Lesbian's Perception of Parental Support and the Disclosure of Sexual Orientation

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LESBIAN'S PERCEPTION OF PARENTAL SUPPORT AND THE
DISCLOSURE OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION

by

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LESBIAN'S PERCEPTION OF PARENTAL SUPPORT AND THE DISCLOSURE OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Janet Trudee Snyder Tarkowski, Ed.D.
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The relationship between lesbian perception of parental support and disclosure of sexual orientation was examined in the study. From the 200 questionnaires prepared for distribution, a purposive sample of 180 (90%) lesbian-identified adults returned data for analysis. The participants completed a questionnaire addressing demographics and lesbian life-experiences. Three self-report inventories, the Perceived Social Support-Family Scale (PSS-Fa) (Procidano & Heller, 1983), the Silencing the Self Scale (STSS) (Jack, 1991), and the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) (Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock, & Erbaugh, 1961), were also administered.

Data gathering procedures used in the study resulted in a sample which was largely white, well educated, and not economically advantaged. The sample was similar to other samples identified in previous lesbian research studies. Thus, generalizations from the results were limited to lesbian-identified adults with similar demographic characteristics.

Data were analyzed by chi square and t-test statistics with $p = .05$ set as the significance level. Statistically significant differences were found for participants who reported perceptions of poor parental support and who did or did not disclose their sexual orientation to
Participants who reported perceptions of mother's and father's attitude toward homosexuality as homophobic significantly reported perceptions of poor parental support. Findings related to self-silencing included significant silencing behavior associated with negative perceptions of parental support and when mothers were perceived as homophobic. No significant differences were found between self-silencing behavior and the perception of father's attitude toward homosexuality and also decisions to disclose, or to not disclose, sexual orientation to parents. A qualitative analysis of written responses was organized into self- versus other-oriented thematic sets, and a summary was included in the results section.

These findings add to a growing body of knowledge of how perceptions of positive support and affirmative attitude toward homosexuality influence the decision to disclose sexual orientation. The findings may also provide additional insight for lesbians to mutually engage in and maintain growth producing parental relationships. Recommendations for future research on issues related to disclosure of sexual orientation and parental support were provided.
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Lesbian's perception of parental support and the disclosure of sexual orientation

Tarkowski, Janet Trudee Snyder, Ed.D.
Western Michigan University, 1994
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In recognition of the support and energy others have shared during the undertaking and completion of this project, I am deeply touched and thank each of you. As the project unfolded, my understanding and respect for lesbian identity development and identity management grew. From this growth, I recognized many of the sacrifices that were made by my family and friends who allowed this process the space and time required to unfold. Also, appreciation to Robert L. Betz, Ph.D.; James L. Lowe, Ph.D.; and James Michael Croteau, Ph.D., for their individual contributions to the completion of this project.

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Janet Trudee Snyder Tarkowski
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ............................................................... ii
LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................ viii
CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION ................................................................. 1
   Background of the Study .................................................. 2
   Statement of the Problem ............................................... 7
   Disclosure of Sexual Orientation .................................... 7
   Perceived Parental Support ............................................. 10
   Self-Silencing: Loss and Compromise ............................ 11
   The Research Questions ............................................... 14
   Definition of Terms ....................................................... 15
   Coming Out ................................................................... 15
   Disclosure of Sexual Orientation ................................... 15
   Heterosexual Assumption .............................................. 16
   Heterosexual Bias .......................................................... 16
   Homosexual Identities .................................................. 16
   Passing ........................................................................ 16
   Self-Silencing ............................................................... 16
   Sexual Orientation ......................................................... 17
   Limitations of the Study ............................................... 17
   Overview of the Study .................................................... 18

II. REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE .............................. 20
   Women's Psychological Development ............................ 22
# Table of Contents—Continued

## CHAPTER

**Introduction and History** ............................................ 22

**Current Status on Women's Psychological Development** ............................................................... 24

**Self-in-Relation Theory** ............................................... 26

**Constructs and Perspectives** ........................................... 26

**Paradigm Shifts** ................................................................. 32

**Formation of Homosexual Identities** ...................... 36

**Theory and Research** ................................................. 36

**Lesbian Identity Development** ................................. 42

**Disclosure of Sexual Orientation** ............................ 54

**Overview of Disclosure of Sexual Orientation** ...... 54

**Coming Out to Self** ..................................................... 55

**Disclosing Sexual Orientation to Parents** .......... 60

**Effects of Self-Silencing** ............................................ 67

**Summary of the Literature Review** ......................... 73

### III. METHOD

**Sample** ................................................................. 76

**Procedures** ................................................................. 77

**Fan-Out Procedure** ..................................................... 78

**Questionnaire Tracking Method** ............................ 78

**Instrumentation** ................................................................. 79

**Perceived Social Support--Family Scale** ............... 80

**Silencing the Self Scale** ............................................... 81

**The Beck Depression Inventory** ................................. 83
# Table of Contents—Continued

## CHAPTER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire Booklet</th>
<th>83</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Data</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Considerations</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Protection</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Procedure to Observe Copyright Restrictions</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### IV. RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>91</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statistical Findings</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary Statement of the Qualitative Analysis</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Oriented Disclosure</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other-Oriented Disclosure</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Oriented Nondisclosure</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other-Oriented Nondisclosure</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### V. SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>110</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## APPENDICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualitative Results of Open-Ended Question</th>
<th>123</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Permission</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Communication for Permission to Use the Perceived Social Support Scale</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table of Contents--Continued

D. Personal Communication for Permission to Use the Silencing the Self Scale ................................................... 141
E. Personal Communication for Permission to Use the Beck Depression Inventory ........................................... 144
F. Informed Consent ........................................................................... 154
G. Participant Instructions ............................................................... 157
H. Questionnaire ................................................................................. 159
I. Distributor Procedure ................................................................. 167
J. Coding Procedure for Packet Identification .......................... 171
K. Master Tracking Record ............................................................. 175
L. First Name--Number Record ...................................................... 177
M. Referral Form ............................................................................... 179
N. Advertisement Poster ................................................................. 181
O. Summary Statement for Participants ......................................... 183

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................................................ 185
LIST OF TABLES

1. Frequency and Percent of the Racial Distribution of the Sample ................................................................. 92
2. Frequency and Percent of the Socioeconomic Status of the Sample as Indicated by Annual Income Level ............ 93
3. Frequency and Percent of the Highest Level of Completed Educational Experience of the Sample ................................................................. 94
4. Frequency and Percent of the Sample Distribution of the Person(s) Indicated as Providing the Primary Parenting Function ................................................................. 95
5. Means and Standard Deviation Summary of the Sample’s Age-Related Lesbian Experiences ................................. 96
6. Chi-Square Relationship Calculated From Statements of Disclosure of Sexual Orientation to Parent(s) by Levels of Perceived Parental Support-Family Scale ................................................................. 98
7. Cross Tabulation of Sample Perception of Mothers’ Attitude Toward Homosexuality With Fathers’ Attitude Toward Homosexuality ................................................................. 98
8. Relationship Between the Perception of Mothers’ Attitude Toward Homosexuality by Sample Scores on the PSS-Fa ............................................................................. 99
9. Relationship Between the Perception of Fathers’ Attitude Toward Homosexuality by Scores on the PSS-Fa ................................................................. 100
10. t-Test Summary Table Comparing STSS Mean Scores and PSS-Fa Scores Between Good Support and Poor Support.................................................................................. 101
11. t-Test Summary Table Comparing STSS Mean Scores and Perception of Mothers’ Attitude Toward Homosexuality as Homophobic Versus Supportive .................................................................. 102
List of Tables--Continued

12. t-Test Summary Table Comparing STSS Scores and the Perception of Fathers' Attitude Toward Homosexuality as Homophobic Versus Supportive ................................................................. 103

13. t-Test Summary Table Comparing the Mean STSS Scores and the Sample's Admission of Having Disclosed Versus Having Not Disclosed ............................................. 104
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Approximately 10% of the women in the United States are lesbians (Bell & Weinberg, 1978; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953; Strommen, 1989). Lesbians are an invisible minority in Western culture. Therefore, the only way for others to know if a woman is a lesbian is if she discloses her sexual orientation. During lesbian identity formation, the processes of disclosing sexual orientation are clarified. However, there are very few references in the professional literature that address the lesbian decision-making process about disclosure of sexual orientation, and fewer references specifically addressing disclosing sexual orientation to parent(s) (Kleinberg, 1986; Savin-Williams, 1989b).

