined below, and justifications are offered for the variables and methods of measurement employed in the current study.

Life events

In the current study it was considered necessary to identify which of the life events common to lesbians had been encountered by each participant, in order to
determine if and how they may have influenced her choice of available dramatistic alternatives.

Researchers have studied life events in order to identify commonalities among a participant group (Evans 2001, Waldner-Haugrud 1999, Kaufman 1997, Stevens 1994, Heatherton & Nichols 1994, Sophie 1987 and others), to analyse their meaning to, and/or effects on, the participants (LaSala 2001, Selvidge 2001, Dobinson & Young 2000, Savin-Williams & Diamond 2000, Harold et al 1995, Whitbourne & Powers 1994, Lee & Brann 1994, Demorest et al 1994 and others), to establish normative time frames (Rotheram-Borus & Langabeer 2001, Meyer & Schweitzer 1999, Garnets & Kimmel 1993 and others) or to identify their structure in narrative (Morrow 1999, Orne 1995, Keller 1991, Penef 1990 and others). Several methodologies have been employed: the researcher identifies the life events from a subjective analysis of the text; the researcher provides the life events and analyses the meaning of those events to the participants; the participant identifies the events while the researcher identifies commonality, meaning or structure in narrative; or the participants are asked to order life events by chronology, by importance or by current salience.

In the current study it was decided that to ask participants to identify life events after they had told their story was to risk inviting merely a retrospective analysis of their own narrative. To invite them to do so before they told their story may have risked establishing a particular focus, but if so, the choice of focus and the way that focus was realised in narrative would contribute to the purpose of the study rather than detract from it. Further, to avoid 'rehearsal' of subsequent narrative by asking participants to verbalise life events, life events common to lesbians, as identified and summarised by Kaufman (1997), were presented in list format, and participants were asked to tick those they had encountered.

Affect

The impact of current affect on life event recall is well documented in the literature (see Chapter 3 of this study). In the available research literature, measures of affect at the time of narration of identity are largely quantitative, but vary greatly in operational format. Research participants have been variously asked to indicate on a 5 point Likert scale the extent to which various positive and negative mood
adjectives describe them (Kercher 1992), or to indicate their level of agreement with statements of affect (Battista & Almond 1973). They have also been asked to record the frequency of experience of particular mood states (Radloff 1977); to score the presence of positive and negative affect, the difference providing an overall affect-balance indicator (Bradburn 1969); to indicate affect on a range of dimensions rather than just a positive/negative continuum (Singer 1990), or simply to rate current levels of happiness (Larsen & Fredrickson 2000). Visual analogue scales (cf. Teasdale & Fogarty 1979) can require participants to respond to statements about anxiety, depression, hostility and elation, and their responses are recorded along measurement lines, where length of line indicates intensity of mood state. Response states can also be chosen from an array of 'faces' demonstrating a happy-to-sad continuum (Andrews & Withey 1976); or from a number of minus/plus signs indicating affect balance (Andrews & Withey 1976).

In the current study, to avoid focusing the participants on particular mood states, a visual analogue scale was adopted for the measurement of overall current affect balance. Plus and minus measurements in the scale were considered more appropriate for the adult participant group than a continuum of faces, etc., and more representative of affect balance than measurement lines.

Identity

Several aspects of identity, or of personal or social environment, have been cited in the literature as impacting on identity narrative itself. Many of these have been measured in previous studies by way of Likert-type surveys, true/false questionnaires, self-reports, sentence completion tests, thematic apperception tests, interviews and/or narrative analyses. The first two of these methods, Likert-type surveys and true/false questionnaires, were chosen for this part of the current study because they provided a more objective measure than self-reports, sentence completion tests and thematic apperception tests, in contrast to the more subjective assessment of the narratives themselves. In contrast to narrative analysis methods they also drew on factors other than those mentioned in the narratives, and hence were able to give a less contextual measure of particular aspects of identity.
Demographics

Demographic measures in the current study were restricted to participants' age and number of years of identifying as lesbian, two factors which could provide information about the impact of habituation on identity narrative. By deduction they also provided the age at which the participant adopted her lesbian identity and hence could provide information about the impact of cohort on identity narrative. Influences stemming from an individual's minority culture are difficult to identify accurately unless large numbers of each minority culture group are represented in a participant group. Similarly, influences from socioeconomic differences are difficult to identify in such a socially mobile group (Sharp 1997) and without large numbers in all class, education, occupation, residence and income groups. The information gleaned from both these measures would no doubt have been valuable, but to provide a sufficient measure and analysis of such information the scope of the current study would have been widened beyond manageable limits.

Demographic measures in the literature are largely self-report or self-ratings on age scales, etc. In the current study, participants were simply asked to indicate their chronological age and to indicate the age at which they identified as lesbian.

Identity organisation

Particular styles of organising one's identity have been found to extend to the organisation of identity narrative. For example, Chance (1999) found that identity consolidation was associated with coherence of self-narrative, while Helson, Stewart & Ostrove (1995) found that identity 'types' were differentially reflected in women's autobiographical narratives of change at mid-life. Pulkkinen & Ronka (1994) found that commitment to identity as opposed to exploration of identity, as revealed in identity narrative, indicated distinct identity profiles based around notions of personal control over identity development, life satisfaction, and positive current and future identity evaluation. Commitment to a current lesbian identity and exploration of a current or future lesbian identity would, intuitively, yield differing dramatic alternative identities in identity narrative, and could potentially reflect...
differing levels of personal adjustment to that identity. These factors were therefore included in the current study.

The Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (Balistreri, Busch-Rosnagel & Geisinger 1995) was chosen as the assessment instrument, as it has advantages over other pencil-and-paper measurements of identity status, its continuous exploration and commitment scores provide a more sensitive measurement than implicitly dichotomous scales, and its separation of exploration and commitment scores allow an assessment of the individual contribution of each dimension rather than confounding the two in categorical status measures of identity.

**Group Identification**

Group identification levels were also considered to have a potential impact on lesbian identity narrative. Researchers have found that group identification levels affect responses to group status (Jetten, Spears & Manstead 1998, Spears, Dossje & Ellemers 1997), degree of conformity to group norms (Ellemers, Spears & Dossje 1997), construction of social and possible social identities (Baumeister 1995, Fiske 1995), and group perceptions and goals (Ellemers, Spears & Dossje 1997). In the current study, the group identification measures established by Spears, Dossje & Ellemers (1997) were adopted as the measures which best addressed different aspects of group identification, including self-stereotyping, in-group bias, group self-esteem, perceived permeability and perceived prototypicality. There are several survey instruments designed to assess group self-esteem, the most comprehensive of which, Luhtanen & Crocker's (1992) Collective Self-Esteem Scale, was adopted for the current study. This instrument assesses an individual's collective identity via the separate dimensions of perceived worthiness to belong to a group, personal and perceived public evaluation of that group, and the importance of the group to one's identity.

**Social support**

Social support has been assessed via semi-structured interviews, symbolic interaction analysis of exploratory interviews, and empirical measures. Scales have been developed to measure person-in-relation in various contexts, such as the family (Siegenthaler & Bigner 2000), the marital or cohabiting dyad (Spanier 1976), and the social group (Mohr & Fassinger 2000, Luhtanen & Crocker 1992).

In the current study the participant's perception of her social support was more the focus than the veracity of her account of social support; hence instruments which measured the participant's perceived relationship to her social group and to her family of origin were considered more useful than, for example, counting the number of friends or siblings she had. To this end, two measures were adopted for the current study as measures of perceived social support among family and friends. Moos & Moos's (1989) Family Relationships Index measures the perceived degree of commitment, help and support family members provide for one another ('cohesiveness'), the perceived extent to which members felt they can behave and speak openly ('expressiveness'), and the perceived level of anger, aggression and conflict expressed by family members ('conflict'). Among friendship groups, Cohen et al's (1985) Interpersonal Support Evaluation List measures the perceived availability of potential social resources in four areas: perceived availability of material aid ('tangible' support); perceived availability of someone to talk to ('appraisal' support); perceived availability of a positive comparison ('self-esteem' support); and perceived availability of someone to do things with ('belonging' support). The 'appraisal' subscale correlates positively with measures of self-disclosure, and appears to indicate generic resources for dealing with stressful experiences (Cohen et al 1985).

Self-Knowing

Given that identity narrative is perceived as constructed in connection with others, a measure of a participant's connection with others was included in the current study. Several references are made in the literature to 'connected' versus 'separate' dimensions of the Self. Gilligan's (1982) notion of the connectedness and separateness of identity was extended by Belenky et al (1986). Through an analysis of the narratives of women, they identified 'ways of knowing' which fell along a continuum of increasingly complex thought, from passive acceptance of concrete
and absolute ideas from others, to the development of personal intuition and the adoption of dominant paradigms and systems of analysis, and finally to the integration of several ways of knowing. Orr & Luszc (1994) found associations between these ways of knowing and connected or separate dimensions of the Self. Knight, Elfenbein & Messina (1995) developed a quantitative measure of Separate and Connected knowing. These were found to be orthogonal dimensions rather than opposites, with nomothetic counterparts, and Connected Knowing was strongly positively correlated with perspective taking, and positively correlated with empathic concern (Knight, Elfenbein & Messina 1995). In the absence of alternatives, this measure was adopted for the current study.

*Responses to stigma*

In addition to the above mentioned measures revealed in the narrative and identity literature, the literature on stigma and coping identifies several variables which may impact on autobiographical narrative. The current study sought to assess the impact of the narrators' attitudes to their lesbianism, to the disclosure of their lesbianism, and to stigma itself.

Scales have been developed to assess homophobia, or negative attitudes towards homosexuality (Szymanski & Chung 2001, Nungesser 1983). Nungesser's Homosexuality Attitudes Inventory, revised by Shidlo (1994), measures 'homonegativity', an inclusive term for the total array of negative attitudes towards homosexuality, in three subscales: 'personal homonegativity', or attitude towards one's own homosexuality; 'global homonegativity', or attitudes towards other homosexuals and homosexuality in general; and 'disclosure homonegativity', or reaction to others knowing about one's own homosexuality. Shidlo's (1994) revised inventory was adopted for the current study as the most extensive measure of attitudes towards personal and global homosexuality.

Attitudes to the disclosure of identity have been assessed by scales measuring privacy preference (Craddock 1994, Marshall 1974, Kelvin 1973) or by measuring the actual extent of disclosure (Carroll & Gilroy 2000). In the current study, the extent of disclosure was not adopted as a measure of attitude, as disclosure events for lesbians are often unintentional and/or unwanted. Marshall's (1974) Privacy Preference Scale was adopted because it distinguishes between desired involvement
with strangers, acquaintances and friends, or 'anonymity', and the desire to disclose information about oneself, or 'reserve'; two factors which are sometimes conflictual for lesbians.

Attitudes to stigma itself have been measured indirectly through social anxiety scales (Watson et al 1996, Monfries & Kafer 1994, Cheek & Briggs 1982, Watson & Friend 1969) and self-consciousness scales (Nasby 1996, Fenigstein, Scheier & Buss 1975). However, the Fear of Negative Evaluation scale (Watson & Friend 1969) was adopted as a more direct indication of the impact of perceived stigma and of the extent to which a narrator is aware of, and may compensate for, the identity impression her narrative is creating on the audience.

6.5 The analysis

The current study involves both qualitative and quantitative analysis of data, each of which is now discussed in turn.

Qualitative analysis

A relatively new approach within psychology, narrative research reflects the search for a more pluralistic view of science, one which includes qualitative analysis. Although there are typologies of qualitative methodologies available (discussed in Smith 1994), in general the qualitative approach sees experience as greater than the sum of its parts, and requires the researcher to 'abandon the myth of objective observation and to adopt an attitude of participant-explorer' (Walsh 1996:377). A qualitative database reveals personal meanings and intentions via an interpretive process in which the personal positions of both researcher and informant are traced within the cultural framework (McGartland & Polgar 1994).

Qualitative data can 'preserve chronological flow, assess local causality and ... are more likely to lead to serendipitous findings ... beyond initial preconceptions and frameworks' (Miles & Huberman 1984:15); they are also more likely to capture the ambiguity and contradiction which may be part of the identity construction process (Smith 1994). However, qualitative research design can be vulnerable to claims of unscientific process (Lincoln & Guba 1985) and incongruent personal perceptions (Oakland & Ostell 1996). In their rush to make idiographic generalisations and
cross-case comparisons, researchers often miss the idiosyncratic or the unique, for example, Rapkin & Fischer (1992) note the preponderance of idiographic measures in qualitative studies of elders' goals, but claim that these measures fail to provide inter-individual comparisons or capture information about goals in areas of life not mentioned by participants. Narrative research in particular can be vulnerable to claims that the research process itself can affect the content and nature of data (Gottlieb & Lasser 2001). To date, while particular-feature analysis abounds, analysis of the holistic narrative event is lacking in the current literature. To this end researchers of narrative need to identify two sets of variables: technical, such as time, prompts and conditions; and interactive, such as differing agendas, purposes, assumptions, goals, relationship of narrator to author, power relations, the narrator's understanding of 'life history' etc. (Rubinstein 1995).

Quantitative analysis

In quantitative research, operationally-defined variables are objectively and consensually observed or measured, and a quantitative database then reveals interrelationships, sometimes causal, between the variables (McGartland & Polgar 1994). Many of the research designs used to assess relationships between aspects of narrative have employed scales or 'multi-scale' techniques. For example, in narrative studies ego development has been correlated with measures of generative concern, generative behaviour, personality traits, and life satisfaction (St Aubin & McAdams 1995); identity status has been correlated with future-orientation and personal control measures (Pulkkinen & Ronka 1994); life events have been correlated with life satisfaction (Selvidge 2001) and with self-evaluation of life function, single item measures of domain satisfaction, prediction and control measures, demographic measures and personal goals (Rapkin & Fischer 1992); self-defining memories have been correlated with affective responses to memories and with personal goals (Moffitt & Singer 1994); connected and separate dimensions of self have been correlated with ways of knowing, relativistic thought, problem-solving responses, problem definition, parameter setting, multiple solution generating, paradox, self-referential thought and sex-role (Orr & Luszc 1994); desired or feared selves have been correlated with current activities, salient
concerns, age, life satisfaction and health (Cross & Markus 1991); and life satisfaction and well-being has been correlated with levels of disclosure (Morris, Waldo & Rothblum 2001, Jordan & Deluty 2000) and with social integration, social comparison and physical health (Hupet, Chantrane & Nef 1993).

Multi-scaling has also been used to examine one phenomenon from a variety of perspectives. Roberts & Donahue (1994), for example, combined an extensive battery of questionnaires and rating scales to assess how women simultaneously maintain a consistent sense of self and multiple role-specific self-concepts. Pulkkinen & Ronka (1994) administered a Personal Control Inventory, Future-Orientation questions and an identity status interview to determine the presence or absence of identity commitment or exploration among their participants.

Using a different scaling technique, several research designs have asked participants to rank such things as the importance of, and success in, certain ego tasks (Breckler & Greenwald 1986), life goals (Moffitt & Singer 1994, Rapkin & Fischer 1992), desired and feared possible future selves (Hooker & Kaus 1994, Cross & Markus 1991), and the relevance of self-defining memories (Moffitt & Singer 1994). Kelly's (1963) repertory grids have been used to examine personal and social identity constructions over time (Smith 1994).

Still other studies have focused on the quantitative evaluation of certain phenomena. Cantril (1965) applied the 'ladder' scaling technique in a study involving the impact of life events on women, who were asked to record the 'most moving event' on the top 'rung', the 'least moving event' on the bottom rung, and events fitting 'halfway between them' on the middle rung, until eight rungs were completed. This, the authors claim, results in equal-interval scales with true zero points, which are more hospitable to statistical analysis. Fingerman & Perlmutter (1995) reported on a metaphorical measurement of time perspective in which participants selected circles of different sizes to represent the past, present and future, and arranged them in a pattern to represent their sense of relationships between these time periods (Beiser 1987, Tismer 1987, Cottle 1967).

However, in recent years many charges have been levelled at such methods, including challenges to accepted methods of scale construction (Paton & Smith 1995), challenges to the predominant justifications for both Likert-type and dichotomous measures (Keats 1995), challenges to the reliability and validity of well-established measures (Boyle 1995), claims that the 'I don't know' item on many
Likert-type opinion, attitude or belief scales is wrongly treated as the mid-point between agreement and disagreement or an indication of indifference when it is more accurately a reflection of ignorance (Gritchng 1994), and challenges to the validity and utility of American instruments applied in Australian settings (Boyle 1995). Gregson (1997) also notes problems with the emphasis that Psychology research tends to place on statistical inference, significance levels and hypothesis testing to refute a null hypothesis: an emphasis that statistical theory in other disciplines appears to be discarding. Grayson, Pattison & Robins (1997) point to the widespread tendency to interpret probability as evidentiary-belief rather than relative frequency. Further, 'statistical realities do not necessarily coincide with cultural realities' (Sultana 1991:59), and not all statistically significant research is socially relevant research (Oakland & Ostell 1996). Indeed, the dominant approach in psychological research has been empirico-mathematical, and has led to conceptual confusion and barrenness, as 'the problems which trouble us ... and methods, pass one another by' (Wittgenstein 1953:232).

There are also challenges to commonly used measures such as the lifeline. Davies (1996) claims that while the lifeline can measure sequences, it cannot reveal the complex interconnections and relational processes, or the 'deep structure' of women's lives. Women's life stories are typically cyclical rather than linear, constructed around repetition of familiar family patterns and milestones rather than external achievements (Straw & Elliot 1997). The lifeline, Davies claims, is a representation of chronological or historical time, but not of 'relational' or 'process' time; it freezes processes at particular points, applying a static analysis to a multilayered and interactional phenomenon. Oakland & Ostell (1996) reveal that quantitative methods of assessment sometimes fail to capture people's reasons, intentions and contexts, and fail to perceive dynamic, interactional, evolving and multidimensional processes. The positivist approach cannot, alone, provide an adequate and identifiable description of a psychological event; positivist psychology lacks articulation with social theory. The trend is toward culture-interpreting methods, particularly where research matter is considered to be socially meaningful (McGartland & Polgar 1994), when the area under investigation is relatively unknown, when what is known has not been examined, or when there is reason to doubt existing knowledge (Kidd, Scharf & Veazie 1996).
Combined methodology

Following the growing recognition among researchers that 'there is a need to re-establish the qualitative grounding of empirical research in order to be truly scientific' (Debats, Drost & Hansen 1995:373), there is a call to develop a more pluralistic view of science, or a synthesis of qualitative and quantitative methods into a new research paradigm (Beeman 1995, Debats, Drost & Hansen 1995). Researchers are accepting the challenge of combining qualitative and quantitative approaches and analyses, and although the obstacles may be legion, the fruitfulness of this search is already apparent in the richness and complexity of the findings. Quantitative methods can identify particular features of narrative, narrator and context, while qualitative methods can clarify the meaning, impact and value of those findings to the narrator.

Bowen (1996) claims that in any research design, the greater degree to which qualitative and quantitative methods are applied to the same phenomena by 'triangulation', the greater is the internal validity and reliability of the research. Morse (1991, in Bowen 1996) distinguishes between simultaneous triangulation where qualitative and quantitative methods are used at the same time and there is limited interaction between the two data sets until analysis, and sequential triangulation where the results of one stage using one approach are used in the planning of the next stage using the other approach. Green & Caracelli (1997) distinguish between mixed-method component designs, in which qualitative and quantitative methods are implemented as 'discrete aspects of the overall inquiry' (p22), and mixed-method integrated designs, in which the results from one method inform the development of the other.

The current study comprised a mixed-method component design where different methodologies were used as discrete aspects of the overall research design, but integrated at the stage of analysis. With the exception of life event and affect factors, Likert-type scales were administered in preference to true/false questionnaires, increasing the effectiveness of correlational analysis.

The specific details of the method of data gathering is presented in the next section.
Method

Participants

Participants were 64 lesbians between the ages of 25 and 65, living in the Sydney metropolitan and Blue Mountains districts of NSW. Participants were approached through personal friendship networks and social and political organisations.

Measures

The 12 page survey package comprised 2 demographic questions, a 'life event' list, 10 surveys and a narrative prompt. See Appendix 1 for a copy of the survey package.

1. Demographic questions;

   How old are you?
   How long have you identified as lesbian?

2. Surveys;

   Affect Circles Scale (Andrews & Withey 1976) displays nine circles with varying numbers of plus signs in them (representing areas of satisfaction in life) and varying numbers of minus signs in them (representing areas of dissatisfaction in life). Respondents choose the circle which most accurately represents their current balance of positive/negative feelings about life. The authors report good reliability and validity, and, when compared with other similar scales, this scale proved the more valid measure (Andrews & Withey 1976). A high score indicates positive affect.

   The Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (Balistreri, Busch-Rossnagel & Geisinger 1995) comprises 32-items which assess the dimensions of exploration and commitment in eight areas; occupation, religion, politics, values, family, friendships, relationships and sex roles. The authors provide evidence of moderately high
reliability, high construct and concurrent validation, and a strong association with Marcia's (1964, in Balistreri et al 1995) Identity Status interview. In the current study, the wording of some items was modified slightly to accommodate an older and Australian respondent group; for example "dating" was replaced with "relationship". Participants responded on a 6-point Likert-type scale, (0=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). A high score in either identity dimension indicates high levels of that dimension.

*Group Identification Measures (Spears, Dossje & Ellemers 1997)*

Group identification was measured by 4 questions: 'I see myself as lesbian', 'I am pleased to be lesbian', 'I feel strong ties with lesbians' and 'I identify with other lesbians', and proved to form a reliable scale, Alpha = .81 (Spears, Dossje & Ellemers 1997).

Self-stereotyping was measured by 2 questions: 'Overall I am similar to most lesbians' and 'Overall I am different from most lesbians' (Reversed), and proved to form a reliable scale, Alpha = .65 (Spears, Dossje & Ellemers 1997).

In-group bias was measured by 1 question: 'On the whole, lesbians tend to live fuller and more productive lives than heterosexuals' (Jetten, Spears & Manstead 1997).

Collective self-esteem was measured by 4 questions: 'Lesbians have a lot to be proud of', 'More often than not, I would rather not let others know I'm lesbian' (Reversed), 'I have very little respect for lesbians as a group' (Reversed), and 'I feel good about lesbians as a group' (Ellemers, Kortekaas & Ouwekerl 1997).

Prototypicality was measured by 3 questions: 'I am very similar to the average lesbian', 'I have a lot in common with other lesbians', and 'I am a good example of a typical lesbian', Alpha = .81 (Jetten, Spears & Manstead 1996).

Permeability was measured by 1 question: 'I will always be lesbian' (Dossje, Ellemers & Spears 1995).

Distinctiveness was measured by 2 questions: 'To what extent are lesbians different from other women?' and 'To what extent are lesbians distinguishable from other women?' (Jetten, Spears & Manstead 1997).

Variability was measured by 2 questions: 'To what extent are lesbians different from each other?' and 'To what extent do you feel that lesbians form a well-defined group?' (Reversed), (Jetten, Spears & Manstead 1997).
Questions were answered on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 5 (very much). A high score in any dimension indicates a high degree of group identification in that dimension.

*The Collective Self-Esteem Scale (CSES) (Luhtanen & Crocker 1992)* is a 16-item instrument which assesses an individual's evaluation of her/his collective or group identity with 4 subscales: Membership esteem (or worthiness to belong); Private Collective Self-esteem (or personal view of one's group); Public Collective Self-esteem (or one's perceptions of others' views of one's group); and Identity (or importance of the group to one's identity). The authors have demonstrated strong reliability and validity indicators over 3 studies (Luhtanen & Crocker 1992). In the current study, participants were asked to respond with regard to a lesbian group to which they belonged and to respond to each item on a 6-point Likert-type scale (0=strongly disagree to 6=strongly agree). A high score in any dimension indicates a high level of collective esteem in that dimension.

*The Family Relationships Index (FRI), (Moos & Moos 1989)* is a 27-item index of people's perceptions of the quality of their family relationships and family support. It comprises 3 subscales: 'cohesiveness', 'expressiveness', and 'conflict', which demonstrate high internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha is .78, .69 and .75 respectively), good construct validity and good test-retest reliability (Moos & Moos 1989). Participants were asked to respond with regard to their family of origin, and in order to obtain a more sensitive and informative data set, the 'True/False' response format was replaced with a 5-point Likert-type scale (0=never true, or not true of anyone in my family, to 4=always true, or true for all members of my family). A high score in any dimension indicates a high level of that dimension.

*The Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (ISEL) (Cohen et al 1985)* is a scale which measures the perceived availability of potential social resources, and distinguishes between structure and function of those resources. The ISEL consists of 40 'True/False' items which fall into four 10-item subscales: 'tangible', 'appraisal', 'self-esteem' and 'belonging'. The authors report subscale independence, strong validity indicators, and good internal reliability with Alpha Coefficients of .74, .82, .73 and .78 respectively. Test-retest reliability is adequate for the entire ISEL scale, although
particular types of support have been found to change over time and in different
patterns for different populations (Cohen et al 1985). Half of the items in each scale
are counterbalanced for desirability. The 'tangible' subscale was found to be the
least effective 'buffer' for stressful events (Cohen et al 1985), and was omitted from
the current study. Again, in order to provide a more sensitive continuous
measurement, the dichotomous scales were replaced with a 6-point Likert-type scale
(0=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). A high score in an any dimension
indicates high levels of perceived availability of that dimension.

The Knowing Styles Inventory (KSI) (Knight, Elfenbein & Messina 1995) is a
quantitative measurement of the qualitatively identified dimensions of Connected
and Separate Knowing as defined by Belenky et al (1986) and Clinchy (1989).
Authors report adequate test-retest reliability and internal consistency; coefficient
alphas for the two components were .71 and .72 respectively. Three items which
were of some concern to the authors in the validation of principal components
analysis of the KSI were omitted in the current study, leaving a 10-item scale, 5
items measuring Connected Knowing and 5 items measuring Separate Knowing.
Participants responded on a 6-point Likert-type scale (0=strongly disagree to
5=strongly agree). A high score in either dimension indicates a high level of that
dimension.

The Revised Nungesser Homosexuality Attitudes Inventory (RNHAI) (Shidlo 1994)
The RNHAI, measuring negative attitudes towards homosexuality is composed of
three subscales: a) personal homonegativity, b) global homonegativity, and c)
disclosure homonegativity. Almost half the items are reversed to control for
response set. The instrument has been found to have high internal and construct
validity (see Shidlo 1994). This measure was based on gay male populations, but in
the absence of measures based exclusively on lesbian data, this measure was chosen
for the current study. Modifications included replacing the terms 'gay' and 'men'
with the terms 'lesbian and 'women' where appropriate. Responses to 18 items were
recorded on a Likert-type scale; 0='strongly agree' to 5='strongly disagree'. A high
score indicates high levels of homonegativity.

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The Fear of Negative Evaluation scale (FNE) (Watson & Friend 1969) is a 30-item 'True/False' scale, with 13 items reversed to counterbalance a social desirability set response. Authors report good test-retest reliability and validity with high indexes of homogeneity. However, in order to provide a more sensitive continuous measurement of the fear of negative evaluation, the dichotomous scales were replaced with a 6-point Likert-type scale (0=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). A high score indicates a high degree of fear of negative evaluation.

The Privacy Preference Scale (PPS) (Marshall 1974) comprises 6 subscales which measure various dimensions of privacy. The subscales have a demonstrated homogeneity, ability to differentiate between sex and age groups, and strong validity indicators (Marshall 1974). Three of these subscales (Neighbouring, Anonymity and Reserve) emphasise control over self-disclosure. Due to the overlap between the former two factors (Marshall 1974), only the latter two (Anonymity and Reserve) were used in the current study. The resulting scale comprised 14-items, and participants responded on a 6-point Likert-type scale (0=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). A high score indicates a high degree of preference for privacy and/or non-disclosure.

3. 'Life Event' list

A 'life event' list was compiled from events cited in stage and transition literature as commonly encountered and/or significant in lesbian identity transition (Kaufman 1997). These events were arranged in arbitrary order and were presented in list format. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they had experienced each event, by ticking the appropriate boxes. In response to informal discussions with lesbian groups, 2 items were added to the list, indicating involvement in organised religion, and interest in spirituality.

4. Narrative prompt;

'Tell me the story of you as a lesbian'.
Conclusion

9.1 Contributions to the literature

This study is based on the conceptualisation of lesbian identity narrative as dynamic and purposeful, developed, negotiated, rehearsed, constrained and affirmed in in-group performance. The major findings of this thesis indicate that the development of performed lesbian identity comprises:

1. the selection of life events, experienced directly or vicariously, and of thoughts, behaviours and situations which are of current significance to at least one other lesbian;

2. the interpretation of these elements via group constrained scripts comprising developmental tasks in the areas of identity, transition, management, relationships and community involvement; and

3. the interweaving of these scripts into group constrained thematic lines which provide a finite range of evaluative closures, meanings and interconnections, and which promote identity belonging, uniqueness, affirmation, morality and interconnection to varying degrees depending on the narrator's age, length of time identifying as lesbian, attitude to stigma, attitude to personal identity, and level of group identification.

The first of these major findings reveals that the relationship of lesbian life events to lesbian identity narrative is not as one might have expected from the lesbian identity literature; it appears that experiencing common lesbian specific life events is not enough to legitimise one's identity narrative as lesbian, at least as performed in-group. The high level of participants' prompted recall of life events added support to lesbian identity research claims that there is an identifiable list of common life events experienced by women in their transition to lesbian identity. However the pervasive practice among this participant group of selecting for narrative a particular few of these common experiences, or appropriating a particular few from the lesbian group experience, lends support to narrative research claims that an individual's recall is often distorted in autobiographical narrative to enable the individual to 'prove' a personal position or to pursue a current identity goal.
This finding extends both lesbian identity research and narrative research in two ways. Firstly it illustrates that lesbian identity narrative performed among in-group members is legitimised or constrained by elements which address the current concerns of the lesbian group. Secondly, it extends the research by identifying those current concerns as:

- identity, or the definitions and development of lesbian identity itself;
- transition, or the 'marking' of the transitional process from assumed heterosexuality to lesbian sexual identity;
- management, or the management of inherited stigma and the disclosure of one's lesbian identity;
- community, or the definition of lesbian community and the evolution of one's membership; and
- relationships, or the definition and development of dyadic relationships.

The second of the major findings of this thesis, that lesbians interpret a purposeful selection of life events via group constrained scripts which demonstrate developmental tasks, extends current 'script' theory as applied in both identity and narrative research. Prior research has established that scripts are co-assemblies of scenes representing the expectations or meanings that an individual has developed or generalised from a particular context. The current finding suggests that the purposeful alignment of one's scripts with those of other in-group members signals or promotes a commonality of development and/or of group membership. Indeed, the current finding indicates that scripts which reflect developmental tasks, particularly those which affirm or justify lesbian identity development, are significantly related to the narrator's level of identification; illustrating that a 'demonstrated' developmental task significantly promoted or stemmed from the narrator's perceived legitimacy as a lesbian.

This finding poses a substantial challenge to existing lesbian identity transitional theories which conceive of lesbian identity development as the individual's progressive, linear encountering of lesbian specific life events and the subsequent adoption and disclosure of a congruent sexual identity. Indeed, this finding suggests that lesbian specific life events can be experienced vicariously and appropriated for group identity development purposes, and that the significance of personally
experienced life events to lesbian identity is conferred to some degree by a group constrained hierarchy of events reflecting current group concerns.

This may in part explain the conclusion of many lesbian identity theorists that specific transitional models of lesbian identity development are inaccurate to a great number of lesbians and that general models are too vague to meaningfully reflect individual experience. Specific models are largely based on participant responses to a researcher's specific questions, and may accurately reflect some or even many of the life events that lesbians are likely to encounter. However, narrative interpretation does not necessarily 'accurately reflect' life events; hence while any one transitional model reflects some aspects of lesbian developmental experience, none encompasses the range of life events and processes that a lesbian uses to develop meaningfulness. Further, the significance relegated to those events by the researcher's imposition of 'developmental stages' does not fully reflect the meaningful experience that is revealed in lesbian identity narrative. General models on the other hand, that is, models representing a synthesis of several models or studies, such as those of Sophie (1986) and Garnets & Kimmel (1993) respectively, give no specific developmental detail, that is, developmental tasks may be implied but not specified.

The third major finding of this thesis was that lesbians interweave developmental task scripts into group constrained thematic lines which provide a finite range of modes of evaluative closure, meaning and interconnection which promote identity belonging and uniqueness, affirmation, morality and interconnection. This supports existing narrative research claims that functional groups deliver to their members a finite set of narrative options within which to interpret affect through group constrained emotional plots, interpret life events through ready interpretations, and establish meaningfulness and interconnection through group constrained time and meaning formats. This finding extends narrative research by identifying a finite set of narrative alternatives, or a dramatistic repertoire, with which lesbians are able to make meaning of a disruption to sexual identity, establish continuity of life course, negotiate the stigma associated with their new identity, account for or justify connection with like others, affirm their sense of morality and self-worth, and interpret affect associated with life events. The finding also extends both narrative and lesbian identity research by contributing an explicit plotting of each
of these narrative alternatives, and by identifying the functions specific to the narratives of this lesbian group.

Further, the finding that choice of dramatistic repertoire is associated with the individual's age, length of time identifying as lesbian, and attitudes to stigma, personal identity, and/or group identification, gives apparent support to lesbian identity theories which locate developmental or transitional issues for lesbians in cohort, habituation, stigma management, narrative and interactional contexts. The age at which a woman first identifies as lesbian, first family influences, and individual ways of knowing were not associated with identity narrative choices in the current study, suggesting that norming, attachment and cognitive factors were far less influential for lesbian identity development as reflected in performed identity narrative. This finding extends lesbian identity research in that it is the first to provide empirical evidence of the relative influences of these theories on performed lesbian identity narrative.

In summary then, the findings of this thesis challenge existing transitional models of lesbian identity development based on the sequential confrontation of lesbian specific life events. It does so by illustrating that such events can be appropriated and distorted in performed identity narrative to guide developmental tasks and achieve and/or confirm group identity. The findings also confirm and extend narrative identity theory by defining the dramatistic repertoire of a lesbian group and identifying the predominant functions of performed identity narrative. They also extend lesbian identity theory by empirically identifying factors which influence identity narrative, confirming the comparative relevance of cohort, habituation, stigma management, narrative and interactional theories of lesbian identity development over more positivist, early attachment and cognitive theories.

9.2 Implications of the findings

The implications of the findings of this thesis depend to some extent on the conceptualisation of performed identity itself. If identity is a given collection of traits or attributes of which the individual has a more or less accurate perception at any one time, then a performed identity narrative could be viewed merely as a temporary or partial account of life events,
selected or distorted by the individual for personal goals. In this case, the findings of the thesis support Freudian claims that the group is the basis of self-knowledge and that the individual 'emerges' from the group, for narrators actively negotiate fundamental aspects of their individual identity, such as identity developmental tasks; group membership and individual uniqueness; individual morality; identity repair; identity affirmation; and interconnection. The implications for research are that group identification is not merely a discrete aspect of identity developed in the later stages of a personal lesbian transition, nor is it merely a means of support and affirmation in a hostile or stigmatising social context; it is fundamental to a sense of individuality, morality and interconnection to lesbian and non-lesbian others. Further, the implications for clinical practice and/or social policy are that lesbian groups are a vital source of self-knowledge for lesbian individuals, and that performance of lesbian identity narrative within those groups is a vital tool for the formation of a coherent, moral and interconnected identity.

On the other hand, if performed identity narrative is viewed as identity itself, that is, if an individual's identity is as she interprets herself to be in a particular context, then the performance of lesbian identity narrative within lesbian groups is more than a vital tool for identity formation; it equates with lesbian identity itself. The implications of this thesis would then extend to identity formation models: developmental tasks revealed in the 'scripts' of the lesbians in this participant group could arguably be considered to comprise the fundamental tasks of lesbian identity formation, and an adequate and relevant model of lesbian identity development should reflect each of the identified developmental tasks identified, as well as uniqueness and belonging, identity repair, affirmation or stigma management, morality, and interconnectedness.

Existing transitional models based on lesbian or gay and lesbian experience variously accommodate these developmental tasks to a greater or lesser degree; Cass (1979) and Sophie (1986) both focus on transition through identity development, Chapman & Brannock (1987) emphasise pre-transitional development, Hanley-Hackenbruck (1989) focuses on stigma management, Ponse (1978) focuses on transition to community and dyadic connection, and Coleman (1981) and Garnets & Kimmel (1993) focus on transition through dyadic relationships. The disparity in the focus of these models may be an indication of the researcher's agenda, with the question determining the answer. They may also be a
reflection of the socio-historic times in which the research was conducted and the psychological approaches of the time. Models of the 1970/80s, such as those of Ponse, Cass and Coleman, tend to reflect the individual-to-group identity processes espoused in that era; those of the 1980/90s, such as Chapman & Brannock, Hanley-Hackenbruck and Thompson are influenced more by identity management concerns, reflecting the rise of stigma and coping theory; while more recent models such as Kitzinger & Wilkinson and Morris tend to reflect the post-modern focus on the meaning of the transitional process to the individual herself and the socio-historic contextualising of that process.

9.2.1 A developmental model

A model suggested by the findings of this thesis would comprise a task-based or check-list approach to identity development rather than a stage-based approach. The development of lesbian identity in such a model would comprise the narrative inter-weaving of developmental tasks related to identity, transition, stigma management, lesbian community and lesbian relationships. Tasks would occur in any 'order' in identity narrative, and their salience would differ according to the individual's changing location in differing performance contexts. In line with the concept of identity as reflecting an individual's changing location in a changing socio-political context, the model would have a 'shelf-life', that is the developmental tasks would change in substance according to current socio-political circumstances. Lesbian identity narratives in such a model would comprise the inter-weaving of:

IDENTITY TASKS;
- the individual's identity definitions and an account of their source
- the individual's account of her identity development over time,
- a demonstration of identity repair, i.e., her account of the connection between pre-lesbian and lesbian aspects of her current identity
- affirmation of her identity, or the identification of affirming social or cognitive sources

TRANSITION TASKS;
- transitional 'markers', pivotal points, and/or 'stages' in her identity transition or development process
- successful change indicators
- assignment of responsibility for transitional or developmental stages
- her sense of the past, present and future of her lesbian identity process

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MANAGEMENT TASKS;
♦ social change indicators, or cognitive destigmatisation of identity
♦ disclosure competence indicators, or destigmatisation of environment

COMMUNITY TASKS;
♦ her definitions and perceptions of lesbian community
♦ the evolution of her community consciousness
♦ current involvement in community, or group membership
♦ affirmation of group identity/involvement, or the identification of affirming social or cognitive sources

RELATIONSHIP TASKS;
♦ the individual’s definitions of lesbian sexual and/or intimate relationships
♦ the evolution of her relationships
♦ her sense of the meaning of her relationships to her identity

NARRATIVE TASKS;
♦ the negotiation of individual uniqueness,
♦ the interpretation of affect
♦ the establishment of self-regulation, or established or achieved identity goals,
♦ the reflection of self-worth or morality
♦ connection of lesbian identity to lesbian and non-lesbian humanity through time and meaning constructs.

Identity development could be determined by the reflection of these tasks in an individual’s performed identity narrative at any one time; salience of particular facets of identity, or reflection of particular developmental tasks, could be said to reflect the current concerns of the individual within those of concern to the overall lesbian group.

9.3 Limitations of the findings

While the thesis contributes to both the lesbian identity and narrative research literature, its contribution is limited by the lack of resolution about the association between identity and identity narrative, and the fact that no evidence is provided to contribute towards this debate. The correlational analysis of data fails to establish whether a pre-existing identity gives rise to certain types of identity narrative construction, or whether group narrative alternatives constrain the formation of a
group identity. Compounding this, the thesis fails to account for how or why the alleged associations between identity narrative alternatives and influencing factors such as age, attitude to stigma, levels of identification, etc., actually come about; it is confined to demonstrating merely that they do.

The very research design encouraged a construction of identity narrative, which can give rise to an idealisation or 'averaging' of identity, or reflect a salience or differentiation of identity, temporarily and contextually accomplished. Further, an analysis of narrative cannot necessarily capture posture, ritual, or all representational systems (Gregg 1995), nor the embodiment of emotion (Sarbin 2001) which are important features of a story. The current study was limited to an analysis of verbal narrative structures, and, as such, is necessarily incomplete.

Further limitations result from the pragmatics of the research design. In response to the researcher's declared agenda, the participants may have been 'establishing a reputation' rather than performing an identity, or positioning themselves in relation to audience as a psychological researcher rather than a co-member of the lesbian group. While this limitation is perhaps insurmountable in such a research process, it nevertheless constrains the validity of the data to some degree.

A limitation common to lesbian identity research also restricts the generalisability of the findings of this thesis; an unquantifiable portion of the lesbian population is isolated and/or hostile to psychological research and a participant research group is rarely representative. The generalisability of the findings is further limited by socio-economic and ethnic factors which were not accounted for in this study.

9.4 Future research

However, the thesis does identify the shared attributes around which members of the participant lesbian group coalesce, and the ways in which individual lesbians negotiate their own belonging and uniqueness. The 'checklist' model of lesbian identity development provides a potentially useful clinical or therapeutic tool for psychologists and counsellors supporting lesbians in this development, and for self-help groups devising identity development programs. The identification of identity narrative alternatives constitutes an original contribution to both narrative research and lesbian identity research. An empirical testing of the checklist model, a test of the generalisability of the lesbian dramatistic repertoire, the application of the
analytical methods of this thesis to other stigmatised groups, and a causal investigation of the association between personal factors and narrative choices as identified in this thesis, would constitute valuable offshoots for future psychological research.
8 Results and Discussion

Analyses were performed on the qualitative and quantitative data according to the research questions, each of which are now be discussed in turn.

8.1 Question 1: Are there life events common to the experiences of lesbians?

Participants were presented with a list of life events common to lesbian women or women in transition to a lesbian identity, and each was asked to select those events which she recalled having experienced. The number of participants recalling each life event was tallied. Table 1 shows the recall of each life event, presented in order of frequency of selection among participants.

Table 1: Frequency of Life Events Recalled

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life Event</th>
<th>Number of participants recalling the life event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>aware of attraction to another woman/other women</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>made more lesbian friends</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mixed with more and more lesbians</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>decided I was lesbian</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>decided to act on my feelings of attraction for another woman</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>came out to someone</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aware of my friends' acceptance of lesbians</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identified as heterosexual</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aware of my community's negative view of lesbians</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thought I was probably lesbian</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>developed a lesbian network</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>took part in political action of some kind</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aware of my family's acceptance of me being lesbian</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>read about lesbianism</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aware of my family's negative view of me being lesbian</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>denied I was lesbian (tried not to think about it)</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>was interested in spirituality</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aware of my community's positive view/acceptance of lesbians</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tried to become 'normal'</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>joined a lesbian social group</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aware of my friends' negative view of lesbians</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>took part in organised religion</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lived 'in the closet'</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>joined a political organisation</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>decided I wasn't lesbian</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sought therapy/professional advice of some kind</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The number of life events recorded by each participant was also recorded. While
the number of life events recalled ranged from 10 to 25, the average number of Life
Events recalled by each of the participants was 15 (SD=3.9).

8.1.1 Discussion

Each of the 26 life events was recalled by at least 18% of this participant group, and
13 were selected by over half of the group, lending support to the assertion that
most lesbians did encounter life events identified in the literature as peculiar to
lesbian identity formation. The life events most frequently selected by participants
as having been encountered by them at some time, included the realisation of
lesbian affect, instances of lesbian sexual behaviour, connection with lesbian
community, lesbian identity decisions or realisations (turning points), disclosure of
lesbian identity, and awareness of acceptance and support from friends and/or
family; these were selected by over 75% of participants. Moreover, on average, each
participant selected 15 of these 26 life events as having been encountered by her at
some point, indicating that the recall of at least half of these life events was
common to the average participant, and adding support to Kaufman's (1997) claim
that these are the common life events encountered by lesbians in their transition to
lesbian identity.

8.2 Question 2: Do common life events comprise the elements
of a lesbian identity narrative?

On average only 22% of those events recalled by a participant were subsequently
used in that participant's narrative, and this 22% accounted for only one third of
the narrative content. In other words, most of the commonly encountered events
recalled were subsequently omitted from the narrative, and most of the narrative
content comprised elaboration on a particular few.

However, on average, 5% of life events NOT recalled by participants WERE used in
their subsequent narratives.

Life events most commonly recalled and also included in subsequent narrative,
included:
disclosure;
• decisions or realisations about transition to lesbian identity;
• awareness of lesbian affect; and
• involvement in lesbian community.
The former two of these were also among the most common references occurring in the participants' narratives. Life events most commonly occurring in narrative without having previously been recalled included:
• failure to disclose (living in the closet);
• stigma awareness;
• denial of lesbian identity; and
• awareness of family and/or social support.

8.2.1 Discussion

Although most participants indicated that they had encountered many of the life events identified in the research literature as common to lesbians in transition to a lesbian identity, narrative identity appeared to revolve around a particular few. Indeed, the majority of life events recalled by participants in response to prompting prior to narration were omitted from subsequent narratives and on average less than a quarter of the narrative was devoted to discussion of selected life events as such. Hence while lesbian specific life events were the mainstay of these lesbian identity narratives, not all events were considered relevant to the identity narrative at any one time.

Clearly there must be some editing of life events; 'if it were not selective, an account of a life would last at least as long as the life itself' (Brockmeier 2000:63). However, some life events not recalled in response to prompting prior to narration did occur in subsequent narratives. It may be that recall of associated events during the narration process prompted later recall of some life events; this would be compatible with the contention that events are added or omitted in narrative to overcome confusion or contradiction and to create a plausible story (Baumeister & Newman 1994 and others). It may also be that events are added to a performed identity narrative, that is, one told to another person, to pursue a particular interactional narrative goal (Wortham 2000). In view of the later findings in this
study, discussed below, it appears that they may have been added specifically to demonstrate or 'prove' to lesbian developmental goals and/or group membership.

8.2.2 Narrative references

If common lesbian-specific life events were not the mainstay of lesbian identity narratives, what common elements could be identified? In order to determine this, narratives were analysed for discrete references to thoughts, actions, feelings, reactions, events, or situations. If references occurred in five narratives (an arbitrary cut-off point) it was deemed they could be considered 'common' to the lesbian narratives.