Cultural and internalized homophobia can act as a resistive force in making decisions about disclosure of sexual orientation (Evans & Levine, 1990). Resistance is a result of homophobia that is defined for this current study as an irrational fear, hatred, and intolerance of people who are gay, lesbian, or bisexual (Pharr, 1988). Intolerance of homosexuality by the dominant culture, including parent(s) of gay and lesbian persons, suggests that disclosure of sexual orientation presents a personal risk of being rejected or disowned. The potential loss of a valued relationship, for most women, is described as a loss of self (Jack, 1991). Women psychologically resist the loss of self, as well as the loss of valued relationships, and are systematically taught to value the making
and maintaining of relationships (Gilligan, 1982; Jack, 1991; J. B. Miller, 1988).

Relational theory, also known as the self-in-relation model of women's psychological development, emphasizes that the making and maintaining of relationships is central to most women's sense of well-being, often at a psychological expense to themselves (Gilligan, 1982; Jack, 1991; J. B. Miller, 1991; Surrey, 1991). Since all lesbians are women and, as understood from women's psychological development theories, some lesbians may struggle to verbalize their differentiated sexual orientation from parent(s). This struggle might be especially difficult when there is a risk of loss while continuing an effort to maintain connection with parent(s) in a growth fostering relationship (Gilligan, 1982; Kleinberg, 1986; J. B. Miller, 1991). Therefore, from the perspective of relational theory, supported with theories and research of homosexual identity development, the relationship between lesbians' perception of parental support and disclosure of sexual orientation was addressed in this current study.

Background of the Study

Traditional psychological development theories, such as those written by Erik Erikson (1968), Lawrence Kohlberg (1984), and Daniel Levinson (1978), have provided a theoretical perspective that has been generalized to the population at large from the observations of men. More specifically, these traditional theories have been established by the observations and values of white, middle-class, able-bodied, North American men (L. S. Brown, 1989b; Gilligan, 1982; J. B. Miller, 1991).
In the past three decades, feminist theorists began to challenge whether traditional psychological theories actually reflect the attitudes and experiences of the population at large, especially women (Chodorow, 1989; Gilligan, 1982; Jordan, 1991; Kaplan, Klein, & Gleason, 1991; J. B. Miller, 1991; Stiver, 1991; Surrey, 1991). In response to this concern, women clinicians and scholars from the Stone Center for Developmental Services and Studies at Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts, have collaborated to develop a theory of women's development. Theorists at the Stone Center for Developmental Studies proposed "that a person's [woman's] mental health is enhanced as she comes more wholly into her relational power rather than as she learns to be a 'separate,' 'autonomous,' or [an] 'individuated' self" (Heyward, 1989a, p. 13). The work of these theorists has prompted research of many marginalized populations, among them women and more specific to this current study, lesbians (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Golden, 1991; Leavy & Adams, 1986; J. B. Miller, 1991; Ponse, 1978).

Traditional psychological development theories suggest that autonomy, separation, and independence occur during late adolescence and that the self is defined through competitive achievements (Erikson, 1968; Kohlberg, 1981; Levinson, 1978). The Stone Center theorists suggest that when women are defined by traditional psychological theories their life experience is devalued and often viewed as pathological (J. B. Miller, 1991). In support of rethinking women's development, Beverly Burch (1993) stated "current thinking about women's developmental issues emphasizes the importance of relatedness for women"
(p. 95), a criterion conceptually absent in the traditional theories.

Additionally, the Stone Center theories of women's psychological development specifically address the concern that the typical embeddedness (often called dependence) of women's interrelational behavior not be viewed as pathological (Jordan, 1991; J. B. Miller, 1991). Jack (1991) stated, "the crucial issue . . . is how to distinguish between healthy, mature interdependence and debilitating forms of connection . . . [and] the concept of dependence hampers our ability to perceive this distinction; it labels women's orientation to their relationships as weakness or pathology" (p. 19). Instead, interrelational behavior as described by the relational theorists is the opportunity to have growth producing experiences that foster mutually empathic and empowering relationships though engaging differences (Jordan, 1987; Mencher, 1990; J. B. Miller, 1976, 1991).

Feminist theorists, such as Nancy Chodorow (1978) from the object-relations perspective and Jean Baker Miller (1976) and Janet Surrey (1991) from the self-in-relation perspective, are cited by Burch (1993) to clarify the concept of relatedness. In agreement, Burch summarized "that women develop most fully within the matrix of their relatedness to others, not apart from it" (p. 95). The object-relations perspective emphasized the importance of understanding the other in relational context of the self. The Stone Center theorists stated that they have expanded this idea to suggest that the existence of the self is more clearly understood from the experience with the other.

The Stone Center theorists understanding of women's relational development suggests that the self is defined and enhanced through
mutually empathic relationships (Gilligan, 1982; Jordan, 1991; J. B. Miller, 1991; Surrey, 1991). Carol Becker (1988) stated that women often experience a less separate sense of self than men. For example, in lesbian relationships a more connected sense of self is reflected in the "tendency of lesbians to maintain ties to former lovers, a phenomenon not so common in heterosexual relationships" (Becker, 1988, p. 96) or with gay men.

When the movement to understand women's psychological development began to address depathologizing the embeddedness of women's experience, the American Psychological Association had addressed depathologizing homosexuality. Therefore, it is only within the past 20 years that issues related to understanding women's experience, particularly lesbians', began to appear in professional journals. In spite of this trend, there was very little information written about lesbians' experience as related to the self-in-relation perspective. There has been even less information written about lesbians' perceptions of parental support and lesbians' experiences with disclosure of sexual orientation.

As early as 1971, Sidney Jourard wrote that society seems to punish those who disclose a self that doesn't fit the stereotypical reality of the dominant culture. Although Jourard did not identify gay and lesbian persons in his work, he did identify the need to recognize differences among people. Jourard (1971) stated, "some persons are treated as if their perspective did not exist, and their action is seen as originating not in their valid and free consciousness, but elsewhere--their glands, their past . . . the official view is being encoded" (p. 111). Jourard's description of authentic-self is conceptually the same as it is used in this
text to describe feelings of being authentically "known" to others.

In examining the family context in which a lesbian considers disclosure of sexual orientation, Vernon Wall and Jamie Washington (1991) reported that parents in Western culture tend to assume that their offspring are born heterosexual. In 1980, Adrienne Rich described this dilemma of cultural assumption in an essay about compulsory heterosexuality. Earlier, Barbara Ponse (1978) described the process by which persons are assumed to be heterosexual unless they overtly demonstrate, or disclose, an opposing reality and labeled it the "heterosexual assumption." Therefore, any time a lesbian decides to risk disclosure of sexual orientation she is likely to encounter this assumption with the result that she may not be believed or understood.

A lesbian's decision about why, when, and how disclosure of sexual orientation gets reported to her parent(s) often is determined by her psychological and relational resources (Falco, 1991; Zemsky, 1991). Beth Zemsky (1991) explained that if a lesbian does not believe that the psychological resources available to her are robust enough to sustain the rejection of the significant other, (family, friends, etc.) then she may intuitively choose to remain silent and withhold disclosure as one means of protecting the relationship.

Alexandra Kaplan (1991) addressed some limitations of the Stone Center Working Papers, such as: "We needed . . . [to] focus on what was 'experientially near,' and to look to others to speak to their particular frame and perspective" (p. 6). J. B. Miller (1991) elaborated on this statement and on behalf of the Stone Center scholars invited diversity by encouraging a collaborative style and including contributions from
others. J. B. Miller stated:

We [Stone Center theorists] regret the limits of our model-building at this time and we have taken steps to include more minority women and lesbian women in the development of these ideas . . . through more frequent dialogue with those who can teach us about other "realities" and points of view. (p. 7)

In the present study, information is presented about the lesbian experience with disclosure of sexual orientation, especially the relational dynamics between lesbians and their parent(s).

Statement of the Problem

In the political climate of the 1990s, it is suggested that "the social and behavioral sciences have an important role to play in increasing society's knowledge about understanding lesbians, gay men, and bisexual people" (Herek, Kimmel, Amaro, & Melton, 1991, p. 957). Recognizing these deficits in the literature, the problem for study in this current project was to more fully understand lesbian perception of the relational dynamics between perceived parental support and disclosure of sexual orientation. This current study was addressed from the relational theory model of women's psychological development and supported by the theoretical formation of lesbian identity development.

Disclosure of Sexual Orientation

The disclosure of sexual orientation is an early task in the process of lesbian identity development. Homosexual identity theorist, Vivian Cass (1979) introduced the dilemma about disclosure with the idea that a person's decision to disclose sexual orientation to others is influenced

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by a psychological capacity to tolerate the deviance from the social
norm. Zemsky's (1991) statement (cited previously) that adequate
psychological and relational resources are required to tolerate the dif­
ference from the social norm, follows Cass (1979) by 20 years. The
essential difference between these positions is reflected in the choice of
words; Zemsky (1991) no longer used "deviance" as a referent to the
homosexual within the dominant culture.