This analysis identified the following 61 discrete narrative references among the narratives of the participant group:
Sixty-two of the 64 participants made some reference to their lesbian identity within their lesbian narrative. Thirty-three women referred to their definitions of lesbianism. Fifteen of these claimed having developed a personal definition of their lesbian identity, defining the term for themselves. For these women, lesbianism variously meant demonstrating a particular lifestyle or set of behaviours, valuing women and women's energy, an all-encompassing aspect of identity, having primary relationships with women but not necessarily precluding heterosexual behaviours or affect, and/or living outside the privilege of mainstream society:

Whatever I choose to call myself, I have an allegiance with women who chose to be in relationships with other women and who don't have the privileges that you can get by being able to be with men. I think that's the main difference. (63)

Eleven women noted that they had derived their definition of lesbianism largely from the lesbian community, and maintained a group definition of their lesbian identity:

(I) mixed more and more with lesbians, you know, I felt quite comfortable and I felt like, you know, they were the experts, they were the people with experience, they were the people that could show me what this life that I seemed to be drawn towards was actually all about. (2)
However 8 women spoke of being without a personal or group definition of their lesbian identity, and of having to constantly grapple with the meaning of their identity:

But for me there's alot of time when it seems a struggle ... mentally, emotionally and spiritually. And what I have to do with that is keep finding myself and what's true for me...but it hasn't been without its times of being really lonely, really sad, and there's been lots of having to discover and make it up as I go along. (37)

Apart from specific references to the meaning of lesbianism, there were also references to the essential or constructed nature of such an identity. Twenty-eight women considered their identity to be essentialist in nature; something they were born knowing or compelled to discover:

I am born lesbian. I've been thinking that I'm born lesbian, genetic or spiritual, doesn't much matter to me, and I believe I am born of a long line of lesbians and I believe that goes back to early matriarchal tribal times. And on a spiritual level, in terms of reincarnation, I believe I have been born lesbian every single time. (29)

Thirteen women recalled a sense of being 'different' as a child, either in gender role behaviour, affect towards same and/or opposite sex or the degree to which they felt 'misfit'. These women recalled childhood attractions to other girls or childhood violations of gender role as early indicators of their lesbianism, claiming that this constituted an unarticulated 'knowing' of their lesbianism, or of an identity difference which was later understood as lesbianism:

When I became a lesbian, and the whole of my past fell into place. I was always going to marry girls when I was little, always had crushes on the girls, and I was terrible tomboy. (42)

and for almost all of the women this was cited as a source of distress or discomfort:

Then one day in the playground all these kindergarten kids were playing and they ganged up on me, and buried me under this pile of leaves. They were just playing, but ... I remember it being about me being different. And this was the first major manifestation of the world telling me. I was confused about it, I knew about the difference, but I'd never seen it so clearly. From then till my mid 30s probably, it worried me alot. (44)
I was always aware that if they thought that I felt as much as I felt inside of me, I knew they would have thought I was real weirdo. So I kept that quiet. And at boarding school there was a lot of physical contact between (the other girls), you know a lot of people would give each other shoulder massages and do all that sort of thing, and I knew that I just couldn't ... for me I knew that it was quite different. So I guess it was ... towards the end of school when I actually started wondering what was different. (2)

Others 'realised' their lesbianism as adults, and pointed to their adult attraction to women in general or a particular woman as the indicator of their lesbianism, or as the beginning of a process of identity change:

And then it seemed like almost out of the blue I started feeling attracted to women. I don't know where it came from, I mean it wasn't a particular woman it was more just, I would, if I thought about anything sexual I started to have sexual feelings for women, generally, you know, not a particular woman. (3)

In contrast, 11 of the women considered their lesbianism to be 'constructed', or a matter of informed choice:

I am comfortable about me being a lesbian, this is my choice in life. I'm happy to just plod along with what I want to do with my life. I've just turned 39. I decided that I would be a lesbian at 17. (33)

I don’t think I was born a dyke. I think it was a choice that I made. I could have been heterosexual and not too miserably heterosexual. It was just a choice, option, opened to me and I decided I liked that better than being straight. (49)

Regardless of the essential or constructed nature of their identities, 17 women cited their sexuality as pervasive and 'established':

It's as relevant and as irrelevant as the fact that I'm right-handed. Like, everything I do in the world I do as a right-handed person, whether or not it has to do with my using my hands. So I sleep as a right-handed person, I speak as a right-handed person, I swim as a right-handed person, I walk as a right-handed person, so everything I do, I do as a right-handed person. In the same way, everything I do, I do as a lesbian, whether or not it's got to do with women or sex. So I walk as a lesbian, I speak as a lesbian, I sleep as a lesbian, all of those things. (24)
while 16 women were less committed to their lesbian identity. Indeed, at the time of narration they considered their sexual identity to be 'fluid' and potentially subject to current or future change to heterosexuality:

After that I went back and ended up in a relationship with a man and then probably for the last, I don’t know, 6 years or so, I’ve been seeing women again. So I find the identity of a lesbian a bit of a difficult box to put myself in because I haven’t actually identified it in any consistent way and I guess I don’t. I kind of identify as various things and having sex with a woman is just one part of me. (51)

While some found this problematic:

I think it’s been a really difficult journey, sort of the swings (between male and female partners)... yeah back and forth, back and forth, not knowing ...and not sure whether I belong in one world or the other... (9)

others clearly did not:

I’ve had a number of relationships with women. I’ve also had quite a few relationships with men as well. I actually think that being a lesbian doesn’t necessarily exclude relationships with men. So I think that just because a person may identify as a lesbian and have sex with a man, that doesn’t necessarily change their sexuality or make them bisexual. I think that their identity is much more important than their sexual behaviour. (55)

Five women cited either being currently unsure of their own lesbian sexuality, or of the parameters of sexuality itself:

I suppose I feel I’m gay. I suppose I feel I’m a lesbian, I don’t know. I think sexuality is very, very complex and I don’t really know where exactly I fit on the continuum. (55)

The narrators also gave accounts of the actual transition process from heterosexuality to lesbianism in their narratives. Forty-seven women cited the motivation for their transition to lesbian identity. Twenty-six of these felt motivated by external threat or circumstance:

And I could maybe tie it into what was happening in the world at that time, which was the 70s you know, the women’s movement when women were saying ‘we don’t like what the world has got mapped out for us, we don’t like our lives, we don’t like our roles as housewives and mothers
by necessity', ... and women were generally saying we want more passion in our lives, we want more connection with ourselves. (5)

It wasn't very overt to me, being a lesbian at that stage, but having gone into the convent and being in a community of women, even though they warn you very much against these sorts of special relationships, it became obvious that that was where my interests were. (26)

and 21 women acknowledged the influence of a significant other in their transition:

(I) was introduced to someone who was a very out lesbian which I found really interesting and exciting and I became involved with her and I found that something ... I could see myself heading in that direction for the rest of my life (64).

Forty-five women made reference to a 'transition process'. Eight women spoke of leaving heterosexual relationships as the beginning of the transitional process, or as an impediment to the process:

It just seemed too difficult at that time to, you know, go through the whole business of ripping the family apart. That was really horrendous, thinking about what would happen to the kids. I knew by that stage that B wouldn't be terribly heartbroken but I just thought the kids wouldn't cope and I liked, having been very close to my own dad, I liked the thought of them growing up with their own father and that sort of thing. (45)

Thirty-seven women recalled some pivotal point(s) at which insight was gained, decisions were made, or a life course took a turn of some kind:

And then when I was 26 I was attracted to a woman that I worked with and decided that I would do something about it. And one night when I was drunk and she was drunk, I walked up and kissed her and that was the start of my life as a lesbian. (54)

I think she was probably the first woman I'd ever trusted and respected and therefore could open up to and feel very deep loving feelings for. And she had never had a relationship with a woman before either, and so for both of us it was pretty freaky, but very amazing and a very beautiful part of my life. It's sort of like my life changed after that happened. (34)

and 6 women spoke of performance utterances, variously depicted as declarations which confirmed a lesbian identity or signalled a commitment to lesbian identity, in some cases after a long period of denial:
I actually wrote something in my diary, 'I think I might be a lesbian, I think I might be attracted to women'. And I remember thinking 'Oh god, I've written it down, oh Jesus, you know, what's ... going to happen, what's that going to mean?' (3)

So I rang up the Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service and said, 'hello I'm a lesbian' and that was the first time I'd actually said it, performed the meaning verbally, which was a tremendous event for me. (41)

Sixteen women recalled a subsequent period of exploration of their lesbian identity:

Though I think I felt really solid and self assured and confident about being a lesbian I think there was a certain amount of taking on a mantle for a while of lesbianism you know ... there's a certain period of time where it's more of an external thing than an internalised. ... I am a new lesbian so I look around to see how lesbians do it you know, and I see this and so I emulate that for a while and I'm trying it on and I'm seeing how it fits ... (10)

while 8 women recalled subsequently learning the 'rules' of lesbian culture:

For the first time (I) sort of met a lesbian community and sort of settled into a sense of a lesbian culture and a lesbian identity, not easily or compliantly, but I saw myself as belonging. (53)

Forty-two women spoke of the consequences of adopting a lesbian identity. Thirty-nine women perceived an increased self-knowledge and/or self-acceptance on transition to lesbian identity:

I think my lesbianism... well I didn't know what it was about necessarily. I was looking for a place to be. Not that I hadn't felt comfortable in the world, I had. But I hadn't found a place for myself. .... My first homecoming was finding my community of women, and my second homecoming was coming out as a lesbian, coming out or deciding I was. ... And I'm now 44 years old. I feel the strongest and the most confident I have ever felt in my life. (43)

Thirteen women experienced a reappraisal of personal, social and/or political goals in conjunction with their transition to lesbian identity:

I like the perspective on the world that that's given me. Despite the fact that I feel like I don't have access to some realms, I actually feel like it's given me more power, because I can see the structure itself and be able to start critiquing it and therefore to get a very solid self esteem and power through relationships with other people who feel the same way about trying to deconstruct the shit that's been set up. (63)

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And now I feel I have an obligation of sorts, as I move into the second half of my life, to provide, in whatever way, formal or informal, an example, a way of being to other kids, girls, boys, teenagers, whoever, that you can be who you are, how you are, you can achieve, you can not achieve, you can just be in the world, and you can choose how you want to be in the world and it's important to do that for yourself. (43)

Forty-two women made reference to disclosure events in their narratives, either as part of their transitional process, or as part of the management of a lesbian lifestyle or identity. Some accentuated the difficulty of the event:

I think this was the hardest thing I've ever done in my life was telling my parents. Because I remember being in my bedroom and just psyching myself up ... almost bloody hyperventilating and thinking 'I've just got to do it, I've just got to do it, I've got to do it'. And then I've just walked into the loungeroom and said to them 'I, there's something I've got to tell you'. And I couldn't think of the 'L' word and I couldn't think of the words to say. And so I said 'I don't think I'm ever going to get married and have children'. That's the only way I could express it (3).

while others indicated that they were comfortable being out as lesbians, and/or that it has made an appreciable difference to their lives:

I used to keep my life totally separated, my professional life, my social life and my sexuality and now I think they're reasonably integrated and I just don't care any more. I'm too old and tired to care; so fucking exhausted. So if people know that's fine, if they accept it, that's fine, if they don't that's their problem. (23)

Twenty-two women recalled making decisions to not disclose their identity at some particular point, either for the physical or emotional safety of self and/or partner, or for protection against discrimination:

She had a husband and 3 kids just down the road. So we just had this very clandestine relationship for two and a half years ..... She thought that if her husband found out, that he would kill her. I don't think he would have, but it wasn't a chance I was going to take. (45)

We had trouble finding accommodation together. We eventually found a little house in the country owned by a woman whose husband had dropped dead playing tennis, and she'd live there through the holidays and we'd go home for the holidays and live there through the term. We invented boyfriends for ourselves; mine was an absolute drop-kick returned from Vietnam with brain damage, (my partner's) was pleasant. We both joined the CWA. (42)
Fourteen women recalled feeling accepted or supported by the person to whom they had disclosed, but five recalled feeling disadvantaged by the disclosure in some way:

(My friend) proceeded to tell other people that how upset she was and how deceitful I'd been and all the rest about it, told the minister about it, etcetera (8)

I had very good 'friend' who very kindly told my fiancé that I had become involved with a female... he was distraught and ended (the engagement). (9)

Some women recalled mixed reactions to different disclosure event in their lives:

As I've become older it's sort of mattered to me less and less and society's attitudes have changed a lot more, and more people seem to be aware of it, whether or not they have a positive attitude. (8)

or different levels of disclosure among different networks:

So I feel like I lead this double life of a life in Sydney where I'm completely, almost completely out with my peers, all of the women I work with. I'm out with all of my friends and acquaintances. One of the first things that they learn about me is that I'm a lesbian. But then the other side of my life is that side where I'm hiding something, hiding from my family that I'm a lesbian. So that I feel like only half of my life can ever be open. (47)

Forty-three women spoke of an awareness of the stigma surrounding lesbianism. Thirty-nine women recalled an early, pre-transitional awareness of negative cultural messages which stemmed from either hearing about lesbians being ridiculed, ostracised or suffering discrimination or ill treatment of some kind, or from having access to negative stereotypes of lesbianism such as those depicted in lesbian literature:

I knew that from things people said and particularly friends of my mother's, that another person in the town who was considered possibly lesbian was regarded with some scorn and suspicion. (8)

I'd heard of the butch/femme community that my friend had gotten herself into at the time. And that fitted the stereotype at the time of Radcliffe Hall; the inverted lesbian and the frilly
femme who is actually heterosexual and for some reason becomes involved with the invert...
(41)

Perception of lesbianism as stigma took the form of various beliefs that it was against the will of God and/or society, that it was a disease or madness, and/or that it was dangerous, alien, or contagious. These women also recalled pre-transitional beliefs that to be lesbian was to invite condemnation from significant others, physical violence, banishment from family or society, and/or eternal damnation:

My parents' generation ... most of the people that I know in that generation are Catholic, and they're spooked. They think it's a mortal sin and you're going to hell and 'God help us'. (13)

Religion was cited as a significant purveyor of cultural messages about lesbianism, such that lesbians opting to live religious lives were cited as having to live in denial, while those opting for lesbian lives had to live with guilt:

I felt as a young lesbian I was forced to make a choice: I was either going to be a Christian or a lesbian. And lesbian won out, talk about lucky .... But I still feel angry about that, and I remember once talking with a friend about it and I was crying. It really affected me. All of a sudden you felt like you're doomed to a life without spirituality. (25)

Eighteen women recalled their early aversive response to their own lesbianism because of these negative cultural messages. Some recalled a period of 'not wanting' a lesbian identity, and so making a choice to live as a heterosexual:

I wanted to belong you know, I just wanted to belong with the normal people, you know, I didn't want, you know, I didn't want to be someone who had to be a hypocrite or be dishonest or, you know, I just wanted to fit in and be normal. (13)

And I remember making a conscious decision about which way I would go, the heterosexual life or the possibilities of a non-heterosexual way. It was safer (the heterosexual) way, I had no way of knowing where I could go or what I could be with the other decision. I prefer to call it a choice, but I don't know if it was. I didn't know what else I could do at the time. (41)

while others chose to live with or deal with their aversive responses:

I think if you're living in a world that .... puts so much negativity towards that, or fear, oppression around (lesbianism), then you carry that to a certain extent always. And I wanted to
be able to say that that wasn't there and that I was liberated and felt positive about my identity and everything was empowering, and I think I needed to do that to a certain extent, but then kept coming to the conclusion that actually I also had to embrace the bad feelings that I had about it, (that) was important as well. (63)

Twenty-two women responded to their early realisations of a potential lesbian identity with a 'denial' of some kind which distorted behaviour, affect and/or cognition. Some claimed that they had experienced lesbian affect but disallowed behaviour, others engaged in lesbian behaviour but distorted their perception of it or minimised its importance:

I had the life which society said happens - the one where you grow up and you have friends with people of the opposite gender and then eventually you marry one of them, and the other life where I thought 'well this is really the me that I like much better', but it was sort of something that you could (only) do in the head. (17)

I was having a relationship for about probably 3 months and I said to her, "J, are we lesbians?" And she said, "No." And I believed her. I believed I truly wasn't a lesbian and a lesbian must have been something different. (55)

Once their lesbianism was developed or accepted, many women spoke of the 'management' of their identities. Thirty-seven women described social change mechanisms in their management of lesbian identity. Of these, 26 developed or redefined dimensions of comparison with heterosexuals, in which lesbians were variously seen to be stronger, and more energetic, fulfilled, emotionally accessible, spiritually connected, and empowered than heterosexual women, and lesbianism was variously redefined as an expression of the valuing of women, a subversion of heterosexuality, a natural state of being, a vanguard movement and 'good for the planet':

Being a lesbian means that you have genuine freedom within your life because to make the choice to be a lesbian, you have to discard a lot of the socialisation of the family values that are put on you, and so in conjunction with that you gain complete freedom for yourself, because you question everything. (52)

I have become so secure about my lesbian heritage and birthright, and the absolute joy of being part of a race of people who are so incredibly powerful and incredibly strong and good for the
planet. Not that we are all good, but as a mass, the lesbian energy is very good for the planet.

(29)

Twelve women devalued heterosexuality and/or heterosexuals in their narratives:

I would have got married, probably had a kid and got divorced, it runs in the family anyway, and probably got married again and probably got divorced again. So I can't see that that was the road to happiness. What else? Might have been nice to have a kid but I didn't. I went the lesbian separatist scene and at that time having children was a no-no. But really I can hardly get out of bed in the mornings so I can't see that getting out of bed at 2 am to change nappies would have been an easy thing to do. (23)

The International Women's' Day and the sort of Reclaim the Night marches and those sorts of things which, in a lot of ways, try and be sort of feminist activities but I always considered that they're really sort of lesbian feminists that get that sort of stuff moving. Because everyone else is really too comatose to be able to break out of that rigid little framework that people have got them in, and that women wouldn't take care of themselves first unless they were lesbians because, of course, they'd always look after their boys or their men or whatever (2)

Twenty-nine women referred to the support they had received or still receive in the management of their identities. Twenty-four women made explicit reference to perceived support from family of origin, in terms either of their family's current attitude or stance towards a daughter's/iesibling's lesbianism:

My mother who lives far away sends more regards to the cat than to my girlfriend. But you know they're nice to me about it. They don't give me shit for it. They accept my choices I guess. (60)

And my family's acceptance of me has been a tremendous help to my continual ability to grow and just be me without having to hide an essential part of myself. (4)

or their family's process of acceptance:

And then really I think it took four or five years for my family to, for my parents to actually come to terms with it ... (my mother) found it very, very hard to understand what had happened, why, you know, why it had happened and (thought) I was going to be unhappy and you know, that's a hard choice in life that I'm making and that "you don't understand that society revolves two people together, a man and a woman". It was very, very hard for her and she went through a lot of pain, you know, I'd say years of pain until she finally decided. (3)
Thirteen women perceived social support from their heterosexual friends, claiming that it was not as important as the support they received from lesbian friends, but that it was important as affirmation of their choices and worthiness:

Sometimes I take my troubles to work. There's been people there who've tried to talk to me there and be supportive, which is very nice. I mean you don't always expect people to be supportive when you're a lesbian, but people are starting to be more generous with their feelings and realising that relationships are relationships regardless of who you're with. (33)

I've been shocked. I think I've been living in the 70s or 60s thinking that people are going to discriminate against me. But on the whole everybody has been so open and so warm ... And it sort of shocked me and I realised, move on, move forward, because everybody else has. (56)

However, 6 women cited a lack of social support from their religious beliefs/communities:

I think because I was a Christian, when I became a lesbian I was just consumed with guilt for ages. It took ages to get through that, that sense of being not ok. And so now I think that for me sometimes when I have that sense of 'oh god, is it ok to be lesbian?', it's not 'is it ok to be lesbian?' but 'is it ok to say I'm a lesbian?' That stems from that feeling of guilt. I know really strongly there are some people who not just disapprove of it, they actually think you're going to hell. (25)

while 5 women made explicit reference to perceived lack of support from family of origin or friends:

Families, even the most accepting families, tend to not value our relationships at all, even to the point where if someone dies you don't get sympathy cards, or flowers, you're lucky to get a phone call, etc, ... let alone relationship break-ups where it can be quite devastating to us. And heterosexuals get a lot of support going through divorce but lesbians don't get that, ... not from our families. (30)

Forty women mentioned relationships in their narratives. Thirty-five women spoke of the issues involved in lesbian relationships, of the continuing external pressures on sometimes clandestine relationships, or of the hard work involved in having a lesbian relationship:

And sometimes I have this feeling in the back of my head, and it's all that Christianity stuff, a feeling that I'm being punished for not doing the right thing. And I have to fight against that,
and it really irritates me. Cause I think 'if I'd been able to grow up and get married and have 3 kids and do the right thing and be the wife and go to church on Sundays as I've been taught, would I have been happier? And maybe that's why I have all these relationships that never work'. It's just that talk that goes on in my head, and I know what it's about, but it does affect us, it does affect me. (25)

There are very few role models so we're always checking with each other, and talking with each other about our decisions, and we do move and change and it's quite exciting and it's also a bit scary sometimes, and sometimes we feel insecure, well I do, and sometimes it's exhilarating. But there are no (relationship) models, there are no rules, and so we have to try and make them up as we go. (30)

Fifteen women spoke of seeking or first finding relationships. Their reactions varied from terror, to relief, to affirmation of identity:

When I went to university I met someone whom I was attracted to. The idea absolutely terrified me and I reacted very badly against any contact with this person but I was aware increasingly that there was an attraction there. Eventually a time came when I thought probably 'this is the situation' and then I decided to accept it and decided to allow a relationship with this other person to develop. (8)

Lo and behold I met E who was the same height, the same weight, the same star sign. A little soul mate. A bit symbiotic I guess but it was just lovely, just heaven. (42)

Twelve women spoke of losing or ending a relationship, in terms of identity crises, not knowing how to end a relationship, not knowing what to expect, and the effect of the loss on the self and the community:

She said she was just somebody who falls in love with people, and she knew she wanted to go off and have children, which was exactly what she did .... That was another hard lesson, that I was being replaced by a male. (17)

Neither of us was really experienced enough to know how to end the relationship, even though it was time for it to be over. And so my girlfriend was sort of attracted to all these other people, and, at different times, men. And I think that for her it was partly saying 'this is not working for me, maybe I'm straight' you know, rather than saying, 'this is not working for me with (this woman) because she and I don't work well together'.(2)

Thirty-four women mentioned sex or sexuality. Twenty women recalled 'falling for' another woman, behaviour inevitably following affect:

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There was this woman at T that I really liked and that I used to, I knew her from before and I used to have names for women like that, that I liked, like "inspirational" and I really wanted to be like her ... but what I also realised is that I was also undressing her with my eyes you know .... And I thought 'oh yes, you do think she's inspirational and you do, you would like to be like her and you also lust after her you know, like you're actually having feelings, like sexual feelings'. (11)

I was feeling maybe, like my body was maybe having this response but really it's just like a bad temperature and it will go and really I'll get over it ... And then I'd be spending more time with her and I wouldn't get over it, and I was, it was quite funny, it was like, there was like a schoolgirl crush, I was behaving and thinking and... but yeah, but she seemed to take up a disproportionate amount of my time and energy and either directly or, if she was absent, then in my thoughts. (12)

Eleven women either describing sex itself as being more passionate, more fulfilling and more exciting than heterosexual sex, or as providing an immediate sense of rightness or 'homecoming':

It just felt like coming home. It was like 'oh that's what it's meant to be like'. I'd had sexual relationships with men before and they were quite satisfying, I have very little complaint about my sexual relationships with men, but once I'd slept with this woman it was a whole different thing. (24)

I could say what was not okay about (sex) and I could say what I needed around that and she heard me and I had never experienced anything as powerful as that before, it was great. And that just reinforced that I was home, you know, I was in the right place. (11)

while others spoke of their sexuality in terms of valuing or being emotionally connected to women:

I suppose lesbian still has a bit of a connotation of that you must be sexually attracted to women in general or something ... I'm not generalised, like ... when I was heterosexual I would sometimes look at a man and think 'mmm, looks pretty nice', eye off his bulge, you know, really the classic things. But I don't do that with women. I think women look really nice or 'she looks really interesting' or 'she looks lovely' ... but I don't sort of go 'ahh, well ...' you know. So I suppose ... it's being women and caring about women and being pro-women are all the sorts of things that I'd put over the top of the fact that we might be sexually active with women. (7)

Nine women spoke of seduction, of them or by them, in their introduction to relationships:

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She told me she was having bad nightmares, and she was insisting on coming and sharing my bed, and I told her she could but she'd have to sleep at the other end of my bed, 'cause I wasn't really interested in her. But she managed to crawl up to (my) end of the bed, and the next thing... passion! (18)

Nine women spoke of the intimacy of lesbian relationships as being the most important and fulfilling aspect of that relationship:

Boys could give pleasure, they were good at it, or some of them. But they were good at it in the way that a vibrator might be good at it. But women attracted me as an unsaid reflection of the giving of sexual pleasure, but as a known reflection of deep emotional joy. (41)

I actually went back to men for a while because it was, all this really revealing yourself and getting very emotional was a bit exhausting for me and I thought, it was really much easier without all that. So I tried it for a while but I realised that I'd been spoiled, so couldn't go back, couldn't go back to just having sex and just fucking and thinking 'oh, this is pleasant', because I expected more. (7)

Thirty-four women mentioned in their narratives their perceptions of the wider lesbian community. Twenty-three women spoke of group boundaries asserted around affect, where lesbians were presented as women with energy, freedom, passion, spirituality, diversity and attachment, and/or around behaviour, where lesbians were presented as creating the rules, inventing lifestyles, being different, creating a gender continuum, relating with equality and creating peer families:

That travelling, that meeting women, the eyes connecting, feeling that energy, commonality of being a woman and a lesbian, it's very deep rooted somewhere in our thousands of years ago. We've really come a long way as women. (18)

These women also spoke of group symbols, such as popular venues, lesbian novels, magazines and films, community 'scenes' such as the 'butch/femme' scene or the hotel scene, political movements, community arrangements such as peer families and group living, and community events such as commitment ceremonies or relationship changes which have evolved over the years:

We were very transient in those days. We'd all rent our houses, and then 3 months later, another girlfriend, another house, and we all adapted and adjusted somehow. And it's really different now, I think. Here we are, further down middle age and alot of us have been with our
partners for quite a few years, and now when there's a break-up we think 'oh!', and it affects us quite differently. There are different emotions now. (18)

Ten women spoke of perceiving the homogeneity of the lesbian community:

I started going to (a lesbian group) and there were so many dykes. There must have been 40 dykes (in that group) and they were all absolutely wonderful women and they just showed me what lesbian life is all about and they were all women that I could relate to and I had heaps and heaps in common with them. ... that really gave me confidence to just get in with that community because I knew that they were likely to be like me. (45)

while 7 others perceived the non-homogeneity of the community:

There's so much diversity in the lesbian community and there's some lesbian factions and things that I really don't particularly like. But overall, yeah, it's a sense of community (49)

Thirty-three women mentioned their identification with the wider lesbian community or with other lesbians. Twenty-six women detailed their first introduction to the lesbian community; 20 of these recalled their active search for lesbian community, and the affirming and motivating effect that had on them and on their transition to lesbian identity:

I talked to a lesbian, who's still a good friend of mine today, and I needed to talk about the coming out process, to give me some sense of who I was and what could happen now, because I had absolutely no lesbian friends at all. My whole life was totally heterosexual. So I did that, and she put me in touch with a group that was there for women who were thinking about their sexuality. So I moved into the lesbian community. (41)

Seventeen women described their first introduction to the lesbian community as being the result of their own search, or as occurring by way of political action, sports clubs, women's refuges, business, or a significant other, and as resulting in feelings of delight, relief, 'coming home', and/or empowerment:

I had actually put out some little tentacles to find out something about gay stuff and I went to a meeting.... And I walked in, and at this stage in my life I still had high heels, makeup, long hair, dresses and skirts and so on. And I walked in and all I saw was a bunch of women who looked like men and all dressed in black. Fortunately one of them was a little Irish leprechaun who kind of picked me up and took me out on the town to show me what being gay was about. (23)
Twenty-six women also spoke of identification with, or belonging to, the greater lesbian group or community, with references which were either metaphoric, such as likening one's lesbianism to one's 'right-handedness', or definitional, such as defining lesbianism as being about community:

    So yeah, but I identify quite firmly as 'lesbian' and to me that just means choosing to be involved in that women energy thing, that women spirit, with women that value women, with people that value women. I mean the only people that value women seem to be lesbians. (27)

Twelve women recalled making identity comparisons with other lesbians in community, in the areas of disclosure management, lifestyle, and transition process. Seven women expressed a sense of perceiving and fitting a lesbian prototype:

    I went through all the stages probably that you go through being a lesbian: self-hatred; (being) separatist; living in England for a while as a lesbian separatist feminist; little crew cut; got my photo in Spare Rib (magazine).... (23)

but 12 women denied a community prototype, or sought to distance themselves from the prototypical, either in identity definition, sexual behaviour or lifestyle:

    I don't think I'm a stereotype although my parents and other people who aren't really very familiar with the community and that probably would, say, think of me as a stereotypical dyke because I you know, I've got short hair, I don't wear dresses, I have hairy armpits and I don't mind the odd game of pool. You know there's so much more to me and to all of my friends (57)

Twenty-seven women gave more detailed accounts of their group or community involvement in their narratives. Sixteen women indicated a high level of involvement in lesbian community, in political, social and relational pursuits related to lifestyle, visibility, political action, and identity:

    And so from there both of us got involved actually in organising (a lesbian group) ... and we met a lot of women and that let us into being involved politically. And we both got ourselves on to the organising committee of (a political group) in various capacities .... I guess by being involved in these groups I also met a hell of a lot of women and developed a lot of networks, which still stay with me today and that has really been really important to me because I guess they became my family in that sense. (46)
I just jumped into lesbian society and I really didn’t have a life outside of that. I didn’t have normal work so I ate, lived and breathed in lesbian community and really have done so mostly ever since you know. So I don’t have straight friends, I don’t have straight family here you know, ... it’s all sort of lesbian. (10)

Twelve women spoke of a sense of solidarity with other lesbians in community, especially in the areas of identity, life choices, legal rights, self-definition, and stigma management:

And since it became conscious life got better and better. And I guess now I’m able to understand and enjoy the community and the friends I have, and this is only in the last year or so. I understand the word ‘friend’ more than I ever have before. (44)

Eleven women also spoke of dependence on the greater lesbian community, citing the need for acceptance, emotional support, ‘family’ support, nourishment, advice, guidance, affirmation and company:

I guess the precious things in life are those (lesbian) friends who’ve been around 10 years or more and have been through a lot with us and have been through similar kinds of struggles and we’ve been there for each other in the way that probably families are supposed to. (30)

Thirty-two women spoke of positive affect within lesbian community. Twenty-two women spoke of emotional safety, in terms of affirmation of identity and process, acceptance, protection from homonegativity, and respect for emotionality:

I think ... to have a lot of lesbian friends is what makes me feel comfortable as a lesbian. So I get reinforced for being, I mean you can go down the street in parts of the town and there’s (a lesbian magazine) and that reinforces that sense of who you are, and that you’re ok. (25)

Sixteen women expressed a liking for other lesbians and/or the lesbian collective, while 5 recalled a sense of acceptance by the group that eased their transition process:

I went to the (lesbian) coffee shop and they were so welcoming, and I was so scared, not scared of them, but scared because it was a new environment. I wasn’t scared of them as ‘the lesbian group’, I was excited to get there but nervous because this was a new group. ... I didn’t realise how welcoming and loving and responsive they were. So that was so affirming. (28)

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However 26 women mentioned negative affect within the lesbian community or with other lesbians. Some of these women cited being either incompatible with other lesbians, rejected by lesbian groups, more comfortable with 'queers', or more focused on other aspects of their identity. Others spoke of not liking the greater lesbian community, either because of the lifestyles, particular people or icons within that community, or the hardships created by being in such a community. Sixteen specifically criticised the lesbian community for cliquey, disparate, political, non-political, hypocritical or prescriptive factors, or for false assumptions of mutual acceptance, liking, etc.:

One of the issues coming up for me now is how difficult it is to meet new women, and how small the lesbian world really is. There's lots of connections, but there's also lots of little ghettos and groups and it's hard to know people in them, or across them, that's something I've been noticing alot. (30)

I also expected a bit more camaraderie than there is. You know, there's actually, like even one of (the lesbian group) said 'well, just 'cause she's a dyke doesn't mean I like her'. And it was sort of a bit like 'mmm, but I mean you know like it's better than all the other bloody rednecks'. The world's crawling with rednecks, you know, you'd think (lesbians would) just sort of stick together ... (51)

and 6 spoke of a feeling of 'not belonging to' the lesbian community, either because they sense incompatibility among lesbians, distrust among lesbians, or stereotyping by and of lesbians, or because they feel a lack of support:

That's another problem being in the lesbian community, because alot of my friends can be very political, and I find that a bit annoying at times, because the same women that I find that are yahooing about being on committees and belonging and being political and feminist ... they're the same women who sit on the couch and say 'get me a beer'. You know, they take that sort of missionary style lifestyle: them on top, someone else underneath them. Not that everyone's like that of course. (15)

And there's some situations when in the scenes I have been with lesbians that I felt totally uncomfortable. You know you go to a wedding with friends and because you're a gay woman you get put on the table with other lesbians and you have absolutely nothing in common with them other than you fuck women. And it's just totally uncomfortable (51)
These then were the 61 discrete narrative references identified as common to at least 5 of the narratives in the participant group of this study. Table 2 provides a summary of these references, listed in order of frequency of occurrence.

NOTE: Frequency refers to the number of narratives in which an identified reference occurred at least once.

**TABLE 2: Frequency distribution of discrete references in narratives**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disclosure events</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of stigma surrounding lesbianism</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased self-knowledge/acceptance gained by transition</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pivotal points in transition</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition perceived as self-motivated</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian relationship issues</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-transition</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian identity perceived as essential/genetic</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition perceived as escape from aversive situation</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redefinition of dimensions of comparison with heterosexuals</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification with/belonging to lesbian community</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family perceived as supportive</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived boundaries of lesbian community</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reluctance/failure to disclose</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial of lesbian identity</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional safety/well-being within lesbian community</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition perceived as response to significant other</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively seeking lesbian community</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual attraction</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aversion to lesbian identity</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to lesbian community</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian identity perceived as a process</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian identity established/certain</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No possibility of return to heterosexuality</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian identity perceived as fluid</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration of lesbian identity</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking/accepting other lesbians/lesbian community</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement in lesbian community</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism of lesbian community/other lesbians</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal definition of lesbian identity</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding lesbian relationships</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving heterosexual relationships</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive consequences of disclosure</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity difference felt in childhood</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition to lesbian identity inspiring goal reappraisal</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual friends perceived as supportive</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of lesbian relationships/breaking up</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity comparisons made with other lesbians</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived non-prototypicality</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidarity with lesbian community</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependence on lesbian community</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian identity perceived as constructed/chosen</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group definition of lesbian identity</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian sex</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devaluation of heterosexuality/heterosexuals</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived homogeneity in lesbian community</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seduction</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For ease of data management, these narrative references were subjected to two separate data reduction analyses. The first of these was a qualitative analysis, whose purpose was to determine whether the references could be grouped into units of meaning, or 'narrative reference themes', which may comprise the elements of lesbian identity narrative. The second was a quantitative analysis, whose purpose was to determine whether the references could be grouped by their tendency to co-occur in narratives, or 'narrative clusters', which may confirm, complement or challenge the qualitative analysis findings. Each of these analyses is now discussed in turn.

8.2.2.1 Qualitative analysis

Discrete references were subjected to a NUD.IST analysis. NUD.IST (Richards & Richards 1994) is a Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching and Theorising computer program which promotes a profound exploration of data and ideas through an organised and flexible storage, coding, retrieval and analysis system. This analysis served to gather discrete references into preliminary groupings, and thence, in a secondary analysis (see Kidd, Scharf & Veazie 1996), into lesbian identity narrative reference themes. Table 3 shows the discrete references that were gathered into preliminary groupings:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 3: Preliminary groupings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preliminary groupings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The nature of lesbian identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation for transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The transition process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response to perceived stigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequences of transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social change mechanisms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions of identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive affect in community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p114
| Perceived social support | Family supportive  
|                         | Heterosexual friends supportive |
| Community involvement   | Actively seeking lesbian community  
|                         | Involvement in lesbian community  
|                         | Solidarity with lesbian community  
|                         | Dependence on lesbian community |
| Negative affect in community | Criticism of lesbian community  
|                         | Perceived non-prototypicality  
|                         | Not belonging with lesbian community |
| Identity indicators     | Lesbian identity established  
|                         | Lesbian identity questioned  
|                         | Return to heterosexual identity impossible  
|                         | Return to heterosexual identity possible  
|                         | Identity difference felt in childhood |
| Perceived lack of support | Lack of support from religious community  
|                         | Lack of support from family |

Table 4 shows preliminary groupings gathered into narrative reference themes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 4: Narrative Reference Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Narrative Reference Themes</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Identity                           | The nature of lesbian identity  
|                                    | Identity definitions  
|                                    | Identity indicators |
| Transition                         | Motivation for transition  
|                                    | The transition process  
|                                    | Consequences of transition |
| Management                         | Perceived social support  
|                                    | Perceived lack of support  
|                                    | Response to perceived stigma  
|                                    | Disclosure  
|                                    | Social change mechanisms |
| Relationships                      | Relationships  
|                                    | Sexuality |
| Community                          | Defining community  
|                                    | Collective identification  
|                                    | Community involvement  
|                                    | Positive affect in community  
|                                    | Negative affect in community |

In summary, the results of this analysis indicated that discrete references fell into five main narrative reference themes. While these themes can be somewhat overlapping in narratives, when extracted the references can nonetheless be delineated into groups comprising:

p115
lesbian identity and its parameters;
transition to lesbian sexual identity;
cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects of the management of a stigmatised lesbian identity;
lesbian sexual relationships; and
identification with and involvement in lesbian community.

8.2.2.2 Quantitative analysis

In order to determine whether the discrete references could be grouped by frequency of co-occurrence in narratives, that is, whether they formed narrative clusters which confirmed or challenged the reference area groupings identified above, the references were subjected to a statistical cluster analysis.

Several attempts were made to cluster the references by multi-dimensional scaling (MDS) techniques. These techniques are designed to quantify the interdependency of a network of variables (Ferguson & Takane 1989), and could therefore determine, hierarchically, which of the references comprised narrative groupings.

The Squared Euclidean MDS was applied to the references but results failed to comply with maximum stress levels of <.15; the results were therefore statistically invalid. The JACCARD MDS was then applied. This is a method which stresses joint presences over joint absences, that is, more weight is given to comparison of those variables which are present among cases. However, this method also failed to comply with maximum stress levels, and results were statistically invalid.

References with a Presence/Absence ratio of greater than 70/30 in either direction, i.e. references which occurred in more than 70% or less than 30% of cases, were removed from the analysis. This is a common method of maximising the effectiveness of scaling or cluster techniques, as data occurring in more than 70% of cases do not provide sufficient variation to aid in analysis or understanding, and data occurring in fewer than 30% of cases are not sufficiently characteristic to aid in analysis or understanding (Cairns 2000). The remaining 26 references were again subjected to JACCARD MDS analysis, and again, results failed to comply with maximum stress levels and were therefore statistically invalid. The MDS method of analysis was therefore abandoned.

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A cluster analysis was then applied to the 26 references with a Presence/Absence ratio of 70/30 or less (as above). These were subjected to both Squared Euclidean and Ward methods; both failed to produce clusters. However the JACCARD complete linkage analysis did produce clusters, as did the JACCARD average linking between groups analysis. The two JACCARD methods yielded almost identical results, validating the results (Cairns 2000).

Based on the interpretability of the data, 7 clusters were identified at the 18th level:

♦ Cluster 1 interwove references from identity, transition, management and relationship narrative themes, into a 'social change and relationships' narrative reference theme;

♦ Cluster 2 interwove references from management and group narrative themes into a 'disclosure and support' narrative reference theme;

♦ Cluster 3 comprised references centred around 'pre-transition';

♦ Cluster 4 interwove references from management, relationship and group narrative themes into an 'attraction and passing' narrative reference theme;

♦ Cluster 5 comprised references centred around group involvement;

♦ Cluster 6 interwove references from transition and management narrative themes into an 'identity management' narrative reference theme; and

♦ Cluster 7 comprised one identity reference, that of 'identity certainty' which did not tend to co-occur with any other reference.

Table 5 shows the reference content of the seven clusters resulting from the JACCARD analysis. The results of the JACCARD complete linkage analysis are recorded in the table as this is the more common analysis of the two in research of this kind (Cairns 2000).
### TABLE 5: Reference Content of JACCARD Clusters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JACCARD Cluster</th>
<th>Reference Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 1</td>
<td>Denial of lesbian identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Change &amp; Relationships</td>
<td>Rejection of/aversion to lesbian identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transition perceived as self-motivated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased self-knowledge/acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lesbian identity perceived as essential/genetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transition seen as escape from aversive situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lesbian relationship issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 2</td>
<td>Disclosure of lesbian identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosure &amp; Support</td>
<td>Awareness of stigma surrounding lesbianianm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family perceived as supportive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Redefinition of dimensions of les/het comparison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Defining community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional safety in lesbian community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 3</td>
<td>Pivotal points in transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice</td>
<td>Pre-transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transition due to significant other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 4</td>
<td>Actively seeking lesbian community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attraction &amp; Passing</td>
<td>Introduction to lesbian community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reluctance/failure to disclose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sexual attraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 5</td>
<td>Identification with/belonging to lesbian community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Involvement</td>
<td>Liking/accepting other lesbians/lesbian community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involvement in lesbian community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 6</td>
<td>Identity transition as a process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Management</td>
<td>Devaluation of stigmatised lesbian domains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 7</td>
<td>Lesbian identity established/certain</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 8.2.2.3 Discussion

Analyses revealed that discrete references in the lesbian identity narratives of this participant group fell into 5 narrative reference themes: lesbian identity and its parameters; the process of transition to lesbian sexual identity; cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects of the management of a stigmatised lesbian identity; lesbian sexual relationships; and identification with and involvement in a wider lesbian community.

However, references occurring in more than 30% and less than 70% of narratives tended to occur in particular combinations of these narrative reference themes. In identified clusters:
Identity references commonly occurred within accounts either of the narrator's management of identity or of her certainty about her lesbian identity;

- Relationship references were absorbed into management themes;

- Transition references commonly occurred with reference to the development of identity and/or lifestyle management and relationships;

- Management references were separated into accounts of relationships or accounts of disclosure; and

- Community references were absorbed into identity and lifestyle management themes or separated into accounts of community involvement.

The quantitative analysis findings could therefore be said to complement the qualitative analysis findings: a quantitative analysis of references occurring in more than 30% and less than 70% of narratives revealed that they did not tend to co-occur in their narrative reference theme groups, but rather as a combination of references from various narrative reference theme groups.

Although only 26 references were included in the quantitative analysis, these findings represented the predominant groupings of the more common references, and were therefore of import to the current study as common elements of lesbian identity narratives. The remaining 35 references comprised narrative reference themes which were also considered of import to the current study as elements, albeit less commonly co-occurring, of these lesbian identity narratives. In order to honour the differences as well as commonalities among lesbian populations, both narrative themes and narrative clusters were retained for subsequent analyses.

8.3 Question 3: Are there scripts in lesbian identity narrative?

A script is referred to as references such as actions, events, perceptions, etc. co-assembled for interpretation or response (Tomkins 1979). In order to determine whether narrative reference themes or narrative clusters actually reflected 'scripts', that is, patterns designed for interpretation or response, the themes and clusters were analysed for patterned coherence in the following manner:

1. The number of references in the first narrative reference theme, i.e. Identity, appearing in each narrative was determined;
2. Narratives with fewer than 3 references in this narrative reference theme were
discarded, as it was considered that they could not evidence a reliable pattern;
3. For narratives with 3 or more references in this narrative reference theme, the
order in which the references appeared in the narrative was recorded to determine
whether or not they constituted a coherently linked series, or 'script'; and
4. Scripts in each narrative were compared with other narratives to determine
whether they were common to two or more narratives.
The discrete references of each of the other narrative reference themes and clusters
were then analysed in like manner.

The results of this analysis, applied to each of the narrative reference themes and
clusters in turn, are presented below. Each reference theme or cluster is represented
by a model which depicts all references in that theme or cluster. Each script
involving at least three of the references, and occurring in at least two of the
narratives, is represented as a common 'script'.

NOTE: In the models following,
♦ An 'X' appearing beside a reference indicates that the reference was used in the
script.
♦ The order in which the references were linked in narrative, or the script, is
represented by the vertical line.
♦ The total (n=x) appearing under the final reference in each script refers to the
number of narratives in the participant group demonstrating that script.
Identity Scripts

All of the 37 narratives demonstrating 3 or more Identity references evidenced scripts. In 33 of these 37, the scripts were similar to those in at least one other narrative. There were 6 variations of script identified in this narrative reference theme. Model 1 represents the 6 scripts apparent in the Identity narrative reference theme:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 1: Identity scripts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity perceived as essential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity difference in childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity perceived as choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity perceived as process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity certain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity doubtful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity perceived as fluid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model 1 shows that:
In script 1, 12 participants illustrated a process of essential identity emergence and identification with the wider lesbian group, from which individual lesbians learned their definitions of their lesbian sexual identity and developed a certainty about their lesbian sexual identity;

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In script 2, 7 participants illustrated a process of essential identity emergence beginning in childhood, from which they developed personal definitions of their lesbian sexual identity;

In script 3, 5 participants illustrated a process of essential identity emergence, from which they developed a certainty about their lesbian sexual identity;

In script 4, 4 participants illustrated a process of choosing a lesbian identity, from which they developed personal definitions of their lesbian sexual identity and feelings of certainty about that identity;

In script 5, 3 participants illustrated a process of choosing a lesbian identity, a choice about which they were currently doubtful. They lacked a personal definition of their lesbian sexual identity, and perceived their sexual identity as fluid; and

In script 6, 2 participants illustrated a process of essential identity emergence and identification with the wider lesbian group, from which they learned their definitions of their lesbian sexual identity.

In summary, the findings indicated that, in 33 of the 37 narratives where 3 or more Identity references were used, references comprised scripts which variously described:

- emergence of essential lesbian sexual identity (scripts 1,2,3,6);
- development of group identity (scripts 1, 6);
- construction of a chosen identity (scripts 4,5);
- evolution of lesbian identity definitions (scripts 1,2,4,6);
- emergence of fluid identity (script 5);
- confirmation of essential identity via ultimate 'certainty', or identity commitment (script 3); and
- affirmation of choice of identity via ultimate 'certainty' or identity commitment (script 4).
Management scripts

All of the 48 narratives demonstrating three or more of the Management references evidenced scripts. In each of these narratives the scripts were similar to those in at least one other narrative. There were 9 variations of script identified in this narrative reference theme. Model 2 represents the 9 scripts apparent in the Management narrative reference theme:

Model 2: Management scripts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of stigma,</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial/aversion to lesbian identity</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social change strategies</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n=2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure/reluctance to disclose</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosure events</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>n=3</td>
<td>n=3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family/friends supportive</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>n=11</td>
<td>n=8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model X shows that:

In script 1, 11 participants outlined various social change strategies they had used, such as their changed attitude to heterosexuality or the de-stigmatising of comparison domains, and illustrated ways in which they were then able to disclose their sexual identities to family and/or friends. They proceeded to relate these disclosures, or disclosure events, to support from family or friendship that they had received or realised in response;

In script 2, 8 participants began by illustrating their awareness of the stigma associated with lesbianism, and then contrasted that with the social change strategies or attitudes they had adopted in response to this awareness. They then related social change to disclosure, and disclosure to subsequent awareness of support from family and/or friends, as in script 1;

p123
In script 3, 8 participants described their awareness of the stigma associated with lesbianism, and their own negative responses, such as aversion to their sexual identity or denial of their sexual identity. They related this denial or aversion to their fear of disclosing, or failure to disclose, their sexual identity to another person or people in general, but illustrated their development through this fear or failure by describing subsequent successful disclosure events which in turn were responded to with support and acceptance from family or friends;

In script 4, 5 participants illustrated ways in which their initial awareness of stigma associated with lesbianism resulted in their denial of or aversion to a lesbian sexual identity, and the social change strategies they used to counter that aversion or denial;

In script 5, 5 participants illustrated ways in which stigma awareness led to denial of and aversion to a lesbian sexual identity and how they responded with social change strategies, as in script 4. They then illustrated how, with social change, they were able to approach disclosure, and ways in which they progressed from initial failure or reluctance to disclose, to eventual successful disclosure and subsequent support from family and/or friends;

In script 6, 3 participants illustrated ways in which they progressed from failure or reluctance to disclose, to eventual successful disclosure;

In script 7, 3 participants illustrated ways in which their initial awareness of the stigma associated with lesbianism prompted negative responses, such as aversion to their sexual identity or denial of their sexual identity, but how they were eventually able to disclose their identity to another person;

In script 8, 3 participants illustrated their use of social change strategies, and the reflection of these changed attitudes in the attitudes and support of family and/or friends; and

In script 9, 2 participants illustrated ways in which an initial aversion to a lesbian identity was overcome by personal social change strategies.