Erik Strommen (1989) described the individualized disclosure
process for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals as the "explicit revealing of
one's sexual preference to others, particularly family members" (p. 39).
This disclosure process is often referred to as "coming out." In early
lesbian identity formation, disclosure of sexual orientation occurs first to
self, then to others (Cass, 1979; Strommen, 1989). Therefore, in this
current study, the term "coming out" will only refer to the developmen­
tal process of identifying lesbian identity to self and the term "disclo­
sure" will be used, as described by Strommen (1989), when relating
sexual orientation to others, such as parent(s).

Disclosure of sexual orientation is described by homosexual iden­
tity theorists and researchers as the most difficult task in the process of
developing homosexual identities (Cramer & Roach, 1988; Kleinberg,
1986; Kus, 1980; Savin-Williams, 1989a). In the past 20 years, the
literature on disclosure of sexual orientation has not indicated any
change in (a) the degree of difficulty or (b) the risks of the disclosure
process. Therefore, this current project is designed to increase the
understanding of lesbians' relational experience with disclosure of sexual
orientation to parent(s). A goal of the study was to provide insight and

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assistance for those who have struggled and those who will struggle with disclosure of sexual orientation.

More recently several theorists and academic authors, like Richard Troiden (1989), Ann Henderson (1984), Nancy Evans and Heidi Levine (1990), suggested that homosexual identity development is different for women than men. Patricia Groves and Lois Ventura (1983) specifically identified that lesbians have more similarity to women than to gay men. In addition to gender differences, Henderson (1979), like Carla Golden (1991), described the importance of recognizing the differences among and between homosexuals. The emphasis is on individuality within homogeneous groups and Henderson (1984) specifically referred to "homosexualities [as being] diverse in style and meaning" (p. 176).

Due to the diversity within the lesbian subculture, women may approach disclosure of sexual orientation to parent(s) with different perspectives and different resistances. Laura Brown (1989b) and Carter Heyward (1989a) emphasized the importance of lesbians doing research on lesbians. From this perspective, the disclosure process could be intrinsically understood and an empathic concern about the risks of exposure and the possible pain within parental relationships potentially more respected (Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1989; Jack, 1991; J. B. Miller, 1991; Savin-Williams, 1989b; Sophie, 1982).

The concern about relational disruption, or loss of the parental relationship, in this study is twofold, (1) loss due to disclosure and (2) loss due to nondisclosure. More specifically, if a lesbian chooses to resist disclosure of sexual orientation, for whatever reason, she risks relational disruption from her parent(s) by the loss of not being known
authentically. On the other hand, if a lesbian chooses to disclose sexual orientation to her parents, for whatever reason, she risks relational disruption from her parents by being disowned (Borhek, 1993).

The twofold concern about potential loss due to disclosure of sexual orientation to parent(s) does not preclude that there are not positive outcomes. However, the consequences for parental alienation, due to disclosure of sexual orientation, have included "expelling their daughter from their home, committing her to a mental hospital, taking her to a therapist or religious figure, or putting her in a new school" (Sophie, 1982, p. 343) as an effort to "change her." Ponse (1978) identified another consequence to disclosure as "counterfeit secrecy"; the price for acceptance is a lesbian daughter's collusion with parents to "act" as if she were heterosexual.

Perceived Parental Support

Perceived parental support was the second variable addressed in the current study question. As indicated in the literature, social support has been studied from two perspectives: (1) social network systems such as Kenneth Heller's (cited in Procidano & Heller, 1983) extensive work with community mental health support systems and (2) perceptual levels of support such as Crowne and Marlowe's (1964) work with social desirability. Mary Procidano and Kenneth Heller (1983) developed measurement scales for perceived social support, both for family (Perceived Social Support-Family Scale, PSS-Fa) and friends (Perceived Social Support-Friends Scale, PSS-Fr). The PSS-Fa and PSS-Fr measure the perception of support from family or friends when impacted by
stressful life events. This instrument was chosen for the specific information it elicits about perception of parental support. Disclosure of sexual orientation is defined as a stressful life-event for gay and lesbian persons.

A clear distinction was made in Procidano and Heller's (1983) work between perceived support and supportive networks. From their research, perceived social support was influenced by within-person conditions, which are made up of both long standing traits (personality and cultural learning) and temporal factors (longevity of relational potential). The description of perceived support as disclosing of intimate information was consistent with the meaning of perceived parental support identified in the present study.

Procidano and Heller (1983) differentiated between family support and friend support in their research to emphasize the transiency of friendships versus the potential longevity and resilience of family-of-origin relationships. Among the conclusions from Procidano and Heller's research on perceived social support (PSS), they reported that family support seemed (a) to be more stable than friends and not influenced by temporary attitudinal changes and (b) to demonstrate evidence that perceived support led to greater willingness to disclose information; inversely reported as, "low PSS-Fa subjects showed marked verbal inhibition with [siblings]" (Procidano & Heller, 1983, p. 1).

Self-Silencing: Loss and Compromise

A third variable, self-silencing, was addressed in the present study due to the influence silencing has on the understanding of women's
psychological needs. The potential ramifications of loss and disruption of the parental relationship, due to the disclosure of sexual orientation and/or the possibility of the misperception of parental support, may effect the psychological well-being of lesbians (Falco, 1991; Kleinberg, 1986; Ponse, 1978; Sophie, 1982). The effect of self-sacrifice and self-silencing on women has diminished psychological well-being. Carol Gilligan (1982) identified the absence of voice with the oppression of women's role in Western culture. More recently Dana Jack and Diane Dill (1992) found self-silencing behavior significantly correlated with depression. The perceptions of social support are also associated with depression. For example, Procidano and Heller (1983) cited "decreased satisfaction with supportive relationships could be as much a result of depression as a cause of it" (p. 10). All of these examples represent a nontraditional view of the etiology of depression (American Psychological Association [APA], 1990).

However, from a perspective of women's psychological development, relational theory states that disconnection from others is a state of discomfort and pain that results in a sense of loneliness and isolation. More importantly, from the pain of disconnection, there is a sense that it is something about oneself that is the reason, or cause, for that loneliness (J. B. Miller, 1988). The violations and disconnections of valued relationships, as presented by J. B. Miller, reflect a prevailing attitude of the dominant culture that has systematically taught women to behave in ways that will keep her "safe" from potential or real abandonment, such as being accommodating, compromising, and self-silenced (Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1989; Jack, 1991; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, &
Jack (1991) cited the results from studies by Belle (1982); Brown and Harris (1978); Brown and Prudo (1981); Campbell, Cope, and Teasdale (1983); and Perry and Shapiro (1986) and reported findings that "identified conflict and disruption in intimate relationships as critical factors in women's depressions, . . . [and] that supportive relationships protect women against depression" (p. 21). In reference to the current study, the risk of discomfort from potential disconnection from family of origin due to the disclosure of sexual orientation suggests that lesbians may make decisions about disclosure from their perception of parental support. In lesbian identity developmental, after confusion and coming out to self, supportive lesbian networks are established, perhaps to buffer possible negative effects of disclosure to parent(s) (Cass, 1979; deMonteflores & Schultz, 1978; Kleinberg, 1986; Sophie, 1986; Troiden, 1989; Zitter, 1987).

Jack (1991) described relational disruption from a perspective of "loss of self." Jack stated: "Within a culture that teaches women to silence themselves as a way to be safe and achieve relatedness, how can a woman learn to take the risk of exposing her authentic self to create mutuality and dialogue within relationship?" (p. 182). In the present study, the research questions asked if the decision to disclose sexual orientation to parent(s) was influenced by the perception of parental support and demonstrated self-silencing behavior?
The Research Questions

For the present study, two formal research questions, each with several hypotheses, were developed. The following are these research questions and the supporting hypotheses:

1. What is the significance of the relationship, if any, between lesbians’ perceptions of parental support and disclosure of their sexual orientation?

The following are the supporting hypotheses for the first research question:

$H_{01}^1$: Lesbians’ perceptions of parental support are independent of reasons to, or to not, disclose sexual orientation to parent(s).

$H_{02}^2$: Lesbians’ perceptions of their mother’s attitude toward homosexuality are independent of their father’s attitude toward homosexuality.

$H_{03}^3$: Lesbians’ perceptions of their mother’s attitude toward homosexuality are independent of perceptions of parental support.

$H_{04}^4$: Lesbians’ perceptions of their father’s attitude toward homosexuality are independent of perceptions of parental support.