In summary, the findings indicated that in the 48 narratives where 3 or more Management references were used, references comprised scripts which variously described:

- development of disclosure competence (scripts 1,2,3,5,6);
- achievement of social change (scripts 1,2,4,5,8,9);
• use of social change strategies to counter stigma (scripts 2,4,5,9);
• affirmation of social change via family/friends support (scripts 1,2,8); and
• affirmation of disclosure competence via family/friends’ acceptance (scripts 1,2,3,5).

**Transition scripts**

Of the 41 narratives demonstrating three or more Transition references, 41 evidenced scripts. In 38 of these 41 narratives, the scripts were similar to those in at least one other narrative. There were 9 variations of script identified in this narrative reference theme. Model 3 represents the 9 scripts in the Transition narrative reference theme:

Model 3: Transition scripts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Left heterosexual relationships</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Escape from aversive situation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition due to significant other</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition self-motivated</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-transition Pivotal points Performance utterances</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration and learning the 'rules'</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>n=6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal reappraisal, self-knowledge/acceptance</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>n=7</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>n=5</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>n=4</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>n=4</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model X shows that:

In script 1, 7 participants considered that the motivation to change identities came from themselves; they indicated that they were motivated away from an aversive situation, through pre-transition situations which built or led them to a pivotal point, sometimes marked by a change or 'performance' utterance, and towards an increased self-acceptance, self-knowledge and/or reappraisal of goals;
In script 2, 6 participants considered that the motivation to change identities came from themselves, and they illustrated pre-transition situations which built or led them to a pivotal point, sometimes marked by a change or 'performance' utterance. They then illustrated the process of exploring their new identities and discovering the ways or learning the 'rules' of their new identity;

In script 3, 5 participants indicated that they abandoned heterosexual identities. They then illustrated the process identified in script 1;

In script 4, 4 participants indicated that they were motivated away from an aversive situation by the influence of a significant other, but otherwise outlined the process as identified in script 1;

In script 5, 4 participants considered that the motivation to change identities came from themselves. They indicated that they abandoned heterosexual identities, and were motivated away from an aversive situation and through pre-transition situations which built or led them to a pivotal point, sometimes marked by a change or 'performance' utterance. They then illustrated the process of exploration of their new identities, the learning of the 'rules', and the discovery of an increased self-acceptance, self-knowledge and/or reappraisal of goals;

In script 6, 3 participants considered that the motivation to change identities came from themselves, and that they abandoned heterosexual identities for lesbian identities and discovered increased self-acceptance, self-knowledge and/or reappraisal of goals;

In script 7, 3 participants indicated that, due to the influence of a significant other, they were motivated through pre-transition situations which built or led them to a pivotal point, sometimes marked by a change or 'performance' utterance, to increased self-acceptance, self-knowledge and/or reappraisal of goals;

In script 8, 3 participants indicated that they were self-motivated to explore their new identities, that they learned the 'rules', and that they discovered an increased self-acceptance, self-knowledge and/or reappraisal of goals; and

In script 9, 3 participants indicated that were self-motivated through pre-transition situations which built or led them to a pivotal point, sometimes marked by a change or 'performance' utterance. They then illustrated the process of exploring their new identities, learning the 'rules', and discovering an increased self-acceptance, self-knowledge and/or reappraisal of goals.
In summary, the findings indicated that, in 38 of 41 narratives where 3 or more Transition references were used, references comprised scripts which variously described:

- identification of turning points or transitional 'markers' such as leaving a heterosexual identity (scripts 3,5,6), building of crystallisations of discontent or 'readiness' (scripts 1,2,3,4,5,7,9), pivotal points during transition (scripts 1,2,3,4,5,7,9), and the exploration or 'learning' of a lesbian sexual identity (scripts 2,5,8,9); and

- affirmation of transition via increased well-being in post-transition identity (scripts 1,3,4,5,7,8,9).
Community scripts

All of the 39 narratives demonstrating three or more Community references evidenced scripts. In 35 of these 39 narratives, the scripts were similar to those in at least one other narrative. There were 6 variations of script identified in this narrative reference theme. Model 4 represents the 6 scripts apparent in the Community narrative reference theme:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 4: Community scripts</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification with group</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity comparisons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively seeking group</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking/accepting lesbians</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group involvement</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining community Boundaries</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n=3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional safety in group</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>n=5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=13</td>
<td>n=5</td>
<td>n=5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism of group</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n=5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-belonging,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>n=4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model 4 shows that:
In script 1, 13 participants outlined ways in which their identification with the group prompted them to actively seek the group and become involved with the group. They outlined their positive affective responses to members of the group, and illustrated ways in which positive affective responses and group involvement enabled them to develop clear group boundaries and definitions and feelings of emotional safety within the group;
In script 2, 5 participants outlined ways in which their identification with the group prompted them to actively seek the group. They outlined ways in which their
positive affective responses to members of the group and group involvement led to
the emotional safety they felt within the group;
In script 3, 5 participants outlined ways in which their identification with the group
and positive affective responses to others in the group led to group involvement
and feelings of emotional safety within the group. They subsequently outlined a
developed sense of withdrawal from and criticism of the group;
In script 4, 5 participants illustrated ways in which positive affective responses and
group involvement enabled them to develop clear group boundaries and definitions
and feelings of emotional safety within the group;
In script 5, 4 participants outlined ways in which they actively sought the group, and ways
in which their introduction to the group and subsequent group involvement led to a
sense of non-belonging in the group; and
In script 6, 3 participants outlined ways in which their identification with the group
led to group involvement, and the development of clear group boundaries and
definitions.

In summary, the findings indicated that, in 35 of 39 narratives where 3 or more
Community references were used, references comprised scripts which variously
described:
♦ development of group involvement or belonging (scripts 1,2,3,5,6);
♦ evolution of relocation within group (scripts 3,5); and
♦ affirmation of group involvement via emotional well-being and/or cognitive
  clarity (scripts 1,2,3,4,6).
Relationship scripts

All of the 36 narratives demonstrating three or more Relationship references evidenced scripts. In each of the 36 narratives, scripts were similar to those in at least one other narrative. There were 13 variations of script identified in this narrative reference theme. Model 5 represents the 13 variations of the scripts in the Relationship narrative reference theme:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 5: Relationship scripts</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Same sex attraction</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexuality, seduction</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional intimacy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n=6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding or having a relationship</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Losing a relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>n=3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship issues</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=6</td>
<td>n=5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive relationships</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=4</td>
<td>n=4</td>
<td>n=4</td>
<td>n=2</td>
<td>n=2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model 5 shows that:
In script 1, 6 participants outlined ways in which feelings of attraction for another woman, sexual contact with another woman, or emotional intimacy with another woman, led to a relationship in which issues specific to same-sex relationships were encountered;
In script 2, 6 participants outlined ways in which feelings of attraction for another woman, sexual contact with another woman, or emotional intimacy with another woman led to a relationship with that woman;
In script 3, 5 participants outlined ways in which finding or having a lesbian relationship raised issues peculiar to a same-sex relationship;
In script 4, 4 participants outlined ways in which finding or having a series of relationships over time raised issues peculiar to same-sex relationships in general; in script 5, 4 participants outlined a process of feeling an attraction for another woman which led to sexual contact and/or seduction and ultimately a relationship. They then outlined ways in which they encountered issues peculiar to same-sex relationships, and ways in which different issues impacted on successive lesbian relationships; in script 6, 4 participants outlined ways in which feelings of attraction for another woman led to a relationship with that woman. They then described the dissolution of that relationship and successive relationships with other women; in script 7, 3 participants outlined successive relationships, included ways in which they were dissolved or ended; in script 8, 2 participants outlined ways in which feelings of attraction for another woman led to sexual contact, emotional intimacy and a relationship with that woman. They then outlined ways in which the relationship was dissolved or ended, and ways in which issues specific to same-sex relationships were highlighted and approached during successive relationships; and in script 9, 2 participants outlined ways in which they progressed from an initial relationship to a series of successive relationships.

In summary, the findings indicated that in the 36 narratives where 3 or more Relationship references were used, references comprised scripts which variously described:

- development of relationships (scripts 1,2,5,6,8);
- relationships (all scripts);
- dissolution or ending relationships (scripts 7,8);
- development of relationship competence (script 5,7);
- issues specific to lesbian relationships (scripts 1,3,4,5,8); and
- affirmation of involvement in lesbian relationships via personal growth through successive relationships (scripts 4,5,6,8,9).
Cluster scripts

Clusters 6 and 7 were omitted from this step of the analysis as it was considered that they each comprised too few references to evidence a reliable script. Results of the analysis of the other 5 clusters follows:

Cluster 1 scripts - Social Change & Relationships

A total of 3 or more references in Cluster 1 was evidenced in 15 narratives, and all 15 comprised scripts. In all 15 narratives the scripts were similar to those in at least one other narrative. There were 5 variations of script identified in this cluster. Model 6 represents the 5 scripts apparent in Cluster 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 6: Cluster 1 scripts - Social Change &amp; Relationships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity essential  X  X  X  X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial of/aversion to  X  X  X  X  X  X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lesbian identity    Escape from aversive situation  X  X  X  X  X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-motivated transition X  X  X  X  X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased self-acceptance X  X  X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships      X  X  X  X  X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=5  n=3  n=3  n=2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model 6 shows that:
In script 1, 5 participants illustrated a process of growth through relationships. They established that their lesbian sexual identity was essential, then described an aversive situation, such as increasing discontent or increasing readiness to adopt a lesbian sexual identity, which prompted a self-motivated transition; this resulted in increased self-acceptance. Each of these stages led to or from a relationship experience or series of relationships;

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In script 2, 3 participants described an aversive situation, such as increasing discontent or readiness to adopt a lesbian sexual identity, which prompted a self-motivated transition; this resulted in increased self-acceptance. Each of these stages led to or from a relationship experience or series of relationships;

In script 3, 2 participants established that their lesbian sexual identity was essential. They described a process of an initial aversion to the idea, followed by an increasing discontent with the situation or readiness to adopt a lesbian sexual identity which resulted in a self-motivated transition. This led to increased self-acceptance and ultimately a relationship or series of relationships;

In script 4, 2 participants established that their lesbian sexual identity was essential, then described a process of an initial aversion to the idea, followed by an increasing discontent or readiness to adopt a lesbian sexual identity which resulted in a self-motivated transition to lesbian identity. This led to a relationship experience or series of relationships, which culminated in increased self-acceptance; and

In script 5, 2 participants established that their lesbian sexual identity was essential, then described a process of an initial aversion to the idea, followed by a self-motivated transition; each stage led to or from a relationship experience or series of relationships.

In summary, the findings indicated that 15 narratives used Social Change & Relationship scripts to variously illustrate:

- transition to lesbian identity in the context of ongoing or serial relationships (all scripts);
- establishment of relationship(s) (scripts 1, 2, 3, 5);
- management of stigma in the context of ongoing or serial relationships (script 3, 4, 5);
- affirmation of transition to lesbian identity via by increased self-acceptance and/or successful establishing of relationship(s) (all scripts).
Cluster 2 scripts - Disclosure & support

A total of 3 or more references in Cluster 2 was evidenced in 20 narratives, and all 20 comprised scripts. In all 20 narratives the scripts were similar to those in at least one other narrative. There were 4 variations of script identified in this cluster. Model 7 represents the 4 scripts apparent in Cluster 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 7: Cluster 2 scripts - Disclosure &amp; Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1   2   3   4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of stigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X     X   X   X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Change strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X     X   X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family/friends supportive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X     X   X   X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining Community Boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X     X   X   X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional safety in group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X     X   X   X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=7   n=3    n=3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model 7 shows that:
In script 1, 7 participants illustrated a process of becoming aware of the stigma of a lesbian identity but subsequently disclosing a stigmatised lesbian identity and finding family and friends supportive;
In script 2, 7 participants illustrated a process of becoming aware of the stigma of a lesbian identity but disclosing a stigmatised lesbian identity, and subsequently developing clarity of boundaries and definition which led to feelings of emotional safety within lesbian community;
In script 3, 3 participants illustrated a process of becoming aware of the stigma of a lesbian identity, but adopting social change strategies to combat stigma. They then disclosed a stigmatised lesbian identity and found family and friends supportive. They subsequently developed clarity of boundaries and definition which led to feelings of emotional safety within lesbian community;
In script 4, 3 participants illustrated a process of becoming aware of the stigma of a lesbian identity, and responding by developing clarity of boundaries and definition which led to feelings of emotional safety within lesbian community.

In summary, the findings indicated that 22 narratives used Disclosure & Support scripts to variously illustrate:
- disclosure of stigmatised identity (scripts 1,2,3);
- social change strategies to combat stigma (script 3); and
- affirmation of stigma management strategies via finding support from family/friends and/or emotional safety in lesbian groups (scripts 1,2,3,4).

**Cluster 3 scripts - Choice**

A total of 3 or more references in Cluster 3 was evidenced in 42 narratives; 22 of those comprised scripts. In 17 of the 22 narratives, the scripts were similar to those in at least one other narrative. There were 3 variations of script identified in this cluster. Model 8 represents the 3 scripts apparent in Cluster 3:

---

**Model 8: Cluster 3 scripts - Choice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Transition</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unhappy but compliant</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy heterosexual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified sexual identity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation for transition attributed to significant other</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pivotal point</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Found other lesbians</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was seduced</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>n=2</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fell in love</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>n=3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had affairs/relationships</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>n=5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

*p135*
Model 8 shows that:
In script 1, 10 participants viewed their pre-transition heterosexual identity as unhappy but themselves as compliant heterosexuals. They then illustrated a process of meeting someone who influenced or motivated them to adopt a lesbian sexual identity; they described either being seduced, falling in love, or having an affair/relationship with another woman as 'pivotal' points in this transition;
In script 2, 4 participants described their pre-transition identities as heterosexual and happy, but illustrated a process of transition to lesbian sexual identity when a significant other woman seduced them; and
In script 3, 3 participants failed to define their pre-transition sexual identities, but described their pre-transition states as discontented or confused. They illustrated a process of being influenced or motivated to adopt a lesbian identity by a significant other who led them to meeting other lesbians, or with whom they had an affair or relationship.

In summary, the findings indicated that 17 narratives used Choice scripts to variously illustrate:
♦ turning points or 'markers' in the transition process, such as pre-transition and pivotal points (all scripts); and
♦ motivation or attribution for transition to lesbian identity, such as being unhappy, meeting a significant other and/or having a sexual experience (all scripts).
Cluster 4 scripts - Attraction & Passing

A total of 3 or more references in Cluster 4 was evidenced in 40 narratives; 8 of those comprised scripts. In all 8 narratives, the scripts were similar to those in at least one other narrative. There were 2 variations of script identified in this cluster. Model 9 represents the 2 scripts apparent in Cluster 4:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 9: Cluster 4 scripts - Attraction &amp; Passing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual attraction to one other woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual attraction to women in general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reluctance/failure to disclose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek lesbian community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model 9 shows that:

In script 1, 4 participants outlined a process of realising a sexual attraction to another woman, feeling reluctant or unable to disclose that attraction to others, and seeking lesbian community as a way of gaining support and/or affirmation; and

In script 2, 4 participants outlined a process of realising a sexual attraction to other women, feeling reluctant or unable to disclose that attraction to others, seeking entry into lesbian community as a way of gaining support and/or affirmation, and marking their introduction to lesbian community as the start of group belonging and/or identity.

In summary, the findings indicated that 8 narratives used Attraction & Passing scripts to variously illustrate:

- developing disclosure competence by attaining group support (script 1,2); and
- developing group belonging and/or identity (script 2).
**Cluster 5 scripts - Group Involvement**

A total of 3 or more references in Cluster 5 was evidenced in 37 narratives; 8 of those evidenced scripts. In all 8 narratives, the scripts were similar to those in at least one other narrative. There were 2 variations of script identified in this cluster. Model 10 represents the 2 scripts apparent in Cluster 5:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identification</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with group</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Liking/accepting</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other lesbians</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n=3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group Involvement</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model 10 shows that:
In script 1, 5 participants illustrated a process of identifying as lesbian, liking other lesbians, and becoming involved in lesbian community; and
In script 2, 3 participants illustrated a process of identifying as lesbian, becoming involved in lesbian community, and discovering a liking for other lesbians and acceptance of and by, other lesbians.

In summary, the findings indicated that 8 narratives used Group Involvement scripts to illustrate socialisation to the group (scripts 1,2).
The lesbian identity narratives of this participant group varied in the number of scripts they evidenced. The number of scripts in each identity narrative was tallied; Table 6 shows the number of scripts occurring in identity narratives:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of scripts</th>
<th>Frequency of occurrence in autobiographical narratives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No scripts</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 script</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 scripts</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 scripts</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 scripts</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 scripts</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 scripts</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 scripts</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 scripts</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 scripts</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 scripts</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=64

### 8.3.1 Discussion

Scripts were identified among theme-based groups of references and among cluster-based groups of references:

- **Identity** references were constrained in scripts which provided illustrations of identity development or construction tasks, linked with ultimate confirmation or affirmation of those tasks. In these identity scripts, the processes of either realising an essential identity or developing a chosen identity were causally linked with identity definition and certainty. Indeed, some participants maintained their lesbian definition and certainty regardless of apparently heterosexual behaviours and affect, while those without definition and/or a sense of certainty from their process perceived their identities as 'fluid'. Using common scripts, lesbians could thereby argue the essentialism of their identity
by citing early childhood and enduring signs of 'difference' as evidence of its pre-existence (Laird 2000), or they could argue the construction of their lesbian identity by citing self-evaluation and social interaction within a changing social location (Rust 1993).

Establishing the nature of, and simultaneously the justification for, lesbian identity itself is not reflected as a developmental task in any of the transitional models or in the research literature, although Kitzinger & Wilkinson (1995) include the 'need to develop definitions of lesbianism' in the final stage of transition. However identity scripts in the current study illustrated that establishing the nature of lesbian sexual identity simultaneously reflected an individual's achievement of a developmental task and counteracted stigmatising definitions of lesbian identity held by the dominant heterosexual culture; the latter is a common pursuit among stigmatised populations (Myerhoff 1992).

Management references were constrained in scripts which provided illustrations of management strategies linked with affirmation and reinforcement of those strategies. In these Management scripts the stigma associated with lesbian identity was attributed to the dominant heterosexual culture and causally linked with the narrator's initial aversive responses to the possibility of a lesbian identity. Externalisation of stigma is an important task for members of a stigmatised group, for when stigma is perceived as contextual rather than inherent to the identity, individuals can maintain positive self-concepts despite expectation of being devalued in certain situations (Brown 1998). Indeed, this script comprised the four life events which were included in narratives even though they were not previously selected as having occurred for the participants; it attests to the collectively perceived importance of the process that this developmental task was included in autobiographical narrative even when associated life events were not recalled by the narrator immediately prior to narration.

However, to prevent devaluing or stigmatising situations becoming 'chronically accessible' and damaging to positive self-esteem, stigmatised individuals must also experience non-stigmatising contexts (Brown 1998). It is the contention of this author that the narratives in the current study illustrated two ways in which lesbians can enhance or maintain positive self-esteem through disclosure; they can seek non-stigmatised contexts such as lesbian community groups, or they
can attempt to 'destigmatise' their identity in familiar contexts such as family and friendship networks.

Management scripts in the current study demonstrated the latter strategy. After externalisation of stigma, Management scripts linked social change with subsequent disclosure management and family and/or social support. Disclosure management and perceived social support are causally linked in the research literature, with the success of the disclosure event attributable to the response of the audience (Aguilera 1994). However most of the participants using Management scripts appeared to experience this effect in reverse; their disclosure management competence was perceived as the determining factor of the level of support gleaned from friends and/or family, and the degree of disclosure was, in most narratives, related to the success of prior disclosure events. Hence the major consequence of 'successful disclosure', that is, disclosure that elicits positive or supportive responses, appeared to be an increase in self-esteem due to perceived 'disclosure competence' and the resultant creation of an increasing number of 'de-stigmatised' ie, socially supportive, contexts in the individual's environment.

Management scripts are reflected in Hanley-Hackenbruck's stigma integration model, and in Kitzinger & Wilkinson's first stage; creating an environment in which being or becoming lesbian is possible. It appears that Management scripts in identity narrative, particularly the externalisation of stigma, the achievement of disclosure competence and the creation of 'destigmatised' contexts within support networks, simultaneously demonstrated an individual's development in the challenging of stigmatised accounts of lesbian identity held by the dominant heterosexist culture. The importance of illustrating the achievement of these developmental tasks is reflected in the fact that disclosure events were the most common of all life events recalled by narrators and included in subsequent narrative; indeed, life events illustrating the externalisation of stigma and the development of disclosure competence were included in life narrative even when previously omitted from life event recall selection.

- Transition references were constrained in scripts which provided illustrations of 'markers' in the identity development or transition process linked with ultimate affirmation for the process. In these Transition scripts, pre-transition events or issues were causally linked with pivotal points of transition, motivation for
transition was attributed to internal or external sources, and the transition process was described in stages. Descriptions of stages established 'markers', or significant events, issues or thoughts which delineated one part of the process from the next and which sometimes motivated progression to the next stage of the process. Markers were specific to the individual, but overall the stages encompassed the decision to make the transition, the early exploration of lesbian identity, and a sense of growing identity competence. In almost all Transition scripts, the complete process was causally linked with ultimate well-being in the form of greater acceptance of the new identity, signalling the end of a successful transition; in some narratives, goal reappraisal also signalled the beginning of the new identity direction.

Cass (1979) claims that lesbians must successfully negotiate stages of transition to promote identity development. Transition scripts in the current study appeared to reflect this perception, but also to support Eliason's (1996) claim that a lesbian's past is often reinterpreted to make it congruent with the gay trajectory, where former heterosexuality is attributed to socialisation or ignorance of alternatives and unfavourably compared to subsequent lesbian identity. The 'periods of exploration' identified in some Transition scripts also appeared to reflect a 'detypification' process (McDonald 2001) rather than a linear transition.

Transition scripts also provided a sense of consistency after a dramatic event (Crossley 2000), by establishing 'platforms' from which to connect current identities with past identities goals and values (Davidson & Strauss 1992). Many also contained successful change indicators as identified by Heatherton & Nichols (1994), that is, the discrediting of former sources of meaning, the perceiving of change as an internally attributed response to external circumstances, the citing of significant others as role models, and the relating of change to subsequent increased self-knowledge and understanding.

Transitional models by definition reflect the transition process, but there is great disagreement between researchers about what constitutes a 'stage' and what motivates the process as a whole. In the current study, Transitional scripts which highlighted pre-transition and transition processes demonstrated the developmental achievement of a normative transition to lesbian sexual identity, within which narrators could establish individual turning points and
motivations, justify, minimise or maximise agency, and contest individual meaning.

- Community references were constrained in scripts which provided illustrations of group investigation and socialisation strategies linked with ultimate affirmation for group identification and involvement. In these Community scripts, identification and/or identity comparison for possible identification were linked with introduction to the wider lesbian group and a sense of acceptance, liking, well-being and greater group involvement. Over half of the Community scripts also linked this process with subsequent feelings of greater clarity in regard to their group identity, while a minority of participants linked the process with subsequent criticisms or rejection of the group.

These narratives illustrated the post-Freudian view of the group as the fundamental unit of human behaviour from which self-knowledge stems (Wolfenstein 1990, Bion 1961). After acceptance into the group, community boundaries and definitions were clarified for these members, in what Clement & Krueger (1998) deem the 'socialisation' phase of group identity development. In less than a quarter of the narratives, subsequent relocation was attributed to the breakdown of the individual-group relationship. This provides apparent support for Parker's (1997) contention that in such times shared knowledge is fragmented, isolation or anxiety occurs and the individual identity emerges as a defence, or for Hermans' (1996) contention that individual and group identities function relatively autonomously, and that 'negotiation' between the two gives rise to changes in both.

Community scripts also reflected the first three elements of Taylor's (1989) Theory of Self: identity comparison, actively seeking evaluative feedback from other in-group members, and defining community boundaries are seen by Taylor as three of the four components of achieving personal and group identity and self-esteem. The fourth element, identity comparison with other groups, was not apparent among these narratives, perhaps again because of the absence of a perceived threat to the group when the audience was an in-group member (Ellemers, Spears & Dossje 1997). Community scripts are also reflected in the transitional models of Chapman & Brannock, Thompson, Morris, and Kitzinger & Wilkinson.
It appears then that Community scripts reflected much of the group identity development process brought to light in the research literature; group evaluation, investigation and socialisation processes, group identity and self-esteem development, and achievement of positive group identity. The establishing of group identity definitions and processes simultaneously reflected an individual's group identity developmental task and 'proved' group membership.

- *Relationship* references were constrained in scripts which provided illustrations of the development of relationships, relationship management and definition, and affirmation of involvement in lesbian relationships. In these scripts, same sex attractions were attributed to sexual or emotional sources, and lesbian-specific relationship issues were presented in the context of cognitive and/or behavioural responses to those issues, both in primary or serial relationships. Variations within Relationship scripts illustrated the development of both sexual and social cohabitations as defined by Sarantakos (1996); in some cases the first relationship was a social cohabitation, and subsequent personal identity development prompted an end to that relationship and the beginning of another social cohabitation or sexual cohabitation, while in other cases a series of sexual cohabitations culminated in the current social cohabitation. Heightened intimacy was presented as a valued aspect of relationships rather than a problematic one, implying that most participants experienced fusion as closeness rather than fusion as intrusiveness (Finch 1999). There was little mention of butch-femme relationship organisation alluded to by Laird (2000) and others, perhaps giving support to Crawley's (2001) contention that these stereotypes are only used by lesbians as a vehicle of protest in particular historical periods.

Several of the issues identified in the research literature as problematic for lesbian couples were mentioned in some narratives, eg. sexual behaviour patterns, domestic violence, lack of heterosexual privilege, lack of legal recognition and/or lack of social norms. However, most of these were presented in the context of the solving of these issues, and of subsequent perceptions of relationship competence.

Relationship scripts are reflected in the final two stages of Coleman's (1981) transitional model, that is, the 'first relationship' stage, characterised by a desire
for intimacy and connection, and the subsequent 'relationship integration' stage, which is characterised by more successful initiation, conduct and termination of relationships. It appears that Relationship scripts were used in the current identity narratives to describe or assert definitions of lesbian relationships, to externalise problematic issues or events thus counteracting stigmatised definitions and analyses of lesbian relationships promoted by the dominant culture, and to demonstrate the developmental task of achieving relationship competence.

- *Social Change & Relationship* references were constrained in scripts which provided illustrations of transition and stigma management strategies evolving from lesbian relationships, and affirmation of successful transition and stigma management strategies via achievement of successful relationships and/or increased self-acceptance. These scripts complemented the claims of Diamond (2000) and DeLeonardo (2000) that relationships are important factors in transition and can be perceived as a pivotal point in sexual identity development; entering into relationships is also reflected specifically as a developmental task in the transitional models of Ponse, Coleman, Garnets & Kimmel and Morris. Hence these scripts demonstrated the interwoven developmental achievement of relationship competence and stigma management.

- *Disclosure & Support* references were constrained in scripts which provided illustrations of stigma management strategies and affirmation of those strategies via the establishment of social support. To prevent damage to positive self-esteem, individuals must experience non-stigmatising contexts (Brown 1998). Disclosure & Support scripts demonstrated the 'de-stigmatising' of familiar contexts apparent in Management scripts, but extended this to demonstrate the second self-esteem enhancing strategy: the seeking of non-stigmatising contexts. The sense of emotional safety in lesbian community mentioned in these scripts is widely held to enhance self-esteem among stigmatised populations, especially among those with a concealable stigma (Frable, Platt & Hoey 1998). Hence these scripts demonstrated stigma management via the accessing of group support; the latter was perceived as both reward and confirmation for the achievement of this developmental task.

*P145*
Choice references were constrained in scripts which provided markers in the pre-transition process and motivation or attribution for subsequent transition. There were three variations in Choice scripts. In all variations, Transition and Relationship references were used to attribute responsibility for the transition to a significant other. The first and most common variation linked the narrator's pre-transitional crystallisations of discontent to subsequent sexual and/or emotional lesbian relationships, the second variation linked a happy pre-transitional identity with subsequent seduction by another woman, and the third variation attributed the transitional decision to sexual or social affiliation with other lesbians. However, in all three variations of Choice scripts, narrators demonstrated or justified the shift from heterosexual to lesbian identity by defining connection with a significant other as the decisional turning point, and simultaneously allocating responsibility for subsequent transition to that significant other. The minimising of personal responsibility and the maximising of agency in autobiographical narrative is identified by Baumeister & Newman (1994) as fulfilling the need to demonstrate self-worth and personal efficacy respectively.

Choice scripts are reflected in stages 2 and 3 of Chapman & Brannock's (1987) model, where feelings of isolation and disinterest in men lead to the exploration of a possible lesbian identity through contact with lesbian friends and community; indeed, connections with even one other lesbian is considered in much of the research literature to be a milestone in lesbian identity formation (Schneider 1989). Choice scripts are also reflected in Kitzinger & Wilkinson's (1995) initial stage in which a lesbian confronts 'compulsory heterosexuality', while Kitzinger & Wilkinson's middle stage includes establishing markers such as having sex or falling in love and identifying specific moments of dramatic change. These scripts established responsibility, or allocated blame, for the decision of the narrator to adopt a lesbian identity.

Attraction & Passing references were constrained in scripts which provided illustrations of disclosure management and group identity development. In these scripts, lesbian affect was perceived as a turning point into lesbian identity development, and the group was perceived as the provider of self-knowledge (Wolfenstein 1990). Attraction & Passing scripts appear to support the 'dual process' hypothesis of Clement & Krueger (1998), in which investigation of the
group is based on the desirability of an individual member's characteristics rather than on the similarity of group members to the perceiver. According to Johnson, Schaller & Mullen (2000), narrators using these scripts would be less likely to have a negative bias towards other lesbians as they perceived themselves to be members of the lesbian group before encountering stereotypical group members.

Use of Attraction & Passing scripts is reflected in the final stage of Hanley-Hackenbruck's (1989) model; consolidation involves finding positive role models while resolving the contradiction between the desire to disclose and the fear of rejection or stigmatisation. These scripts presented both a strategy for the transition to lesbian identity and a stigma management strategy, thereby establishing a motivation for group identity development.

- Group Involvement references were constrained in scripts which provided illustrations of group identity development. These scripts directly reflected group investigation processes (Clement & Krueger 1998), where identification with the group leads to positive evaluations of other group members before group involvement (Dovidio, Gaertner Validzic 1998, Clement & Krueger 1998), or group socialisation processes, where group involvement leads to more positive assessment of other group members (Ellemers, Spears & Dossje 1997). This reflects much of the group investigation and socialisation processes reflected in the literature, and simultaneously demonstrated an individual's developmental task and group belonging.

In summary then, it is this author's contention that scripts comprised and reflected the developmental tasks of lesbian transition. These tasks comprised making sense of, or ordering and interpreting, life events commonly experienced by lesbians in their lesbian identity development. Most of the tasks are variously reflected to greater or lesser degrees in established transition models but none of the established transitional models reflect all of the tasks identified here.

The scripts identified above reveal group constraints on interpretation of, or ready interpretations for:

- the evolution or development of identity (Identity scripts);
- the nature of lesbian identity; essential, constructed or fluid (Identity scripts);
- destigmatisation of lesbian identity (Management scripts);
the transition from a heterosexual identity to a lesbian identity (Transition scripts);

the development of group identity or belonging (Community scripts); and

the development of competent lesbian relationships (Relationship scripts).

In performance, these scripts can convey to the listener that the narrator has
developed and accounted for a lesbian identity, destigmatised that identity, made
the transition from heterosexuality to lesbian identity successfully, earned or taken
a place in the lesbian group, and achieved successful intimate and/or sexual
relationships with other lesbians, respectively; hence she could both define and
demonstrate her lesbian group identity.

However, scripts identified on the basis of frequency of co-occurrence of the more
common references revealed that group narrative constraints or ready
interpretations performed an additional function. In these scripts, interpretations
organised events to illustrate or 'prove':

the role of relationships, or a significant other lesbian, in motivating transition
to lesbian identity and in motivating externalisation of stigma (Social Change &
Relationship scripts);

the role of the group, or other lesbians, in destigmatising lesbian identity
(Disclosure and support);

allocation of responsibility, or blame, for transition to lesbian identity (Choice
scripts);

motivation for involvement in lesbian group, or lesbian group identity
development (Attraction & Passing scripts); and

motivation for, or confirmation of, group involvement and belonging (Group
Involvement scripts).

It appears that, in performance, these scripts not only conveyed to the listener that
the narrator had accomplished the developmental tasks identified in theme based
scripts, they also provided an account of the motivation for the development of
these tasks. This allocated responsibility for the events, and provided the narrator
with a sense of justification or self-worth. These scripts therefore not only defined
and demonstrated the narrator's group identity development, they also defined
and demonstrated her worthiness to belong.
However not all references were found to occur in scripts, and narratives varied in the number of scripts they evidenced; indeed the number of scripts in the narratives of this participant group appeared to resemble a normal distribution. If scripts are indicators of lesbian identity development and/or worthiness, the variation in the number and type of scripts in any one narrative may well reflect the narrator's levels of identity development and group or personal self-esteem. The next stage of the analysis addressed this proposition.

8.4 Question 4: Are scripts reflective of accommodation to lesbian group identity?

In order to determine the relationship between scripts and personal or group identity factors, correlational analysis was applied to these data, that is, personal or group identity data were correlated with the presence or absence of particular scripts in the identity narratives of each participant. Before this could be accomplished however, several necessary steps were undertaken; these are now detailed.

8.4.1 Approaching a correlational analysis

To correlate all variables was to invite a proliferation of data, thereby increasing the probability of a Type 1 error, that is, the possibility of concluding that predicted relationships exist when in fact they do not. The usual solution to this problem is to proceed to data reduction. However there were no available models in the literature that could suggest a multivariate analysis approach. Further, the current study was exploratory, and a cluster analysis may have masked relationships, leading to a Type 2 error, or the possibility of concluding that predicted relationships do not exist when in fact they do. It was therefore decided to risk a Type 1 error rather than a Type 2 error, and each of the personal variables was examined for relationships with each of the narrator variables.

There is a wide range of correlational analyses; selection of the appropriate analysis used in any research design depends on the type of variables undergoing the analysis, and the capacity of the variable measurement data to meet underlying theoretical assumptions. In the current study, instrument measures revealed
frequency scores, yielding interval/ratio, or 'continuous', data, while narrative choice was measured by the presence or absence of a script or thematic line, yielding dichotomous, or nominal, data. Point biserial correlation is an indication of the relationship between continuous variables and dichotomous variables (Ferguson & Takane 1989). The assumptions in applying this method of analysis are that the variables are both normally distributed, and that their relationship is linear (Ferguson & Takane 1989). A significant point biserial co-efficient obtained for two variables indicates that a relationship exists between them, such that one may predict the other. The point-biserial correlational analysis was therefore used in the current study as a measure of the association between personal factors and narrative choices.

To check data for subsequent point-biserial analysis, tests of skewness were applied to the data. The distributions of age and identification years were both slightly negatively skewed, indicating that this was a predominantly older group, who had identified for a predominantly greater number of years. Other negatively skewed variables included affect, identity exploration, connected knowing, perceived belonging and perceived support, indicating that this participant group registered slightly higher than normal scores in these variables. Positively skewed variables included separate knowing, privacy preference, and homonegativity, indicating that this participant group registered slightly lower than normal scores in these variables. However, tests of skewness revealed that none of these skews was statistically significant.

Before point-biserial analysis could be applied, personal and group identity data from surveys administered immediately prior to narration were subjected to data reduction, and to check the face validity of the data they were subsequently subjected to frequency and correlational analyses.

8.4.2 Data preparation

Demographic data included the participant's age and the number of years she had identified as lesbian. In order to assess a possible cohort factor, the age at which a participant became lesbian was deduced from these two variables and added to the data.
Affect, Evaluation Anxiety and Homonegativity instruments all produced single scores, while the Identity instrument produced Committed Identity and Exploratory Identity scores, and the Ways of Knowing instrument produced Separate and Connected Knowing scores.

In the remaining instruments, some measures were combined. The justification for this was threefold: the measures were shown to vary together; combining the measures reduced the overall number of measures and therefore increased the manageability of the data; and the instruments were not exact measures of a factor so much as indications of that factor's greater or lesser influence on narrative choices and could therefore be reduced without compromising the analysis. Reduced measures included the following:

- the *Family of Origin* instrument which produced three measures: Cohesiveness; Expressiveness; and Conflict. The former two varied together and differed from the latter, and were therefore combined to form a 'Family Functional' score;

- the *Group Esteem* instrument which produced four measures: Importance to Identity; Worthiness to Belong; Private Group Esteem; and Public Group Esteem measures. The first three measures varied together and differed from the latter, and were therefore combined to form a 'Private Group Esteem' score;

- the *Perceived Social Support* instrument which produced three measures; Perceived Appraisal, Perceived Social Support and Perceived Belonging. The former two varied together and differed from the latter, and were therefore combined to form a 'Perceived Support' score; and

- *Group Identification* questions which measured eight aspects of group identification. Six of these, Self-stereotyping, Prototypicality, Permeability, Distinctiveness, Variability and In-group Bias, varied together and differed from the other two measures: they were therefore combined as a measure of 'Group Identification'. The other two measures, Group Self-Esteem and Group Identification, also varied together and, as the latter appeared to measure the participants' feelings about being lesbian, the two were combined as a measure of 'Collective Self-Esteem'.

*p151*
8.4.3 Frequencies

Table 7 shows the participant group's mean and standard deviation distribution scores for personal measures. It also shows possible ranges of scores for each of the measures:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Measure</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian Years</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Age</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affect</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity commitment</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity exploration</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connected knowing</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate knowing</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of negative evaluation</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privacy preference</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homonegativity</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Support</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Belonging</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family - functional</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- conflict</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private group esteem</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public group esteem</td>
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<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Self-esteem</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Identification</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.4.4 Bivariate Analysis

A bivariate analysis was performed on the personal measures data to identify possible relationships among personal measure scores. Table 8 shows correlations (Pearson's r^2) among personal measures:
Table 8: Correlations between personal measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lesbian Years</th>
<th>Age at Transition</th>
<th>Affect</th>
<th>Identity committed</th>
<th>Identity exploratory</th>
<th>Connected knowing</th>
<th>Separate knowing</th>
<th>Perceived belonging</th>
<th>Group private esteem</th>
<th>Group public esteem</th>
<th>Collective esteem</th>
<th>Collective identification</th>
<th>Family functional</th>
<th>Family conflictual</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>63***</td>
<td>2.8***</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>-0.30</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
<td>-0.26</td>
<td>-0.32**</td>
<td>-0.35***</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Homogeneity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical preference</td>
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<td>Anxiety</td>
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</table>

*Note: Correlation coefficients are indicated by asterisks: *** indicates p < 0.001, ** indicates p < 0.01, * indicates p < 0.05.
Of interest to the current study are the findings that, as would be expected, older participants were significantly more likely to have identified as lesbian for longer and to register significantly higher levels of identity commitment, collective identity and collective self-esteem. The younger they were when they made the transition, the more committed they were to their current identity and the higher were their levels of collective identification.

A more positive affect was related to higher levels of perceived support and lower levels of privacy preference. Further, high levels of perceived social and belonging support were related to high levels of collective self-esteem and group private esteem and low levels of homonegativity and evaluation anxiety. High levels of perceived belonging were also related to low levels of separate knowing, while high levels of perceived support were related to high levels of group public esteem. Evaluation anxiety was related to lower levels of perceived social and belonging support, low levels of public esteem and collective self-esteem, and high levels of homonegativity and privacy preference, while homonegativity was related to low levels of group private esteem, collective self-esteem and collective identification. Group public esteem was related to collective self-esteem, while group private esteem was related to collective self-esteem and collective identification.

While this bivariate analysis suggested associations between some measures, it did not suggest an effective data reduction grouping that would not risk the masking of potentially significant relationships: the correlational analysis with individual variables therefore proceeded as planned.

8.4.5 Point-biserial analysis

Personal and group variable data were now ready to be correlated with script data. Table 9 shows the correlation between personal variable data and the presence of scripts in lesbian identity narrative (point biserial coefficient rpb), and between personal variable data and the number of scripts in the narratives (Pearson's r):
Table 9: Correlations between personal measures and scripts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Management</th>
<th>Transition</th>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Social Change</th>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>Disclosure &amp; Support</th>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>Attraction &amp; Passing</th>
<th>Group Involvement</th>
<th>Number of Scripts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.13</td>
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<td>-.16</td>
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<td>-.01</td>
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<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.07</td>
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<td>.02</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.22</td>
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<td>.19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-.03</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.33**</td>
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<td>-.08</td>
<td>.06</td>
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<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.25*</td>
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<td>-.21</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-.01</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>-.02</td>
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<td>Separate knowing</td>
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<td>.33**</td>
<td>-.09</td>
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<td>.21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homonegativity</td>
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<td>-.03</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.04</td>
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<td>Perceived Belonging</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived Support</td>
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<td>Family - conflict</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public group esteem</td>
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<td>Private group esteem</td>
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In scripts identified by thematic content, results indicated that only two scripts were associated with personal variables:

- Management scripts were positively associated with levels of collective identification, such that the higher the level of collective identification of the narrator, the more likely that she would use a Management script in her identity narrative; and
- the greater the narrator's perception of her first family as conflictual, the more likely she would be to use Community scripts in her identity narrative.

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narrator, the more likely that she would use a Management script in her identity narrative; and

- the greater the narrator's perception of her first family as conflictual, the more likely she would be to use Community scripts in her identity narrative.

In scripts identified by frequency of co-occurrence of references, results indicated that personal factors were associated with 3 scripts:

- the higher the level of evaluation anxiety, homonegativity and/or collective identification of the narrator, and/or the lower her level of identity exploration, the more likely that she would use a Choice script in her identity narrative;

- the lower the level of privacy preference of the narrator, the more likely that she would use an Attraction & Passing script in her identity narrative; and

- the higher the level of identity commitment, collective identification and/or collective self-esteem of the narrator, and/or the lower the level of homonegativity, the more likely that she would use a Group involvement script in her identity narrative.

8.4.6 Discussion

The results of the correlation between personal identity factors indicate that the number of scripts used in a narrative was strongly positively associated with the level of the narrator's collective identification, that is, with the level of her identification as lesbian and with her level of commitment to her identity. As the latter was measured with regard to general identity this could indicate commitment to global identity, or, as it was assessed in the context of lesbian identity research, this could indicate commitment to lesbian identity; regardless it indicates that the narrator was committed to whatever she perceived her current identity to be, and had a degree of identity satisfaction. Hence there appeared to be an association between the use of scripts in identity narrative and the narrator's level of accommodation to a lesbian identity. However, as correlations do not indicate cause or direction, it is impossible to deduce from this analysis whether choice of scripts predicted accommodation levels or accommodation levels predicted choice of script.

Choice of scripts based on narrative theme references did not appear to be associated with particular personal identity features; this implies that lesbians

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incorporated a wide variety of theme based scripts in their identity narrative, regardless of personal identity features. Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to determine how and why personal factors and script choice were related, it seems reasonable to make certain speculations based on the results of two thematic based scripts which did show an association with personal identity factors:

- Community scripts were associated with greater perception of one's original family as conflictual. Perceiving one's original family as conflictual may well have prompted a greater need to seek or demonstrate group belonging; conversely, a greater level of group belonging may by comparison reflect one's original family as conflictual; and

- Management scripts were associated with higher levels of collective identification. Intuitively, having a high level of collective identification would increase the need to externalise the stigma associated with lesbian identity, and hence the need to reflect social change in identity narrative. Conversely, successfully de-stigmatised one's lesbian identity would facilitate greater degrees of collective identification, hence the ability to reflect higher levels of collective identification in identity narrative;

However, scripts identified by frequency of co-occurrence of common references were far more likely to be associated with personal factors, in particular, attitudes to identity, to lesbian group identity specifically, and to stigma generally.

Attitudes to identity generally were associated with two scripts:

- Choice scripts were associated with lower levels of identity exploration; and

- Group Involvement scripts were associated with higher levels of identity commitment.

Attitudes to lesbian group identity specifically were associated with two scripts:

- Choice scripts were associated with higher levels of collective identification; and

- Group Involvement scripts were associated with higher levels of collective identification and higher levels of collective self-esteem.

Attitudes to stigma were associated with three scripts, and non-significantly with a fourth:

- Choice scripts were associated with higher levels of evaluation anxiety and homonegativity;
Attraction & Passing scripts were associated with lower levels of privacy preference;

Group Involvement scripts were associated with lower levels of homonegativity; and

Social Change & Relationships scripts were non-significantly associated with lower levels of evaluation anxiety.

Again, although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to determine how and why personal factors and script choice were related, it seems reasonable to speculate that:

- higher levels of collective identification combined with higher levels of evaluation anxiety and homonegativity associated may well evoke a greater dissatisfaction about present identity, and lead to, or stem from, Choice scripts which largely allocated responsibility for transition to another;
- higher levels of identity commitment, higher levels of collective identification and higher levels of collective self-esteem, combined with lower levels of homonegativity, would tend to lead to, or stem from, Group Involvement scripts which 'proved' and justified group involvement and belonging; and
- lower levels of privacy preference would tend to lead to, or stem from, Attraction & Passing scripts which stressed group identity development over individual identity development.

It appears then that these lesbians used a variety of theme-based scripts in their identity narratives to facilitate, reinforce or demonstrate developmental tasks and group belonging, and that these were not necessarily reflective of personal identity factors. However, scripts which emphasised the worthiness of the narrator to belong appeared to be significantly related to the narrator's levels of identity commitment, attitudes to lesbian identity specifically and/or attitudes to stigma in general, and therefore can be said to have reflected accommodation to lesbian identity.

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8.5 Question 5: Are there identifiable 'thematic lines' in lesbian identity narrative?

According to Singer (1995), thematic lines in the dramatistic alternatives of western cultures comprise:

- a coherent series of references with a beginning, middle and end;
- a time sequence; and
- an evaluative closure.

While Singer clearly implies a linear time sequence in his definition, Brockmeier (2000) identifies a variety of autobiographical time sequences (linear, circular, cyclical, spiral, static and fragmentary), which can co-occur in a single autobiography; Brockmeier's definition of time sequence was adopted for the current analysis. Evaluative closure was conceptualised as the 'summation' of the reference series, which 'proves', or gives weight to, the narrator's inherent ideologies (Greenberg 1995) and current narrative goals (Baumeister & Newman 1994).

In the search for thematic lines, narratives were analysed for the presence of each of these three elements. The elements were identified in the following manner:

- an evaluative closure was located within each narrative;
- the events leading to that evaluative closure were identified; and
- the autobiographical time format connecting those events was identified.

Results indicated that narratives evidenced a variety of time sequences, particularly linear, fragmentary and static, and a variety of evaluative closures. In 29 of the narratives there were more than one thematic line; the maximum number of thematic lines identified in any one narrative was three. Further, two narratives did not reliably evidence any evaluative closure and were precluded from thematic line analysis. On the basis of event, time sequence and evaluative closure in combination, 9 distinct thematic line types were identified, each of which is discussed in turn below.
**Emergence thematic line**

Fourteen narratives integrated perceptions, action and events into a linear time format to present an account of the difficult emergence of an essential lesbian identity. Sometimes characterised by childhood awareness of difference, these events comprised developmental hurdles or challenges, which, after being successfully overcome, led to a rewarding post-transitional state of certainty and achievement, which in many cases included the establishment of a successful relationship.

**Integration thematic line**

Fourteen narratives integrated scenes and events in fragmentary time sequences to illustrate a 'completion' of identity transition or to depict an integrated current lesbian status, sometimes with explicit declarations of identity completion and satisfaction added as a 'coda' at the end of the narrative. Those narrators who alluded to previous doubts about their identity, or unresolved issues, subsequently asserted that they were happy with the transition and would not change their current status.

**Ideology thematic line**

Thirteen narratives integrated events and ideas into circular, cyclical or static time sequences to illustrate, elaborate or make explicit a valued aspect or outcome of the narrator's identity development process. These thematic lines represented what the narrator believed was important, sometimes presented as a position reached after considerable reflection or in response to particular events.