2. What is the significance of the difference, if any, between lesbians’ perceptions of parental support and self-silencing behavior?

The following are the supporting hypotheses for the second research question:

$H_{0a}^a$: There is no difference between lesbians’ perceptions of parental support and mean scores of self-silencing behavior.

$H_{0b}^b$: There is no difference between lesbians’ self-silencing be-
behavior and perceptions of mother's attitudes toward homosexuality as supportive or homophobic.

$H_0^c$: There is no difference between lesbians self-silencing behavior and perceptions of father's attitudes toward homosexuality as supportive or homophobic.

$H_0^d$: There are no differences between lesbians' self-silencing behavior and reported decisions to disclose versus decisions to not disclose sexual orientation to parent(s).

Definition of Terms

The following terms have been selected and defined in this list to provide continuity of meaning between the author and the reader. The terms defined in this list have also been defined within the text, in the context of their meaning for this project.

**Coming Out**

Coming out is the developmental process through which homosexual persons recognize their own homosexual orientation and choose to integrate this knowledge into their personal awareness and self-definition (deMonteflores & Schultz, 1978). Coming out is not used in this text when referring to disclosing sexual orientation to others.

**Disclosure of Sexual Orientation**

Disclosure of sexual orientation is the explicit communication of revealing a different sexual orientation to others, particularly parent(s) (Strommen, 1989).
Heterosexual Assumption

The heterosexual assumption is the idea that all persons are believed to be heterosexual unless demonstrating or disclosing a different sexual orientation to others (Ponse, 1978).

Heterosexual Bias

Heterosexual bias is the belief that the values, behaviors, and attitudes of mixed gender relationships are superior and more natural than those of same gender relationships (Morin, 1977).

Homosexual Identities

Homosexual identities are an organized set of diverse characteristics uniquely perceived by an individual as representative of a homosexual self with congruent behavior in relation to social situations (Troiden, 1984).

Passing

Passing is a functional, covert behavior that camouflages lesbian sexual orientation from the dominant culture (Ponse, 1978).

Self-Silencing

Self-silencing is the inhibition of one's verbal and nonverbal self-expression and behaviors in order to avoid negative consequences and conflict that results in potential loss of relationship and diminished self-worth (Jack, 1991).
Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation refers to the three dimensions of personal awareness, (1) physical sexual activity, (2) personal affection, and (3) erotic fantasies that can be manifested with persons of the same sex as oneself (such as, gay or lesbian persons), or with persons of an opposite sex than oneself (such as, heterosexual persons) (Hart & Richardson, 1981).

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of the present study included the invisibility of the lesbian population and the inherent difficulties in accessing a randomized sample of participants (Bell & Weinberg, 1978; L. S. Brown, 1989b; Hunnisett, 1986; Savin-Williams, 1989a). The effect of population invisibility limits information about the expected range of participant characteristics and also reduces the participation of persons marginalized within the subculture.

A second limitation in this current study was the use of the questionnaire format, a method that often restricts the participant to forced choice responses. Questionnaires also reduce the control of participant diligence in the completion of the instrument, as well as limited control over participating conditions, health status, or personal comfort during participation. In addition, forced-choice responses provide no opportunity for item clarification and this can confound content validity.

An additional limitation was the recognition that there were various connotations of some terminology, especially parent(s). Therefore,
consistency might have been compromised within questionnaire responses and among the data set as a whole. In addition, the present study had no controls for defining the quality of the parental relationship.

The fourth limitation of this present study was the complex procedure for distributing questionnaires. Questionnaires were distributed and monitored by lesbian-identified fully and limited licensed psychologists and licensed professional counselors. Therefore, recruitment by professional distributors might have restricted the sample distribution and possibly biased the results.

The fluidity of the lesbian identity was not controlled, as there were no indicators on the questionnaire that addressed women who had been in, then out, then in lesbian relationships. It is recognized that the data represented a cross-section in the lives of the participants and if this population were retested longitudinally, these response sets might be different. Thus, the results are time and response-set bound.

Overview of the Study

This current study described the interaction between a lesbian’s perception of parental support and the decision to disclose sexual orientation to parent(s). Cultural biases present a significant influence on the decisions to disclose value laden information, such as sexual orientation, to parent(s) and can interfere in the perceptions of parental attitudes and support. Cultural biases include, but are not limited to, issues of (a) homophobia that becomes internally held by lesbians as well as culturally held by nonlesbians, (b) parents’ assumption that their offspring are heterosexual, (c) persistent pathologizing of homosexualities and
women's relational capacities, and (d) dependence as a pathological condition in women.

A questionnaire format was designed to gather data from 200 lesbians to answer the research questions developed for the study. There were direct responses and instruments to measure (a) perceived support (PSS-Fa) and (b) self-silencing (Silencing the Self Scale [STSS], Jack, 1991). The data from these responses were statistically tested using the computer software system, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS-X).

In Chapter II, the review of relevant literature is organized into three sections, (1) women's psychological development, (2) formation of homosexual identity, and (3) disclosure of sexual orientation. The third chapter reports the method and design of the research. In Chapter IV the research data and results are presented, with conclusions, implications, and recommendations found in Chapter V.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE

This review of selected literature cites theoretical perspectives and research about a "relational approach to psychological understanding" (J. B. Miller, 1991, p. vi) of women. The literature review is organized into three sections: (1) an overview of women's psychological development theories from a relational perspective, (2) a review of the theories specific to lesbian sexual identity development, and (3) an examination of the specific issues within sexual identity development that addressed disclosure of sexual orientation to self and others. Finally, there is a summary statement describing the integration of these three sections.

As an overview, women's psychological development theorists recognize that relational theory is a theoretical perspective that has been defined by white, professional, heterosexual women. There is an open recognition of the limitations of this work and the need to invite greater diversity into women's psychological theory development. In recent years, there have been efforts by lesbians to collaborate with feminist scholars to determine if the relational theoretical perspective is also representative of lesbian experience (Gartrell, 1984; Heyward, 1989a; Kleinberg, 1986; Rosen, 1990).

A central thought in relational theory states that most women find making and maintaining relationships a growth producing experience (J. B. Miller, 1991). Therefore, violations to relationships may cause
women to experience distress and discomfort (Jack, 1991; J. B. Miller, 1988, 1991; Swift, 1987). Disclosure of sexual orientation is a potential process within sexual identity development. For lesbians, disclosure of sexual orientation to parents presents risks to the relational connection in two ways: (1) to disclose sexual orientation might result in parents disowning or casting out their daughters or (2) to not disclose sexual orientation to parents might cause a lesbian to have to maintain a secret life. Therefore, the risk to the parental relationship in disclosure of sexual orientation can mean living disconnected from parents and family if acceptance and integration are not accomplished between family members.

This selected review of the literature contains:

I. Women's psychological development
   A. Introduction and history
   B. Current status on women's development
   C. Self-in-relation theory

II. Formation of homosexual identities
   A. Theory and research
   B. Perceived parental support
   C. Issues specific to lesbians

III. Disclosure of sexual orientation
   A. Coming out to self
   B. Disclosing to others
   C. Effects of self-silencing

IV. Summary
Women's Psychological Development

Introduction and History

The feminist theories of women's psychological development evolved out of political, social, and personal awareness stimulated by the women's movement in the 1970s (Gilligan, 1982; Golden, 1991; J. B. Miller, 1976). Some feminist scholars challenged traditional thought and provided working papers on a relational perspective to women's psychological growth through grants of the Stone Center for Development Services and Studies (Jordan et al., 1991). Other scholars have researched ideas of women's development with grants from the Harvard Project on Women's Psychology and Girls Development (Gilligan, Rogers, & Tolman, 1991). Selected others who also integrate feminist perspectives of women's psychological development are included in this review (Chodorow, 1989; Golden, 1991).