**Preparation thematic line**

Twelve narratives integrated perceptions, actions and events into linear time sequences to present a justification of the decision to adopt a lesbian identity. Preparation for transition was depicted as a difficult crystallisation of discontent, a building of readiness, or a conscious or unconscious resistance, which yielded to a
sudden decision to adopt a lesbian identity and a relatively swift subsequent transition. Hence the hard work of a turbulent pre-transition or accommodation to the idea of a lesbian identity was justified, that is, rewarded and affirmed by post-transition certainty and fulfilment.

*Struggle thematic line*

Twelve narratives integrated acts and events in static or fragmentary time formats to illustrate the challenges of stigma management in transitional or post-transitional lesbian life. Thematic lines comprised the relating of stigmatising events and issues and sometimes an explicit analysis of their effects upon the narrator's identity development. Although these thematic lines presented lesbian life as difficult, with stigma management a constant challenge, they often also comprised an overt claim to group membership as a narrative coda.

*Metamorphosis thematic line*

Nine narratives integrated acts, events and perceptions in linear and spiral time formats to illustrate an inevitable, doubt-free and relatively trouble-free transition to lesbian identity, and a post-transitional state of certainty and elation. The narrator's lesbian identity was sometimes explicitly perceived as a pre-existing or 'essential' identity characterised by early childhood indications which were identified in retrospect. Some narrators using this thematic line emphasised the lack of negative affect in their autobiography, sometimes by referring to a 'not-me' or feared self, or by asserting that they were 'lucky' not to suffer negative affect during or after the transition process.

*Performance thematic line*

Nine narratives integrated acts, events and perceptions in linear, circular or cyclic time formats to contextualise lesbian identity in performance. This thematic line implied that, through developing relationships and/or strategies to overcome stigma, the narrator had developed competence and personal growth.
Contribution thematic line

Three narratives integrated acts and events in linear, spiral and cyclic time formats to present an account of personal growth through contribution to community development during the narrator's post-transition. They comprised an account of the simultaneous development of personal and group lesbian identity, culminating in a sense of generativity and contribution to community and affirmed by a sense of self-satisfaction and well-being.

Fluidity thematic line

Three narratives integrated events, acts and perceptions in spiral and circular time formats to contextualise lesbian identity in the present, leaving the way open for future or imagined identity changes in response to changing personal and social circumstances. An account of a protracted period of indecision in early transition in which the narrator's relationships with both women and men were compared, led to the decision to adopt a lesbian identity, and culminated in current feelings of well-being and fulfilment. This was often followed however by an explicit 'out clause' in which the narrator claimed that her current lesbian identification did not entirely rule out the possibility of fluid or bisexual identity in the future.

A summary of the thematic lines identified is presented in Table 10:
### Table 10: Thematic lines: Content summary and Frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thematic Line</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emergence</td>
<td>A long transitional struggle resulting in the ultimate reward of post-transition certainty and achievement, sometimes affirmed by a loving relationship.</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>Unconnected accounts of various aspects of current situation and/or viewpoint, illustrating identity integration and/or completed transition.</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>Elaboration on valued aspect or outcome of the identity transition, or personal philosophy about lesbian identity, usually as an adjunct to another thematic line</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>A difficult pre-transitional period giving way to a sudden decision to adopt a lesbian identity and/or a swift transition to lesbian identity, affirmed by post-transition fulfilment.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struggle</td>
<td>Fragmentary time sequence depicting lesbian life as difficult, with stigma management a constant challenge, but asserting lesbian identity as a preferred and valued nonetheless.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metamorphosis</td>
<td>Early indications of a lesbian identity verified by its subsequent and inevitable emergence, and affirmed by post-transitional certainty and elation.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Development of competence and personal growth in the course of managing relationships and stigma, often involving considerable time and effort.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution</td>
<td>Simultaneous development of lesbian personal and group identity culminating in a sense of generativity and contribution to community, affirmed by self-satisfaction and well-being.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluidity</td>
<td>Current lesbian identification not entirely ruling out future changes, but affirmed as currently correct and confirmed by current feelings of well-being and fulfilment.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 8.5.1 Discussion

In summary, thematic lines again comprised the five narrative reference themes identified earlier in this study as elements of lesbian identity development: identity; group identity and involvement; transition; management; and relationships. They also appeared to address the positive/negative affect continuum associated with these themes:

- certainty about identity (Metamorphosis thematic lines);
- uncertainty about identity (Fluidity thematic lines);
- identity as choice (Preparation thematic lines);
- identity as compulsion (Metamorphosis and Emergence thematic lines);
- community life as successful (Contribution thematic lines);
- community life as difficult (Struggle thematic lines);
- transition as pure-positive (Metamorphosis and Contribution thematic lines);
- transition as negative and difficult (Emergence and Contribution thematic lines);

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management as successful (Performance thematic lines);
management as ongoing & difficult (Struggle thematic lines);
relationships as successful (Emergence and Performance thematic lines); and
relationships as difficult (Performance thematic lines).

This supports Sarbin's (1995) contention that even people's affectional states are interpreted in terms of social plots; it also indicates that both negatively and positively perceived lesbian-specific life events were incorporated into the ready interpretations or the 'social plots' of the lesbian group.

Emergence thematic lines focused on transition into lesbian relationships. They emphasised the difficulty of essential identity emergence affected by stigma and discrimination, but linked this process to its ultimate affirmation in the form of a loving relationship. This allowed the conclusion that no matter how hard the struggle, emergence of lesbian sexual identity was ultimately rewarded, most notably in the form of a significant or intimate connection with another group member.

Emergence thematic lines are an example of reconstructive narrative. Designed to align current identities with past identities in order to provide a sense of consistency and progress after a major life change, these lines established an end-point or 'platform' (Brooks 1984) and a frame within which to allocate responsibility and assert causal linkage (Hyden 1995). As with the reconstructive narratives identified as those of 'successful changers' (Heatherton & Nichols 1994), Emergence thematic lines emphasised past difficulties, claimed internal attributions for change, saw change as a response to intolerable external circumstances, identified a focal or critical incident or flash of insight, discredited former sources of meaning, asserted the resolution of major challenges, and related change to increased self-knowledge and understanding and to a reappraisal of goals.

Emergence thematic lines also comprised a 'redemption sequence', in which negative affect turns to positive affect by producing positive situation or outcome (McAdams et al 2001). They depicted a protagonist who overcame obstacles and challenges to find reward & happiness (Heatherton & Nichols 1994) and who has grown and benefited from adversity (King 2001, Tedeschi & Calhoun 1995): the 'hard work of accommodation' showing that the narrator was wiser for the experience (King 2001). The 'happy ending' of Emergence
thematic lines showed that good things can come from bad things (McAdams et al 2001), and demonstrated the need for a sense of purpose which influences most personal narratives (Baumeister & Newman 1994).

As a redemption sequence the Emergence thematic lines appeared to be more powerful to the narrators than a pure-positive sequence; redemption sequences have been associated with high levels of well-being, adaptation, self-esteem and coherence (McAdams et al 2001). They comprised integratedness, relatedness & transcendence, which have been associated with more meaningfulness (Debats, Drost & Hansen 1995) and, as narratives that provoked interest and established obligations for the narrator, they reflected open and resolved emotions (Pals 2001) and the living of an emotional life (Greenberg 1995).

The Emergence thematic line threads to some degree through the transitional models of Ponse (1978), Coleman (1981), and Kitzinger & Wilkinson (1995) and others. The hard work of accommodation in various aspects of identity development is reflected in the early stages of several transitional models: Chapman & Brannock (1987) cite feelings of incongruence, isolation and self-questioning as stage towards positive lesbian identification; Hanley-Hackenbruck (1989) cites initial prohibition and ambivalence as stages towards consolidation and resolution; and Thompson (1992) cites feelings of loss and grief as stages towards adjustment and integration. The closest reflection of a complete transition redemption sequence in the literature occurs in Cass' (1979) stage model, which focuses on the individual's transition from initial confusion to eventual pride and synthesis.

Integration thematic lines focused on post-transition performance of lesbian identity and depicted an 'achieved' lesbian identity; due to either the achievement of developmental tasks and processes, or to a lack of interest in further lesbian identity development. The former reflects a concept espoused in the 'integration' stages of transitional models such as Cass (1979), Coleman (1981), Sophie (1986), Thompson (1992), and Kitzinger & Wilkinson (1995), where the lesbian has found a comfortable harmonisation of her lesbian identity with other aspects of her identity. The latter appears more as a social mobility script, that is, the narrator has found an acceptable compromise between lesbian identity and heterosexual lifestyle, and is not pressed to develop her identity any further.
The apparent lack of affective intensity in some Integration thematic lines appeared to reflect a 'distanced identity' (Pals 2001), characterised by closed and resolved emotions. For these narrators, lesbian identity narratives evoking interest and establishing obligations appeared to have faded in intensity and have been replaced, as happens during identity development (Greenberg 1995). However in other narratives the Integration thematic line appeared to reflect a 'threatened identity' (Pals 2001), characterised by closed and unresolved emotions. For these narrators, lesbian identity narratives appeared to reflect a negotiation of social forces, in which distortion of self-understanding allowed the narrator to assert agency, authenticity and self-actualisation (Sloan 1992). The difference between these two manifestations of the Integration thematic line may be accounted for by the research of Degges-White, Rice & Myers (2000) who found that while identity integration was still 'intact and a crucial part of healthy development' (p327), some lesbians did not find heterosexuals supportive, and their identity integration was restricted by fears for their personal safety. Narrators in the current study whose identity integration was restricted may well have used the Integration thematic line to defuse threats to their self-worth, vulnerability and control, common to those who have experienced a disruptive life event (Fiske 1993).

Identity integration comprises the final stage in the models of Cass (1979), Coleman (1981), Sophie (1986) and Thompson (1992). In Cass's model, identity integration, or 'synthesis', involves the individual integrating her sexual identity with other important private and public aspects of her identity and having increased contact with supportive heterosexuals. Social mobility scripts are not represented in stage models, but may be implied in the 'prohibition' stage of Hanley-Hackenbruck's (1989) stigma integration model.

*Ideology thematic lines* reflected 'autobiographical reasoning' rather than 'narrative processing', that is, the interpretation or evaluation of remembered experiences rather than sequential plot, character and goal (Singer & Bluck 2001). In these thematic lines, the narrator adopted a 'position' on lesbian identity issues, perhaps to 'influence' the audience, or to be judged as legitimate (Shotter 1993). However they also incorporated the ideological settings, imagos, 'touchstone' memories and generativity claimed by McAdams (1985) to be common components of autobiographical narratives in western societies.

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Often comprising 'not-me' aspects of lesbian identity, that is, a 'contestung' of lesbian group definitions and interpretations or of the perceived expectations or assumptions of the in-group audience, this thematic line's evaluative closure comprised an overt claim to group membership, eg; 'I'm definitely lesbian and happy to be so'. It may therefore have reflected what the narrator still seeks to attain or avoid (Moffitt & Singer 1994). In most narratives, the ideology thematic line occurred as an adjunct to another main thematic line.

* Preparation thematic lines were stories of complex and extended pre-transitional periods culminating in swift transition and affirming post-transition fulfilment. Narrators justified the decision to adopt a lesbian identity, and then cited their sense of fulfilment in lesbian relationships or community groups as affirmation of the decision, thereby concluding that the decision to become lesbian was a correct and well-considered decision, affirmed by other group members.

Like Emergence thematic lines, Preparation thematic lines reflected reconstruction and redemption sequences. The difference between these two types of thematic line lies in the frame established by the narrator (Hyden 1995). The focus of Preparation thematic lines was on the justification of the narrator's decision to adopt a new identity; former aversive or untenable situations prompted the critical incident or focal point of identity change, the 'hard work of accommodation' lay in the narrator's confronting resistance to the idea of a lesbian identity, and her 'redemption' lay in overcoming this obstacle to reap reward and benefit from the subsequently changed identity. Further, the Preparation thematic lines located negative affect at the pre-transitional stage, with positive affect and reward located at the turning or focal point and continuing throughout transition and post-transition; the Emergence thematic line located negative affect throughout the pre-transitional and transitional phase, with positive affect located at the end-point and culminating in post-transition.

Pre-transitional consideration of the decision to adopt a lesbian identity is referred to in the early stages of many transitional models, including those of Cass (1979), Coleman (1981), Sophie (1986), Chapman & Brannock (1987), Kitzinger & Wilkinson (1995), and Morris (1997), indicating that this is has been a commonly reported aspect of transition to lesbian identity. However in 8 of the 12 narratives evidencing the Preparation thematic line, the narrator
presented this pre-transition and turning point as the total narrative, declaring, rather than demonstrating, post-transitional fulfilment.

- **Struggle thematic lines** focused on the challenges of stigma management in transition and post-transition identity performance, emphasising the pervasive and continuous effects of stigma on the narrator's transition to lesbian identity and/or on the current performance of her lesbian identity. Narrators presented a common conclusion that stigma, while not necessarily inherent to the identity, was inherent to the achievement or performance of that identity in a heterosexist environment.

Struggle thematic lines appeared to reflect a 'conflicted identity' characterised by open and unresolved emotions (Pals 2001) and a lack of meaningful myths and symbols with which to engage (Singer 1995a). Another example of 'autobiographical reasoning' (Singer & Bluck 2001), they may function as a regulative narrative, reflecting what the narrator still seeks to attain or avoid (Moffitt & Singer 1994). Unlike reconstructive narrative, they lacked the 'platform' from which the current disruptive event could be aligned with previous narratives and goals (Davidson & Strauss 1992).

Confronting stigma and developing stigma management strategies in transition is reflected throughout most of the transitional models, but specifically in Hanley-Hackenbruck's (1989) stigma integration model, while stigma management in post-transition is most closely reflected in Kitzinger & Wilkinson's (1995) final 'going on' stage, where lifestyle consequences, losses and new opportunities continue to be discovered.

- **Metamorphosis thematic lines** focused on the individual transition process. They comprised stories of an almost inevitable emergence of a pre-existing or essential identity, as evidenced by early indications of a lesbian identity and a post-emergent elation. As in Emergence narratives, emergence of lesbian identity was shown to be a process of ultimate reward, but in this case the reward was most notably in the form of markedly increased self-fulfilment, a new found sense of certainty, and personal well-being.

Metamorphosis thematic lines comprised reconstructive narrative, but lacked the redemption sequences of the Emergence or Preparation thematic lines. Here narrators explicitly emphasised the lack of negative affect in their autobiography, perhaps consciously distancing themselves from stereotypical
stigma narratives. This thematic line may therefore also serve to warn the narrator of what she still seeks to avoid (Moffitt & Singer 1994). The Metamorphosis thematic line asserted a pre-existing identity which rose to the narrator's consciousness via self-assessment or external consequence; this demonstrated the narrator's perceived continuity of identity and hence self-awareness (Hallowell 1955), and focused on creating a consistent and unbroken life story (Covington 1995). As a reconstructive narrative, the Metamorphosis thematic line asserted a happy ending in which the protagonist had grown through experience (King 2001), and which 'proved' benevolence over malevolence, meaningfulness over randomness, and self-worth over self-abasement (Janoff-Bulman 1992). As a pure positive sequence, this thematic line may have been less powerful than the Emergence or Preparation thematic lines for the narrator (McAdams et al 2001), but most examples of the Metamorphosis thematic line evidenced integratedness, relatedness and transcendence, associated with greater meaningfulness (Debats, Drost & Hansen 1995).

While the content of Metamorphosis thematic lines are reflected in most stage models, pure-positive sequences are rarely reflected as such.

- **Performance thematic lines** focused on stigma management and relationship competence during transition and post-transition, and emphasised the successful management of stigma, particularly with regard to transforming the impact of stigma on lesbian relationships and, consequently, individual lesbian identity. This thematic line gave rise to the implication that achievement of developmental tasks and processes in lesbian identity development created a more worthwhile individual.

The Performance thematic line simultaneously comprised both a reconstructive narrative and an autobiographical argument. It conformed to the reconstructive sequence (Heatherton & Nichols 1994) in which the protagonist overcomes major challenges (of stigma and relationship management) and finds reward and happiness (in competent post-transition), but rather than a 'happy ever after' evaluative closure, the Performance thematic line appeared to adopt a 'worthy ever after' evaluative closure. Major disruptive life events can threaten perceptions of control and self-worth (Fiske 1993); this thematic line demonstrated that the narrator had achieved control of her environment through her own efforts, and was therefore a competent individual and/or
worthy member of the lesbian group. This thematic line may well have served the need for efficacy, which motivates the maximising of personal responsibility and the construction of a stable, predictable world, and for self-worth, which motivates the diffusion of potential threats to self-worth (Baumeister 1991).

Reflected in the 'integration' stages of transitional models such as Cass (1979), Sophie (1986), Thompson (1992), Garnets & Kimmel (1993) and Kitzinger & Wilkinson (1995), this process is most specifically detailed in Coleman's (1981) final stage, which is characterised by 'more successful initiation, conduct and termination of relationships', and is reflected to some degree in the 'resolution' stage of Hanley-Hackenbruck's (1989) stigma integration model.

- **Contribution thematic lines** focused on transition into, and performance of, group identity. These lines depicted a simultaneous personal and group identity development through involvement in community, and implied that active political contribution to lesbian community provided personal growth, satisfaction, fulfilment and reward. This thematic line also focused on the maintenance of group identity in the establishment of more positive future group identities (Cinnirella 1998), and on worthiness to be a member, reflecting the need for efficacy or the maximising of personal responsibility and the construction of a stable, predictable world (Baumeister & Newman 1994). This thematic line also appeared to reflect Taylor's (1989) Theory of Self; the individual's characteristics and uniqueness were established, the reference group was perceived to value these characteristics and uniqueness, the characteristics were then attributed to the group, and the group was rendered valuable to society.


- **Fluidity thematic lines** focused on the definition of identity, contextualising the narrator's sexual identity in the present and not predictive of the future. Narrators presented a common conclusion that their sexual identity was responsive to changing personal and social circumstances. Understandably, this concept is not reflected in transitional stages, but supports Rust's (1993) contention that sexual identity is a reflection of a woman's psychosocial
location. The Fluidity thematic line appeared to represent for the narrator a compromise between reigning cultural scripts (Cerulo 1997), and a 'conflicted identity' of open and unresolved emotions (Pals 2001). They also appeared to reflect a post-modern blurring of dichotomous sexual definitions, and/or a rationalising of bisexuality to meet the perceived expectations or assumptions of an in-group audience.

The thematic lines identified could therefore be said to comprise a 'dramatistic repertoire' in which group narrative becomes the author of its members' identity, providing an interpretation and a guide for individual members' behaviour and affect (Sarbin 1995). If lesbian group narrative constructs or constrains individual lesbians' identity, the variation in the thematic lines chosen by a narrator may well reflect that narrator's levels of accommodation to their lesbian group identity. The next stage of the analysis addressed this proposition.
8.6 Question 6: Are thematic lines reflective of accommodation to lesbian group identity?

In order to determine the relationship between thematic lines and personal or group identity factors, personal or group identity data was correlated with presence or absence of particular thematic lines in the identity narratives of each participant. Table 11 shows the correlations between personal factors and thematic lines (point biserial coefficient $r_{pb}$):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Emergence</th>
<th>Integration</th>
<th>Ideology</th>
<th>Preparation</th>
<th>Struggle</th>
<th>Metamorphosis</th>
<th>Performance</th>
<th>Contrib</th>
<th>Fluidity</th>
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<td>-.09</td>
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<td>-.16</td>
<td>.37**</td>
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<td>-.10</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.13</td>
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<td>-.13</td>
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<td>.11</td>
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<td>.29*</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td>-.13</td>
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<td>-.02</td>
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<td>.00</td>
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<td>-.07</td>
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<td>Separate knowing</td>
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<td>.08</td>
<td>-.01</td>
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<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.02</td>
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<td>-.30*</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.26*</td>
<td>-.06</td>
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<td>.23</td>
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<td>-.16</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
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<td>-.23</td>
<td>.25*</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.28*</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Private group esteem</td>
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<td>-.28*</td>
<td>.24</td>
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<td>.13</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.03</td>
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<td>.04</td>
<td>-.01</td>
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<td>.30*</td>
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<td>.25*</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.37**</td>
<td>.30*</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Results indicated that:

- the higher the narrator's level of evaluation anxiety, the more likely she was to use Emergence thematic lines in her identity narrative. Similarly, the lower her levels of public group esteem, the more likely she was to use Emergence thematic lines in her identity narrative;
- The lower the age, number of lesbian years, level of private group esteem and/or level of collective identification of the narrator, the more likely she was to use Integration thematic lines in her identity narrative;
- The higher the narrator's level of positive affect, perceived support, public group esteem and/or collective self-esteem, and/or the lower her level of evaluation anxiety, the more likely she was to use Ideology thematic lines in her identity narrative;
- The lower the narrator's number of lesbian years, the more likely she was to use Preparation thematic lines in her identity narrative;
- The higher the narrator's level of homonegativity, and/or the lower her age, level of identity commitment and/or level of collective self-esteem, the more likely she was to use Struggle thematic lines in her identity narrative;
- The higher the narrator's age, number of lesbian years, level of identity commitment, level of collective identification and/or level of collective self-esteem, and/or the lower her level of evaluation anxiety and/or homonegativity, the more likely she was to use Metamorphosis thematic lines in her identity narrative;
- The higher the narrator's level of public group esteem and/or collective identification, the more likely she was to use Performance thematic lines in her identity narrative; and
- The higher the narrator's level of identity commitment and/or the lower her level of identity exploration, the more likely she was to use Contribution thematic lines in her identity narrative.

8.6.1 Discussion

The results of the correlation between personal identity factors and the thematic lines used in lesbian identity narratives indicated that thematic lines were
associated to some degree with demographic factors and with attitudes to identity in general, lesbian collective identity in particular, and stigma.

Attitudes to identity generally were associated with the choice of three thematic lines:

- Use of Contribution thematic lines was associated with high levels of identity commitment and/or low levels of identity exploration;
- Use of Struggle thematic lines was associated with low levels of identity commitment; and
- Use of Metamorphosis thematic lines was associated with high levels of identity commitment.

Attitudes to lesbian group identity were associated with six thematic lines:

- Use of Emergence thematic lines was associated with low levels of public group esteem;
- Use of Integration thematic lines was associated with low levels of private group esteem and/or collective identification;
- Use of Ideology thematic lines was associated with high levels of public group esteem and/or collective self-esteem;
- Use of Struggle thematic lines was associated with low levels of identity commitment and/or collective self-esteem;
- Use of Metamorphosis thematic lines was associated with high levels of collective identification and/or collective self-esteem; and
- Use of Performance thematic lines was associated with high levels of public group esteem and/or collective identification.

Attitudes to stigma generally were associated with four thematic lines:

- Use of Emergence thematic lines was associated with high levels of evaluation anxiety;
- Use of Ideology thematic lines was associated with low levels of evaluation anxiety;
- Use of Struggle thematic lines was associated with high levels of homonegativity; and
- Use of Metamorphosis thematic lines was associated with low levels of evaluation anxiety and/or homonegativity.
Demographic factors were associated with the choice of four thematic lines:

- Use of Integration thematic lines was associated with lower age and/or number of lesbian years;
- Use of Preparation thematic lines was associated with lower number of lesbian years;
- Use of Struggle thematic lines was associated with lower age; and
- Use of Metamorphosis thematic lines was associated with higher age and/or number of lesbian years.

Again, as correlations do not indicate cause or direction, it is impossible to deduce from this analysis whether choice of thematic lines predicted accommodation levels or accommodation levels predicted choice of thematic lines. Essentialists may argue that, as indications of personal factors were elicited from participants before the identity narratives were performed, and as they were elicited in the context of global rather than lesbian identity per se, (for example perceptions of first family were elicited on the basis of quality of time spent together, physical expression of anger, etc), they were pre-existing identity factors, and therefore predicted narrative constructions. Constructionists may counter that the explanation of the research project before personal factors were elicited from participants rendered pre-constructed lesbian identity narratives salient, hence personal factors were deduced from prior narratives and reinforced or re-negotiated in current identity narratives. However, a correlational analysis cannot give greater weight to either contention.