All these theoretical works contrast the traditional psychological development theories; such as, the theories constructed by Erikson (1968), Levinson (1978), and Kohlberg and Kramer (1969) that stated autonomy, separation, and independence occur in late adolescence and that the self is defined through competitive achievements. These traditional theories were generalized to women from the observations and research data collected on young, white, middle-class, North American, able-bodied men (L. S. Brown, 1989b; Gilligan, 1982; J. B. Miller, 1991). Therefore, the women's psychological development theories emerged, in part, to address a concern about the curious absence of the representation of women's experience in psychological literature and

As the traditional psychological development models were challenged by feminist scholars, it was discovered that women didn’t always fit into the stage-progression models that are built on separation and autonomy paradigm (Belenky et al., 1986; L. S. Brown, 1989b; Gilligan, 1982; J. B. Miller, 1991). A second paradigm shift acknowledges the unique tendency of humans to maintain an interconnection between the generations (Surrey, 1991). Relational authenticity is a third paradigm shift that identifies the value of connection for women with their sense of self as authentic (Surrey, 1991). As the traditional theories were generalized to include women’s experience, the outcome often described women as less advanced and less independent (Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Lyons, 1988). For example, Lyons (1988) cited Gilligan’s exploration of Kohlberg and Kramer’s work, stating:

that when women are engaged professionally outside the home and occupy equivalent educational and social positions as men, they will reach higher states of moral development than the typical adult woman (Stage 3—interpersonal mode) found in Kohlberg’s six stage system of moral judgment making. (p. 37)

Gilligan (1982) and J. B. Miller (1976) were among the first scholars to provide a challenge to the traditional theories and worked to reduce the deficit in the psychological literature about women and girls. Since that time, there has been a significant effort to increase the quantity and diversity of contributions that address issues related to unique patterns of women and girls development (Belenky et al., 1986; Burch,
1993; Gartrell, 1984; Heyward, 1989a; Jack, 1991; Kleinberg, 1986; Mencher, 1990). However, even with an effort to diversify women's psychological development, there continues to be a knowledge deficit, especially in work pertinent to subgroups of women as defined by race, age, or sexual orientation (L. S. Brown, 1989b; Heyward, 1989a; J. B. Miller, 1991; Peck, 1986; Savin-Williams, 1989a).

**Current Status on Women's Psychological Development**

The traditional male development theories evolved over the years with a fairly traceable lineage. The newer theories, by and about women, have been developing only during the past three decades. Therefore, the indicators about who's research or theory influenced whom is less clear for those working on women's psychological development issues. Golden (1991) provided a schema for women's psychological development and defined four variants of feminist psychoanalytic theories and their major proponents: (1) object relations psychoanalytical feminism with contributions from Dorothy Dinnerstein, Nancy Chodorow, Jane Flax, Susie Orbach, Louise Eichenbaum, and Jessica Benjamin; (2) a feminist systems perspective from Harriet Lerner and others; (3) nonclinical developmental psychological perspective through the work of Miriam Johnson; and (4) the interpersonal school of psychoanalytic feminism developed collaboratively by J. B. Miller, Judith Jordan, Surrey, Irene Stiver, and Kaplan. This current literature review will focus on the theoretical contribution of this last group; the interpersonal school of psychoanalytic feminism. The contributions of other theorists and researchers will be identified in this review when their...
theoretical work is relevant to this perspective; such as Chodorow, Gilligan, and Mary Belenky and her colleagues.

Empirical support is evolving at the doctoral and postdoctoral level to clarify and strengthen conceptual efforts of women's psychological development (L. M. Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1989; Rosen, 1990). There is an emphasis to construct empirical tools for women and girls that can validate women's experience, such as Jack's (1991) work to measure self-silencing behaviors with an instrument that reflects attitudes of the female role imperative. Another instrument constructed from a woman's perspective is a measure of mutuality in couples, called the mutual psychological development questionnaire; this instrument provides insight into relational empathic experience (Genero, Miller, & Surrey, & Baldwin, 1990).

In the construction of thought about research on women and girls from a developmental perspective, the longitudinal work of Gilligan and her colleagues particularly commends the strength of using women's voice (self-expression and recasting of experience) as the power of reflecting women's values and developmental process (Belenky et al., 1986; L. S. Brown, 1989b; Gilligan, 1982; Jack, 1991; J. B. Miller, 1991). The qualitative work is validated, not impeded, by women's verbal hesitations and deferring language that peppers research with "you know" statements. It is from this language that the value of being-in-relation is identified and defines a psychological state of selflessness to self-fullness (Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1989; Jack, 1991). Therefore, from the current perspective and development of the self-in-relation model, clarifications are occurring both theoretically and through
research methods by scholars who continue to work specifically toward refining and enhancing an understanding of the relational approach of women's development.

Self-in-Relation Theory

As a result of Surrey's (1991) contribution, the Stone Center scholars initially called their work "self-in-relation: a theory of women's development" (p. 1). The hyphenation of this name was to reflect the relational component of an evolutorial process of development rather than a static self-construct (J. B. Miller, 1991; Surrey, 1991). These theorists noted that this title is still used, "despite our ambivalence about its aptness" (J. B. Miller, 1991, p. 4). Currently, a preferred reference to this theoretical work is a "relational approach to psychological understanding" (Jordan et al., 1991, p. vi). In this paper, this theoretical perspective of growth in connection will be referred to as relational theory, as suggested by Surrey (1994).

Constructs and Perspectives

This relational perspective addresses how the goal of psychological development is to increase one's ability to build and enlarge mutually enhancing relationships or connections with oneself, others, and the community. This approach also identifies how isolation, disconnections, and violations can inhibit growth and are ultimately defined as the root of psychopathology (J. B. Miller, 1988).

Many feminist scholars have faced the dilemma of explaining psychological separation of children from the mothering one, attempting
to parallel the male separation paradigm of traditional theories. Chodorow (1989) presented a feminist perspective of a psychoanalytic theory and stated that fundamentally, both sexes separate from mother. However, because mother is a woman, daughters separate differently than sons. Chodorow also stated that the social structure presents girls with a "negatively valued gender category" (p. 110) usually identifying conflicts of relative power. Lesbians might be presented with an additional negative value category by the social structure of the dominant culture amplifying the conflicts of relative power.

Relational theory suggests that most women value relational connectedness and often preserve compromised relationships with collusions of silence, often at a personal cost to themselves (Gilligan, 1982; Jack, 1991). The preponderance of care and effort to maintain relationships attempts to compensate for the negative gender category, a caretaking role demonstrating personal value. Heyward (1989b) clarified that Miller "does not suggest that we remain in bad relationships, but rather than our growth is not served by merely absenting ourselves from abuse of one form or another" (p. 14).

The Stone Center scholars have developed the relational approach to psychological understanding of women by a collaborative model, a learning style of "connected knowing" that is specifically described in Women's Ways of Knowing (Belenky et al., 1986). Using the collaborative model, these scholars have been able to take their critique of traditional development theories further than any of the other groups working on feminists' theoretical perspectives (Golden, 1991). J. B. Miller (1991) described several conceptual differences from traditional theory.
and emphasized the active interaction between self and others.

J. B. Miller (1991) first described a core component of early development as the capacity of infant and parent to attend "to each other's mental states and emotions" (p. 14). She identified that female infants are encouraged to develop their abilities to feel as others do (empathic learning) and that male infants are systematically diverted from empathy. Surrey (1991) emphasized mutually learned empathy as the core difference between relational theory's empathic focus and the ideas of Heinz Kohut (1977) and Donald W. Winnicott (1971) that suggested empathy was imparted from mother to child.

As a second difference between traditional psychological thought and relational theory, J. B. Miller (1991) described how mutual emotional interaction leads to caretaking and gets refined as a necessary process for growth producing connections. The emphasis on mutuality suggests that all continued relational growth "occurs within emotional connections, not separate from them" (J. B. Miller, 1991, p. 15). Gilligan (1989) also supported the value of caretaking and "identifies the vulnerability [for women] of caring for others within a culture of inequality" (J. B. Miller, 1991, p. 15).

Third, J. B. Miller (1991) described that for most women and girls, a definition of self is "based in feelings that she is a part of relationships and is taking care of those relationships" (p. 16). A personal perception of effectiveness and competence develops for women out of this care-taking capacity (Gilligan, 1982). In the relational model of women's development, the effectiveness of personal power and growth-in-connection are not defined as a competitive achievement.
J. B. Miller (1991) emphasized that women’s growth to a more articulated sense of herself (such as coming out) occurs "only because of her actions and feelings in the [valued] relationship" (p. 17). Therefore, in the relational context, empathic knowing is mutually influential, all relational components being effected.

Surrey (1991) described the four critical elements of relational theory as (1) an evolving real form, rather than intrapsychic form, of critical relationships throughout the life cycle; (2) the capacity to maintain relationships with respect to the developmental needs of each person; (3) an image of movement, the relationship structure would be intensified or distanced according to the individuals' needs within the relationship; and (4) exploration of the capacity to diversify and enlarge the relational repertoire of established relationships.

Psychological growth occurs in the relational process because both participants benefit as a result of a mutual experience. For example, in mother-daughter relationships the mutual growth experience allows the daughter to differentiate from her mother, while still knowing mother through their empathic connection. Jordan (1991) described differentiation as a developmental process that requires an increased level of complexity, choice, fluidity, and articulation within the context of human relationships. Using the analogy of mitotic cell division, where cells differentiate into systems within a whole, the psychological self differentiates from mother within the context of the relationship, not as separate from the relationship.