Yet again, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to establish the reasons for particular choices made by narrators, as revealed by the correlational analysis, but it seems reasonable to speculate that:

- Emergence thematic lines, stories of transitional hardship and associated with low levels of public group esteem and high levels of evaluation anxiety, reflected the experience of those who have encountered discrimination and therefore feel that lesbian identity is not valued by society and that society's negative evaluation is to be feared. Conversely those who, in positioning with another lesbian, recounted a difficult and negative transition may have concluded that society condemns a lesbian identity and that, in that it leads to discrimination and psychological pain, negative evaluation is to be feared;
Integration thematic lines, stories of 'achieved identity', were chosen by younger and/or newer lesbians who did not privately value their lesbian identity, nor identify highly with other group members. These then were stories of social mobility; the narrator identified as lesbian but did not attach great significance to that aspect of her identity, choosing to 'pass' or integrate as heterosexual in behaviour, lifestyle and philosophy. Conversely, those who, in positioning with another lesbian, have not developed stories which revolve convincingly around lesbian specific life events felt that they integrated as heterosexual in behaviour, lifestyle and philosophy;

Ideology thematic lines, stories of autobiographical reasoning by which narrators seek to influence others, were chosen by those who felt good about their group identity, who felt that others value their group identity, who perceived that they have solid social support, who did not fear negative evaluation and/or who felt happy with their lives generally. Conversely, those who, in positioning with another lesbian, presented a positive argument for their individual lesbian identity may have valued their group identity, felt that others also valued their group identity, perceived that they have solid social support, did not fear negative evaluation and/or felt happy with their lives generally;

Preparation thematic lines were chosen by those with a lower number of years spent identifying as lesbian. As stories focussed on pre-transition, Preparation thematic lines may have been chosen simply because the narrators had only recently made the transition; the pre-transitional situation, along with the need to make sense of the change of identity, may still have been predominant in positioning with another lesbian;

Struggle thematic lines were chosen by those with negative attitudes towards stigma, younger age, lower levels of commitment to identity and lower collective self-esteem. Younger narrators with negative attitudes to their newly acquired, stigmatised identities, may well have experienced a difficult transition, and may have chosen Struggle thematic lines to reflect that difficulty. Conversely, in positioning with another lesbian, younger narrators' relating of difficult and stigmatising experiences may have invoked or reinforced negative attitudes towards their ability to manage stigma and/or towards their lesbian identities;

Metamorphosis thematic lines, stories of stigma-free transition to an essential identity, were chosen by older and/or longer identified narrators with high
levels of commitment to their identity generally and/or their lesbian identity in particular and/or with positive attitudes towards stigma. Conversely, those older and/or longer identified narrators who, in positioning with another lesbian, related pure-positive stories, have developed a high level of commitment to their identity generally and/or their lesbian identity in particular, and/or a positive attitude towards stigma in general;

♦ **Performance thematic lines**, stories of successful stigma and relationship management and consequent feelings of self-worth were chosen by those with high levels of public group esteem and collective identification, that is, by those who have made a strong psychological and social investment in their lesbian identity and who perceive that others value this identity. Conversely, those who, in positioning with another lesbian, recounted experiences of successful stigma management and relationship competence development, may have deduced that they have made a strong psychological and social investment in their lesbian identity and that others would value this identity;

♦ **Contribution thematic lines**, stories of simultaneous group and personal identity, were chosen by narrators with high levels of identity commitment, that is, narrators who were happy with and confirmed in their identity, in order to present their lesbian identity as group-embedded. Conversely, those who, in positioning with another lesbian, have recounted stories of group identity development, may have deduced that their identities were group embedded; and

♦ **Fluidity thematic lines** were not associated with any personal factors, hence no speculation can be made about the choice of these thematic lines.

It is the contention of this author that thematic lines were reflective of accommodation to lesbian identity. In particular, the narrator's age and/or number of years identifying as lesbian predicted particular thematic line choices, and levels of identity commitment, attitudes to lesbian identity specifically and attitudes to stigma in general predicted, or were predicted by, the narrator's choice of particular thematic lines.
8.7 Question 7: What functions do lesbian identity narratives perform for the narrator?

In view of the findings discussed above, it is the contention of this author that lesbian identity narratives, as performed by the lesbians in this participant group, simultaneously performed several individual and group identity functions:

1. Demonstration of group belonging.
Through the selection of self-relevant lesbian-specific life events, individual lesbians constrained the referential aspects of their identity narratives to that which comprised commonly recognised lesbian identity development events. By linking a selection of these events in group constrained 'scripts', they demonstrated that they had completed certain lesbian identity development tasks and had therefore achieved a lesbian group identity, that is, group belonging. An association between the number of identity development tasks, or scripts, in an identity narrative and the narrator's level of commitment to identity and/or group identification supports this contention. Further, by extending these scripts to include group constrained accounts of motivation and/or justification, they demonstrated their self-worth and their worthiness to belong; by extension they also reinforced the worthiness of the group. Hence, the group provides guidance for moral action, and, by their internalisations of this moral action as expressed in identity narrative, the individuals reinforce the group's right to exist (Taylor 1989);

2. Establishment of individual uniqueness.
The age of the narrator, the length of time she had spent identifying as lesbian, and her attitude to her global identity, to her sexual identity, and to stigma generally, were the primary characteristics upon which lesbians differed in regard to their performed lesbian identities. In the narrative of her identity, a lesbian could adopt the group's ready interpretations and definitions of developmental task events, or, by invoking a series of 'Me/Not-me' identities, could negotiate and contest group constrained definitions and interpretations of those events, 'locating' herself on a central-peripheral continuum of group membership;
3. Demonstration of morality, or the reflection/construction of a worthy life. Lesbian scripts were woven into group constrained meaning formats, or 'thematic lines'. These thematic lines facilitate moral guidance by providing group-asserted ready interpretations of affect and self-regulation:

♦ Interpretation of affect. Affect comprises the primary motivational life force (Tomkins 1979) but different affects make sense to people only in terms of the social plots they elicit (Sarbin 1995); indeed they are the means by which we negotiate the moral and relational demands society imposes (Singer 1995). Transition to lesbian identity reveals a 'dazzling idiosyncrasy' of identities (Suppe 1984), more or less supported by institutional traditions, more or less influential over other identity positions, more or less imaginary, more or less enjoyable (Hermans 1996), more or less welcomed (Faderman 1985), and yielding a variety of physical and emotional consequences for the individual lesbian (Rust 1993). Yet the lesbian identity narratives of this participant group revealed group constraints on the interpretation of a variety of positive and negative affective reactions to lesbian specific life events in all five referential areas of lesbian identity development; lesbian identity itself, transitional events, group involvement, lesbian relationships and stigma management events. Hence group constrained lesbian identity narratives provided the opportunity for a lesbian to negotiate the competing moral and relational demands of heterosexist and lesbian cultures via the interpretation of individual and group patterns of affective response.

♦ Establishment of self-regulation mechanisms. Further, Integration or Struggle thematic lines may direct lesbians toward their identity goals by 'warning' against a possible feared self, while Contribution or Metamorphosis thematic lines may direct lesbians toward their identity goals by 'striving' towards a possible desired self. By allocating blame or responsibility and accounting for motivation, Fluidity and Preparation thematic lines may construct or reflect a lesbian identity congruent with 'ought' and 'ideal' selves, and by presenting a viable autobiographical reasoning, or justification, for a lesbian identity development, Ideology thematic lines may reduce the cognitive dissonance in current selves;
4. **Identity repair.**

Adopting a lesbian identity involves, for most women in a heterosexist society, disruption to an assumed or existing identity; lesbian identity narrative facilitates the rehearsal, contesting or reflection of identity reconstruction, or 'successful change'. Pure-positive thematic lines such as Metamorphosis and some Performance thematic lines depicted a pre-existing identity, thereby demonstrating identity consistency, with the successful change located within the perspective of the narrator who is then free to inherit her destiny. Some redemption sequence thematic lines, such as Emergence or Preparation thematic lines, depicted a successful change in identity itself by illustrating a causal sequence of personal unhappiness, the hard work of accommodation, achievement of a new identity and personal happiness and fulfilment;

5. **Connection to the group.**

Lesbian identity narratives variously reflected the three 'meaning formats' identified by Freeman (1998). None of the formats is specific to or encompassing of any one thematic line, but some general observations can be made:

- **Emergence, Preparation and Metamorphosis** thematic lines reflected 'archaic' meaning formats. For example, Emergence thematic lines could be superimposed onto the mythical tale of Cinderella whose misfortune ended when she met a perfect partner and changed her identity, and Metamorphosis thematic lines could be superimposed onto the mythical tale of the Ugly Duckling, whose misfortune ended when she met her own kind and realised her own true identity. These meaning formats allowed connection with the archaic, with all lesbians who have gone before, whose legendary suffering, discrimination and isolation gave way to good fortune when they became one with the group.

- **Performance, Contribution and some Ideology** thematic lines reflected 'historic' or 'developmental' meaning formats. Here the narrator's individual development was traced through the chronological ordering of events, the implied or explicit 'product' or 'outcome' being the unique, ever-new and current identity of the narrator.

- **Integration, Fluidity and Struggle** thematic lines reflected the 'formless' meaning format, where the narrator's identity development was unorganised and located in space rather than time.

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These three meaning formats allowed individual lesbians to define their connection to the group as, respectively, embedded within and interdependent with the group; a member of the group but different to other members; or part of the group but unconnected to other members. Hence individual lesbians could again establish belonging and uniqueness by locating themselves on a continuum of embedded-detached group connection.

6. Identity affirmation.

Performed lesbian identity narrative provides affirmation for lesbian identity by facilitating the 'rehearsal' of desired aspects of the self, and by internalising (real or imagined) audience (verbal or non-verbal) co-authorship. Further, the audience's implicit or explicit acceptance of the narrator's identity narrative affirms the narrator's identity account of herself as a worthy group member; affirming the worth of its members also serves to affirm the group's self worth.

In summary then, it is this author's contention that the functions of lesbian identity narrative as performed for another lesbian, comprised: the demonstration of group belonging; the establishment of individual uniqueness; the demonstration of morality, or the reflection/construction of a worthy life, via the interpretation of affect and the establishment of self-regulation mechanisms; identity repair; connection to the group; and identity affirmation.

8.8 General Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the lesbian identity narratives performed by the participant group comprised lesbian specific life events which may or may not have been directly experienced by the narrator herself. To a greater extent, referential elements of these identity narratives comprised events, behaviours, thoughts, actions and situations in relation to five narrative reference themes: lesbian identity considerations; processes of transition to lesbian identity; management of lesbian identity and its associated stigma; development of lesbian relationships; and lesbian community considerations. The most commonly occurring of the referential elements were interwoven to yield a sense of justification or worthiness of the narrator in regard to these five areas.

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An analysis of the ways in which these narrative reference areas were structured in the narratives revealed that the references comprised common patterns which were co-assembled for interpretation, or 'scripts'. The scripts described developmental tasks in each of the five narrative reference themes: the definition and development of identity and perceptions of its essential or constructed nature; the identification and promotion of management strategies aimed at disclosure and/or stigma reduction; the definition of the transition process itself and the identification of 'markers' by which to judge the transition as normative or otherwise; the identification of group investigation, socialisation and relocation strategies; and the definition and development of lesbian dyadic and/or sexual relationships and sexuality. Developmental task scripts often included perceived indicators or affirmations for the completion of the tasks, 'proving' the legitimacy of the narrative; they also included accounts of motivation, justification and/or allocation of responsibility, arguing the worthiness or legitimacy of the narrator to belong with the in-group.

In each narrative reference theme the developmental tasks were common to over half of the narratives. The greater the number of tasks included in a narrative, the greater the level of lesbian identification of the narrator, and the greater her commitment to her current identity. This gives apparent support to the author's contention that scripts were employed in the development, rehearsal and/or demonstration of lesbian identity. The narrator's choice of particular scripts was found to be reflective of her accommodation to her lesbian identity to some degree. For example, the narrator's level of lesbian identification, self-esteem, and commitment to her current identity, along with negative attitudes to stigma and negative evaluation, predicted her inclusion of a 'Choice' script which justified the decision to adopt a lesbian identity and allocated responsibility for the transition to external circumstances or to significant other. On the other hand, her level of lesbian identification, self-esteem, and commitment to her current identity, along with positive attitudes to stigma, predicted her inclusion of a Group Involvement developmental script which depicted affirmation for the narrator's group identity development. Scripts incorporating justification or affirmation were also intended to further the argument for worthiness or legitimacy of the narrator to belong. In general then, narrators with higher levels of identification and greater commitment to their identity included a greater number of these developmental task scripts.

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Narrators with higher levels of identification, greater commitment to their identity, greater fear of negative evaluation and greater levels of homonegativity tended to combine some of their scripts to include justification and minimisation of personal responsibility for their lesbian identity. Narrators who indicated higher levels of identification, greater commitment to their identity and low levels of homonegativity tended to extend their scripts to include affirmation for their lesbian identity.

An analysis of evaluative closures and time sequences associated with events, behaviours, thoughts, actions and situations revealed that the elements of narrative were intertwined in nine distinct thematic lines which appeared to serve a somewhat different type of purpose from those of the scripts. Each of the nine thematic lines enclosed identity, management, transition, community and/or relationship developmental tasks in evaluative closures which emphasised the reconstruction, comparative positioning, or morality of that identity. However, the functions of the thematic lines also included interpretation of affect associated with lesbian life events; the prescribing of morality and self-regulation towards personal goals or away from feared end-states or stereotypes; identity repair after a quantum change in sexuality and/or life-style; identity affirmation by rehearsal of desired states and/or implicit in-group acceptance; and connection to the greater group via culturally constrained time and meaning formats. These thematic lines arguably comprised a 'dramatistic repertoire' available to lesbians and accessed to differing degrees by members of the lesbian group.

Again, the narrator's levels of lesbian identification, commitment to her current identity, attitudes to stigma, and/or her age and number of years spent identifying as lesbian, were all associated with the use of particular thematic lines. For example older and longer identified lesbians were more likely to use Metamorphosis thematic lines which illustrated successful change, while older but more recently identified lesbians were more likely to use Struggle thematic lines which illustrated a task-in-progress, and younger and more recently identified lesbians were more likely to use Integration thematic lines which illustrated social mobility. The fact that chronological age and length of identification time affected choice of thematic line while age at which the narrator first identified as lesbian had no apparent affect on choice of thematic line, indicates that choice of thematic line is less related
to an individual's chronological social development per se and more related to lesbian cohort and habituation factors.

Further, narrators with high levels of identification and group self esteem were more likely to use thematic lines illustrating successful change or Performance thematic lines illustrating worthiness and affirmation; those with low levels of identification and group self esteem were more likely to use Struggle thematic lines illustrating a task-in-progress or Integration thematic lines illustrating social mobility; and those with negative attitudes to stigma were more likely to use Struggle or Emergence thematic lines, depicting difficulties ongoing or resolved, respectively. This supports the contention that narratives are less a reflection of actual life experience and more a reflection of current attitudes to identity and current life goals, including the need to connect to the greater group and affirm identity, to effect or demonstrate identity repair, to self-regulate, to prescribe morality, and to interpret affect.

In general then, thematic lines comprised a lesbian group dramatic repertoire from which individual lesbians could choose in order to pursue individual lesbian identity goals such as affirmation, redemption, successful change or identity repair, interpretation of affect, prescription of morality and connection to others: individual goals which appeared to be affected primarily by age, length of time identifying as lesbian, commitment to identity, attitudes to stigma, attitudes to lesbian identity and/or levels of identification as lesbian.

In in-group performance, the lesbians in this participant group chose events, directly or vicariously experienced, to demonstrate developmental tasks in specific areas of common concern and to negotiate definitions and interpretations with reference to the assumed position and expectations of the in-group audience. They were able, via the purposeful selection of particular events, behaviours, thoughts, actions or situations, to demonstrate, rehearse or develop group belonging and worthiness, while pursuing individual goals related to the affirmation of identity, morality and connection to others.

To return to the original question of this thesis, 'What is it about the telling of a lesbian identity narrative that sustains and nourishes both the narrator and her lesbian audience alike?', it appears that while performed lesbian identity narrative demonstrates group belonging of the narrator, it simultaneously confirms the group
membership of the audience, and affirms that lesbian group membership is valuable to at least one other person. Similarly, while it demonstrates the worthiness and morality of the narrator, it affirms the morality and worthiness of the group, and, by extension, of the in-group audience, and while it establishes the narrator's connection to the group it locates the listener as connected-to. By affirming the identity of the narrator, it also affirms, by extension, the identity of the in-group audience.

In other words, for the listener, performed lesbian identity narratives 'have the potential to lose the indications that they are outside of direct experience and become indistinguishable from other stories that draw upon direct experience' (Schiff, Noy & Cohler 2001:159). Further, they 'serve to situate our stories of the past and identity within a cultural horizon of sense and meaning' (p159) for both the performer of lesbian identity narrative and her lesbian audience.
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Lesbian Identity Narratives:  
Telling tales of a stigmatised identity

by

Christine Elizabeth Sharp

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PLEASE NOTE

The greatest amount of care has been taken while scanning this thesis,

and the best possible result has been obtained.
Dedicated to Chris Miller:
an extraordinary life partner
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Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text.
I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.
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Abstract

An individual's identity is thought to accommodate and reflect his or her changing drives, abilities, beliefs, roles and obligations in an ever-changing environment. A social or group identity is perceived as a contextually-bound aspect of identity, which may arise from, or give rise to, individual identity. When identity is stigmatised, expressions of identity are constrained by stigma management mechanisms. Stigmatised groups are thought to provide such mechanisms via group narratives, facilitating affirmative identities for their members. The in-group performance of these identities, that is, the telling of identity narratives to other group members, is thought to develop, affirm and reflect affirmative group identity. This study comprised an analysis of the identity narratives of 64 lesbians as told to another lesbian. The referential, structural, interactional and functional aspects of the narratives were analysed using a Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching and Theorising (NUDIST) program. The study also comprised an analysis of a set of quantitative personal or group identity factor measures, including demographics, attitudes to identity and lesbianism, attitudes to stigma, and family and social support. Results revealed that while these lesbians experienced common life events in their transition to or maintenance of lesbian identity, their identity narratives comprised a reflection of developmental tasks in one or more of 5 aspects of lesbian identity: lesbian sexual identity, transition to lesbian identity, stigma management, lesbian relationships and lesbian community involvement. Further, narratives were constrained by group interpretations: common 'Lesbian Scripts' and 'Thematic Lines' were identified among the narrative data. These scripts and thematic lines were correlated with personal or group identity factors, and results revealed that they were reflective of accommodation to lesbian identity. Specifically, results revealed that the inclusion of particular scripts and thematic lines in a lesbian's identity narrative was associated with her level of identification as a lesbian, her level of commitment to her identity, and her attitude to stigma and/or to lesbianism in general; the inclusion of particular thematic lines was also associated with her age, and the number of years she had spent identifying as lesbian. The study concludes that the function of lesbian narrative told to other lesbians, includes demonstration of group membership, location within the group, demonstration of worthiness and morality, identity repair, and identity affirmation.
Introduction

I've discovered there's a journey ... and since it became conscious life got better and better, and I guess now I'm able to understand and enjoy the community and the friends I have ... (Participant 44)

I think it's that investment, that emotional, financial part of it, that whole belonging and that building up a big commitment and a story of our lives together, a herstory, of all the people we have in this story, this big circle, a big tapestry, isn't it? (Participant 18)

Stories that lesbians tell about their transition to lesbian identity or their past or current lesbian lifestyles can be inspiring, humorous or tragic, yet to a lesbian audience they appear to be universally engaging. Why do lesbians love to talk about being lesbian? What is it about the telling of a lesbian identity narrative that appears to have value for both the narrator and her lesbian audience alike?

Social or Collective Identity research focuses on the contextual nature of the self-concept, and the ways in which individuals, over their life span, adapt their self-concepts to accommodate and reflect their changing roles in a changing environment. Identity in this context is perceived as 'an internal, self-constructed, dynamic organisation of drives, abilities, beliefs and individual history ...... reflected by age and changes in an individual's life circumstances' (Pulkkinen & Ronka 1994:261). Included in this area of research is the notion of the co-existence of divergent, even contradictory, aspects of identity, or 'roles'; as the individual fulfils different obligations in different social contexts, so her perception of her drives, abilities, beliefs and individual history is expanded and modified to accommodate contextual behaviours. Social interaction is considered by some as giving rise to, by others as stemming from, a 'social identity'; social identity is perceived by the former as a contextual adjunct to individual identity, and by the latter as the fundamental aspect of identity from which a sense of individual identity is developed.

The role of social interaction in the formulation of a lesbian identity is still hotly debated. Fruitful contributions to this debate stem from three distinct areas of research:
Lesbian research presents lesbian identity development variously as the progressive realisation of a lesbian sexual consciousness and/or the individual's progressive transition to a lesbian lifestyle; 'coming out', or the disclosure of this new identity to at least one other person, is claimed by most developmental models to be a transition point or developmental task;

Narrative research suggests that identity developments are reflexively ordered and communicated to others by way of established cultural repertoires which provide cultural guidance about the interpretation of morality, affect and behaviour and the hierarchical ordering of social identity roles;

Stigma research contends that in the representation and communication of a stigmatised identity an individual must accommodate the stigmatised role by developing interactive strategies to maintain self-efficacy and establish or affirm positive roles; the identity narratives of stigmatised identities are likely to be constrained by affirming group repertoires which challenge those of the stigmatising culture.

At the intersection of lesbian, stigma and identity narrative research then, one could contend that the disclosure of a lesbian identity would involve the individual's acknowledgement of lesbian identity developments and her reflexive ordering of those developments within the constraints of the lesbian group's repertoire. The purpose of this thesis is to explore this contention.

The structure of the thesis
The exploration begins with those elements in the literature which could be presumed to constitute lesbian identity developments, and includes considerations of the definitions, etiologies and 'types' of lesbian identity, transitional or developmental trajectory models, the development of social or group identity and the impact of stigma, and dyadic and community relationship and lifestyle developments, as established in the research literature to date. These then are the potential referential elements of lesbian identity narrative.

The exploration then moves to the elements of identity narrative itself, and includes an outline of the development of narrative structure through identity cognition, modelling and authorial practice, and the imposition of time and meaning formats in identity narrative; these are the potential constraints on identity narrative, or the structural elements of identity narrative. If lesbians construct their identities within
the constraints of group repertoire, such constructions would logically occur within in-group contexts; factors impacting on the ways in which an identity narrative is rehearsed with imagined others and communicated to real others, comprise the interactional elements of identity narrative. Finally, the exploration moves to the motivation for storying oneself and for performing that story for and with others, particularly among lesbians; this comprises the functional elements of identity narrative.

In combination, these elements form the basis of the current study. The thesis then moves to an exploration of the literature in order to determine a method design best suited for the analysis of the role of lesbian identity narratives in lesbian identity development. This includes establishing a research philosophy and an appropriate method of analysis, identifying elements established in the literature as reflecting identity development in general, lesbian identity development in particular, and stigma management, and identifying measures of these elements suitable for incorporating into the analysis; this comprises the research design.

Note;

In the psychological literature there are many and varied approaches to the study of identity, and research definitions of the term itself are legion. Largely interchangeable with 'self-concept' or 'ego', identity in this thesis is perceived as a 'clearly delineated self-definition comprising the goals, values and beliefs to which the person is unequivocally committed' (Waterman, in Pulkkinen & Ronka 1994:260).

'Group identity' is the aspect of a person's self that derives from membership of a social group combined with the personal value attached to that membership (Luhtanen & Crocker 1992, Tajfel 1972). 'Collective identity', 'group identity' and 'social identity' are terms used interchangeably in the literature; in the current study the term 'group identity' is the preferred term.

'Coming out' is variously used in the literature to denote the identity transition process, a first lesbian sexual experience, or an act of disclosure; the latter can also be termed 'being out'. In this thesis, the preferred term for the transition process is 'identity transition', while the preferred term for the act of identifying oneself to others as lesbian is 'disclosure'.

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