Jordan’s (1991) description of the process of differentiation and Surrey’s (1991) element of diversifying relational experience describes
the experiential phenomenon known as "coming out" to parents. Coming out to parents is a process of acknowledging a redefined self and disclosing this knowledge within a valued relationship for the purpose of preserving both the relationship and the redefined self (Kleinberg, 1986).

Kaplan (1991) clarified the meaning of relationship as "much more than is indicated in interpersonal or object-relations theories such as those of Harry Stack Sullivan (1953) or W. R. D. Fairbairn (1962)" (p. 208). Kaplan emphasized "relationship is a two-way interaction, . . . a mutual process wherein both parties feel enhanced and empowered through their empathic connection with the other" (p. 3). This definition of relationship is in contrast to the idea of an interpersonal exchange based on repetitive responses that are used to avoid anxiety (i.e., Sullivan, 1953) or the internalized relational template that replicates in future relationships of the object relations theory (i.e., Fairbairn, 1962). Therefore, an important tenet, of relational theory is the active role most women play in facilitating the process of enhancing relational connectedness.

Stiver's (1991) contribution addressed the persistent effort by women within the psychological communities to resolve the Oedipal struggle; such as, Karen Horney, Lampl-de-Groot, Chodorow, J. B. Miller, and Gilligan. In addition, Stiver reported that it is rare to see any of these women cited in the current psychoanalytic literature. Stiver's (1991) contribution to an alternative understanding of psychosexual development addressed a specific concern about...
how the inflexible application to female development of a concept derived from male development, without sufficient attention to the quality and nature of women's experiences, leads to a significant misunderstanding of women. While this would be bad enough, it also blinds us to seeing the unique nature of female development in the area of sexuality, affect and cognition. (p. 98)

In contrast to the penis envy-superego development model of psychosexual development, Stiver (1991) described an alternative view of the Oedipal explanation. Mothers and daughters have conflictual relationships that do not arise out of penis envy, castration anxiety, and rivalry, but rather from (a) observations of a mother's tolerance for being less valued than fathers, (b) betrayal by the mother of her preference for men, and (c) "fury at being replaced by her mother's relationships with others" (p. 119). Stiver (1991) reported how daughters turn from their mothers to their fathers; and yet, the relationship of a daughter and her mother "nevertheless remains powerful, enduring, and continuous through it all" (p. 102).

The relational theory is highly influenced by how the self, others, and society value the capacity to use empathy as a tool of mutual empowerment (Kaplan, 1991). J. B. Miller (1976) cautioned that these relational qualities are often devalued and repressed because the social, religious, educational, and political systems can have an oppressive influence on girls and women. Gilligan (1989) reported that girls learn to be silent in the face of authority before puberty, often creating an internal conflict between what they know and what they verbalize to others.
Paradigm Shifts

The relational model of psychology shifts the focus of development from the separation/autonomy paradigm to a relational/connection paradigm. In contrast to the traditional development theories, relational development states that there is no need for women to separate from their mother to experience autonomy, creativity, or assertion (Chodorow, 1989). Therefore, the relational dynamic established by the empathic knowledge encouraged between mother and daughter is a crucial component of this developmental model for women.

A second paradigm shift from the traditional development theories acknowledges the unique tendency of humans to maintain the interconnection between the generations throughout their life cycle. Surrey (1991) suggested that the continuity of relationship between generations necessitates mutual growth through commitment and responsiveness to change, especially the complex task of addressing the evolving needs of all involved persons who work to maintain a relational process of connection.

Relational authenticity is the third paradigm shift that differentiates this relational perspective from the traditional autonomy/separation models. The importance of feeling emotionally purposeful and valued within interpersonal relationships over time encourages the desire to feel "real" and known. However, Laura M. Brown (1991) cautioned about the risk of authentic disclosures, suggesting that risking the security of convention can cause a rupturing disconnection. Surrey (1991) stated that relationship-authenticity is often mutually desired "to be seen and..."
recognized for who one is and to see and understand the other with ongoing authenticity" (p. 9). These paradigm shifts are in opposition to the competitive dynamics of the traditional theories that often value being less known or less authentically open in order to keep an edge on the competition.

The longevity of commitment to others, such as in families, and potential for a mutual interactive dynamic, encourages the core self to seek relational authenticity because it is difficult to maintain a false self representation over time (Kurdek & Schmitt, 1987). The value and concept of authentic self isn’t unique to women’s relational theory. Jourard (1971) identified the value in authenticity and defined it as "being oneself, honestly, in one’s relation with his [or her] fellows" (p. 133). Anne Miller (1981) emphasized that children accommodate to their perceptions of parental needs or desires with an "as if" personality to be protected from negative feelings about the self. The object-relations perspective defined the imposed self as an idealized representation that defends the true self from the injury of rejection and abandonment (Kohut, 1977).

Women’s relational theory of psychological development provides a framework of how a woman’s sense of self is empowered and enhanced. This framework was inspired by the work of J. B. Miller who introduced *Towards a New Psychology of Women* in 1976. J. B. Miller stated that women’s sense of self-esteem is grounded in their ability to establish and maintain growth fostering relationships. Relational psychology elaborated on J. B. Miller’s premise and emphasized that women’s positive sense of self is supported by their capacity to engage
and maintain mutually caring, empathic, and empowering relationships (Jordan et al., 1991).

The relational premise, according to women's development, suggests that if the key component to a healthy perspective of self is obtained from a healthy connection with valued others, then a disconnection from valued others would result in a diminished sense of self (Kaplan, 1991). In support of relational disconnection, Kaplan stated:

Feelings of grave injury to the self through emotional loss, suppressing anger or turning it against the self are all said to contribute to the pervasive feelings of worthlessness and extreme inadequacy that comprise what we think of as low self-esteem. (p. 208)

The social climate in Western culture continues to devalue the importance of interpersonal interactions, often labeling relationships as dependent, co-dependent, enmeshed, smothering, merged, symbiotic, or undifferentiated (Jordan, 1991; J. B. Miller, 1991; Stiver, 1991). Therefore, the political climate, academia, and other social-economic influences might insidiously obstruct women's experience of growth fostering relationships, especially if power within these connections is distributed unequally (Belenky et al., 1986; Kaplan, 1991; Surrey, 1991).

Research about women's relational investments that investigated the opportunity to be known by others and honored the relational knowing of others, demonstrated a positive experience of mutually enhanced self-esteem (Gilligan, 1989; Jordan, 1991; Lyons, 1989; Peck, 1986; Schneider, 1989; Sholomskas & Axelrod, 1986; Surrey, 1991). Recognizing the value of the mother-daughter relationship, Diane Sholomskas and Rosalind Axelrod (1986) specifically reported that "the less hostility perceived to characterize the mother-daughter relationship, the greater
the women's self-esteem" (p. 178).

Surrey (1991) stated that the key factor about self-esteem for women is that the degree of self-worth is intrinsically involved in caring for other's well-being. Self-esteem measurement scales rarely addressed this perspective. Surrey (1994) identified that esteem for women seemed different than men's definition of self-worth that has traditionally been based more on mastery and independent task achievement.

Specifically related to women's psychological development model, the interrelatedness of women's role is not problematic or pathologic but signifies the difference between male and female development. Julie Mencher (1990) agreed with the relational theory perspective and claimed that interrelatedness is normative for lesbians. In Mencher's argument, there is no distinction between intimacy and merger; merger doesn't imply fusion, but is the essence of mutually empathic and empowering relationships. Chodorow (1989) cautioned that women's fluid ego boundaries were a liability and emphasized the importance of separation as a developmental task. Burch (1993) challenged that the relationship between two women is more intimate because of the flexibility of ego boundaries. Burch cited Mitchell's argument that lesbian relationships are devalued when emphasis is placed on autonomy and separation issues. Burch emphasized the "ability [of lesbians] to open the boundaries of the self . . . is far from pathological. Rather, it is seen as the basis for profound relationship and the necessary condition for psychological growth" (p. 96).
Theory and Research

Theory and research on the development of homosexual identities appeared in the 1970s after the emphasis on the etiology of homosexuality began to abate (Bell, Weinberg, & Hammersmith, 1981; Cass, 1979; DeCecco & Shively, 1984; Plummer, 1981; Hart & Richardson, 1981; Troiden, 1989). Historically, the trend had been to consider homosexuality a disease that needed its cause and cure discovered (Cass, 1984; Fassinger, 1991; Ponse, 1978; Richardson, 1981; Troiden, 1988). Nanette Gartrell (1984) described some of the atrocities of that historical trend and denigration that some lesbians suffered in their resistance to pathological labels by a homophobic dominant culture, that is, witch burnings, incarcerations, and "deprogramming" by gang rapes. The result of this milieu and the women's movement precipitated an exploration of theoretical perspectives and initiated research on gay/lesbian/bisexual identities (Bell et al., 1981; Larson, 1982; Ponse, 1978; Richardson, 1981; Troiden, 1989).

Golden (1987) addressed the complex task theorists and researchers encountered when describing the diversity and variability of homosexual identities as a concurrent integration of psychological, biological, and sociocultural processes. Many theorists present a theoretical orientation of homosexual identity development that is an all encompassing, ever-evolving process of self-definition (Bell et al., 1981; Cass, 1984; DeCecco & Shively, 1989; Golden, 1987; Larson, 1982; Minton & McDonald, 1984; Ponse, 1978; Hart & Richardson, 1981;
Sophie, 1986; Troiden, 1989). Due to the isolation of some of the empirical efforts and controversial terminology in some of the theoretical work, there has been a noticeable lack of coordination, collaboration, and focus (Cass, 1984).

In 1984, Cass addressed the professional and academic communities with three suggestions to coordinate the research and theoretical work in homosexual identity development. First, Cass addressed the need for a coordinated taxonomy and universal definitions of what is meant by "homosexual identity." Secondly, a strong suggestion was made for researchers to coordinate data and concepts with existing theoretical literature on identity and self-concept. Finally, a suggestion to avoid "inadvertent inclusions of theoretical assumptions that play a critical role in the conceptualization of homosexual identity" (Cass, 1984, p. 121).

To avoid further confusion, Cass (1984) suggested that any homosexual identity development formulation should (a) "offer a definition of what 'identity' means and of its relationship to self concept, (b) outline the structural components of identity, [and] (c) describe both internal and external factors influencing such changes" (p. 188). Coordination of recorded information and data about homosexual identities written in a common language would allow for more empirical correlation of like-concepts (Cass, 1984). For example, a noted difference among theorists was in the structure and factors influencing the use of the term identity. For some theorists, homosexual identity is diagnostic, while gay/lesbian identity is more inclusive of the whole emotional, political experience of being gay (Cass, 1979; Evans & Wall, 1991).
Cass (1984) tested her theoretical model with 103 gay men and 63 lesbians and reported that there are no defined markers between her Stage 1 and 2 (identity confusion, identity comparison), and Stage 5 and Stage 6 (identity pride, identity synthesis). However, Cass did report distinct differences between the early stages and the later stages. In conclusion, Cass reported that the formation of homosexual identities condensed into four stages from the original six stage model. These condensed stages of homosexual identity formation are known as (1) identity confusion, (2) identity tolerance, (3) identity acceptance, and (4) identity synthesis.

Troiden (1988) suggested there are two theoretical oversights to Cass’s (1984) model of sexual identity formation. Troiden defined these shortcomings as:

(1) the omission of . . . childhood genital, emotional and social experiences in creating alienation and perceptions of difference that contribute to initial feelings of identity confusion and (2) [a concern about] . . . the conceptualization [that] homosexual identity equates identity development with identity disclosure. (p. 40)

Currently, there are a number of theories and research conclusions about the development of homosexual identities providing descriptions from different theoretical perspectives (Cass, 1984; Coleman, 1982; Dank, 1971; deMonteflores & Schultz, 1978; Evans & Levine, 1990; Kleinberg, 1986; Minton & McDonald, 1984; Sophie, 1986; Troiden, 1989; Warren, 1974). These theories are diverse (a) in their origin of disciplines (sociology, psychology, psychosocial, and social work), (b) on the basis of conclusion (empirical/theoretical), (c) in the participants examined (clinical/nonclinical, men/women, or both), and (d) in the
terminology used to describe the sequence of change during the process of identity development.

Henry Minton and Gary McDonald (1984) identified two developmental tasks in the formation of homosexual identities. The first task was the formation of a homosexual self-image, followed by establishing a system for a homosexual identity management. The other stage models of homosexual identity formation vary in the categorical divisions of these two developmental tasks. There has been an effort coordinate theoretical thought and consolidate stage model theories in an effort to describe the commonalities. Although theoretical foundations vary, three theoretical perspectives of sexual identity development are selected as examples of integrated theory and research: Minton and McDonald (1984), Joan Sophie (1986), and Troiden (1989).

Minton and McDonald (1984) presented a compressed, tripartite developmental conception of the development of homosexual identities labeled as: (a) egocentric interpretation, (b) internalization of normative assumptions about homosexuality, and (c) gay identity achievement. Minton and McDonald described the integration of their model of homosexual identity formation in the terminology of Jurgen Habermas (1971) psychoanalytic stages of ego development that are titled (a) symbiotic, (b) egocentric, (c) sociocentric, and (d) universalistic. Within this context, Minton and McDonald prepared a comparison of Habermas's ego development model of sexual identity development with seven other theoretical stage models of homosexual identity formation.

Sophie (1986) researched the development of lesbian identities and compared the sequential stage theories of Cass (1979), Coleman
(1982), Raphael (1974), Spaulding (1982), Plummer (1975), and McDonald (1982) with a generalized four-stage description model. The generalized stages are described as (1) "awareness of homosexual feelings or of the relevance of homosexuality for oneself, or both"; (2) "testing and exploration, with no homosexual identity"; (3) "identity acceptance, in which the individual adopts a homosexual identity"; and (d) "identity integration" (Sophie, 1986, p. 42).

Sophie (1986) challenged that the other theories' perspectives on formation of homosexual identities represent a linear progression of stage development. Sophie noted that other step-locked stage theories only seemed to apply to lesbians in the early stages. Therefore, Sophie concluded that in the later stages of homosexual identity development women seemed to require greater flexibility than men. In Sophie's study, the increased flexibility was identified as the tendency for some lesbians to employ several options and vary the direction of their homosexual identity outcome; such as, (a) returning to a heterosexual identity if desired; (b) being politically out and active in community concerns about gay, lesbian, and bisexual rights; or perhaps, (c) choosing to actively conceal homosexual identity. Sophie reported that the outcome of lesbian sexual identify formation "was very sensitive to social/historical context" (p. 39).

Troiden (1989) synthesized previous research and theories about the formation of homosexual identities in order to provide a sociological description of sexual development (Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Plummer, 1975). The continuum of sexual behavior in humans can be described on a 7-point range from heterosexuality (0), bisexuality (3), toward
homosexuality (6) (Kinsey et al., 1953). From the social learning perspective, Troiden (1988) described an ideal-typical model that borrowed concepts from other theorists.

Troiden's (1989) model, like Sophie's (1986) model, is nonlinear and allows for fluctuations and stage overlaps. The heuristic value of Troiden's ideal-typical stage model is that the generalized patterns provide room for flexibility of identity options. The ideal-typical stages are labeled as (a) sensitization, borrowed from Plummer (1975); (b) identity confusion, from Cass (1984), Plummer (1975), and previous Troiden (1984); (c) identity assumption, incorporating Cass's stages of identity acceptance and tolerance and addressing coming out issues from an earlier Troiden (1984) model; and finally, (d) commitment from Cass's (1984) definition of identity disclosure. Troiden's (1989) work suggested that the differences in gender-role socialization explained the differences between gay men and lesbian identity formation processes.

Troiden (1988) reported that over the past two decades research on homosexuality has gone through major changes. Cass (1984) explained that research and theory has shifted from the perspective of homosexual identity as a medical-pathology model to a process within self-concept development. Troiden (1988) concurred with Cass and identified a current trend in the development of homosexual identities of looking at how lesbians and gay men perceive themselves differently and their experience in the context of contemporary Western society. Heidi Levine and Nancy Evans (1991) addressed the need to consider gender differences and expand the process to include bisexuality. The process of identity development doesn't occur in a vacuum, but rather with
valued connections that fosters positive self-concept (Levine & Evans, 1991).

**Lesbian Identity Development**

**Theory Specific to Lesbians**

Adrienne Rich (1980, 1986) stated that being a lesbian is a female experience. Groves and Ventura (1983) reported that lesbian women share more common characteristics with heterosexual women than they do with gay men. Before the work of women's psychological development theories, Gagnon and Simon (1973) observed that girls are socialized (taught) to be sexual in the context of relationships and that boys learn a presocial sexual pattern. Therefore, sexuality tends to be more contextual for most women and more objectified for most men (deMonteflores & Schultz, 1978; Evans & Levine, 1990; Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Kleinberg, 1986; Marmor, 1980; Troiden, 1988). Lennie Kleinberg (1986) identified the misconception that lesbian identity was primarily a sexual concept and clarified that for most lesbians, sexual commitment follows feelings of "emotional and spiritual connectedness and bonding" (p. 2).

As recent as 1986, Alan Watters reported that most research on homosexuality used male participants. Traditionally, a common methodological practice had been to gender-blend the findings from studies using only male subjects to include women (Cass, 1979; deMonteflores & Schultz, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Heyward, 1989a; Savin-Williams, 1989b). Recognitions in gender differences in the homosexual identity
development process advocated for specific studies about lesbians as a gender-homogeneous sample, not denying the commonalities and variances between lesbians and gay men (i.e., stigma, relational needs) but, to obtain information specific to lesbian experience (L. S. Brown, 1989b; Gilligan, 1982; Herek et al., 1991; Heyward, 1989a; Hunnisett, 1986; Jordan, 1991; Leavy & Adams, 1986; Savin-Williams, 1989b; Suppe, 1981; Vance & Green, 1984). Heyward (1989b) reinforced the need for additional lesbian research and suggested that "it needs to be lesbians who do the looking [research]. Lesbians need to study, honestly and critically, our lives-in-relation, in order to learn who we really are" (p. 11).

Many theorists report differences between lesbian and gay male development of homosexual identities; however, there are several common themes. There were theorists who noted that homosexual identity was "acknowledged" by lesbians at a later chronological age than "discovery" occurred for gay men (deMonteflores & Schultz, 1978; Evans & Levine, 1990; Golden, 1987; Henderson, 1984; Marmor, 1980; Troiden, 1988. The two beliefs identified in this theme were (1) difference in age of identity recognition for men and women and (2) cognitive process between "acknowledgment" by lesbians of sexual identity versus "discovery" of homosexual identity by gay men.

Henderson (1984) specifically identified that lesbians, differently from gay men, were typically less self-identified during the traditional college age for two reasons. First, women's cognitive process regarding sexual orientation is variable and more fluid; and secondly, women have a tendency to accommodate and comply with social norms and avoid
disappointing others, especially family and friends (Evans & Levine, 1990; Golden, 1987; Ponse, 1980).

The more fluid nature of identity development was noted as a unique pattern in lesbian identities (Cass, 1984; Evans & Levine, 1990; Golden, 1987; Sophie, 1986; Troiden, 1989). Burch (1993) stated that an underlying theme from her research suggested that lesbian identity "is fluid and shifts over time and within the context of environment" (p. 112). Nancy Evans and Heidi Levine (1990) cited Marmor's (1980) observations about lesbian variability in identity expression as (a) lesbians can often resemble nonlesbian women; therefore, "passing" is easier for women than for gay men and (b) the dominant culture tolerates long-term, intimate relationships between women with less criticism than it inflicts upon male couples or nonmarried, nonhomosexual persons.

The process of acknowledging a lesbian identity was more than simply engaging in a same-gender sexual experience (DeCecco, 1982; DeCecco & Shively, 1984; Kleinberg, 1986; Sang, 1989; Schneider, 1989; Vance & Green, 1984). Kleinberg (1986) described the process of coming out to self as cognitive and affective experiences that over time transform behaviors and attitudes about lesbian identity growth. For lesbians, it is the phenomenological recognition (over time) that emotional, relational, sexual, and/or political satisfaction and self-fulfillment is exchanged in relationships with other women (L. S. Brown, 1989a; Golden, 1987; Greenberg, 1976; Kleinberg, 1986; Levine & Evans, 1991; Ponse, 1980). Groves and Ventura (1983) suggested that the influence of the relational socialization process that was common for most women impacts the decision-making process for lesbians about
pursuing their identity development or resting in foreclosure.

Alan Bell and Martin Weinberg (1978) noted the high concentration of male dominated, male oriented research and began to compensate with reports of differences between men and women, especially how men and women cognitively process identity differently. For example, men tend to report experiencing sexual activity before they understand themselves as homosexual and women report recognition of their attractions before being sexually active (Bell & Weinberg, 1978). Therefore, in the early stage of sexual identity formation, Bell and Weinberg stated that using the lesbian label was delayed because the emphasis of self-definition was on the emotional/sexual attachment and that attachment was labeled as a unique and special relationship. Carmon deMonteflores and Stephen Schultz (1978) concurred with Bell and Weinberg (1978) and added that men seemed to avoid their homosexuality in early sexual identity process by denying their feelings and often blaming their sexual activity to events external to themselves, such as an alcohol-related behavior.

An elaboration on the tendencies for lesbians to establish contextual sexual relationships is described by Henderson (1984) as a choice to act on sexual orientation versus the discovery of orientation as frequently described by gay men. Fred Jandt and James Darsey (1981) addressed this concept and suggested that the "lesbian label (re-naming) reflects a personal consciousness, a chosen life-style and/or political perspective separate from any sexual act" (p. 37). Therefore, the gender differences in cognitive processing of sexual identity is that women approach their identity and resolution of their own homophobia

The political-philosophical perspective of being a lesbian was divided by Evans and Levine (1990) into two general viewpoints of (1) a traditionally relational lesbian who focuses on emotional and sexual attraction toward women (Kleinberg, 1986; Ponse, 1980) and (2) of the radical feminist who views choice of the lesbian lifestyle as a political statement (Faraday, 1981; S. G. Lewis, 1979). Heyward (1989a) described the feminist lesbian perspective with a citation about the Jewish roots of Rich (1982), Heyward quoted: "I had never been taught about resistance, only about passing" (p. 7). Persons who are marginalized by the dominant culture often choose to remain invisible in order to survive (Fassinger, 1991; Heyward, 1989a; Kleinberg, 1986; Rosen, 1990; Wall & Evans, 1991).

Sophie (1986) presented comparative work of the other sexual identity theories and cautioned that stage descriptions seem inadequate for lesbians because individual diversity of experience can be lost within the rigidity of linear process. Cass (1984) revised her initial theory due to the recognition that lesbians have a less fixed sexual orientation. Therefore, Cass (1984) suggested that lesbian identity development isn't a locked-step process as often described in male-based theoretical models of development. Lesbian identity development also depended on the cultural and societal influences operating on women and with their valued relationships (Burch, 1993; Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1989).
Kleinberg (1986) described an identity development process specific for lesbians in her work on coming home to self, going home to parents. Kleinberg addressed lesbian identity process from a similar perspective to deMonteflores and Schultz's (1978) work. For example, the description of critical factors for lesbians who are making a positive transition in the coming out process seemed highly influenced by deMonteflores and Schultz. Three of the critical factors include: (1) cognitive transformation, (2) "recasting the past," and (3) self-labeling (deMonteflores & Schultz, 1978; Kleinberg, 1986).

The first factor of Kleinberg's (1986) work described the transformation toward a lesbian identity as a cognitive movement from a negative sense of self to a positive sense of self. These women often describe their childhood as a "poor fit." They report few lesbian role models or safe places to address their attractions to other women, such as teachers, camp counselors, coaches, and peers causing an increase in self-doubt, shame, and loneliness (Kleinberg, 1986). Kleinberg concluded that through resolving (a) negative stereotypes and (b) internalized homophobia, women are able to feel validated by self and others and find comfort in this self-understanding and feeling of community (Kleinberg, 1986; Nemeyer, 1980; Ponse, 1978; Richardson, 1981).

The second critical factor in Kleinberg's (1986) work addressed how self-acceptance and self-understanding as a lesbian results from "recasting the past." During sexual identity formation, recasting the past is reported more often by women than men as a reconstruction of a personal history. In addition, recasting the past is a process of
re-owning feelings and connecting current feelings with memories of similar experiences that were minimized, denied, misunderstood, or feared (deMonteflores & Schultz, 1978; Kleinberg, 1986). Kleinberg (1986) explained that with this integrated understanding of self,

comes [an] acknowledgment of the many losses she [lesbians] will encounter. These include the loss of heterosexual privilege, the possible loss of jobs or homes and, most difficult of all, the potential loss of friends, family, and children. (p. 3)

Kleinberg’s (1986) third critical factor in identity transformation was described as self-labeling (deMonteflores & Schultz, 1978; Kleinberg, 1986; Levine & Evans, 1991). Labeling oneself as a lesbian is the result of integrating the past, present, and future into a functional realization that "her most fundamental emotional, spiritual and sexual needs are met and satisfied by other women" (Kleinberg, 1986, p. 3). However, this integration of self is a synthesis of courage and risk that results in the transition from a heterosexual to a lesbian identity.

**Process of Parental Acceptance**

deMonteflores & Schultz (1978) described the process of accepting a nontraditional identity as "restructuring one’s self concept, reorganizing one’s personal sense of history and altering one’s relations with others and society" (p. 60). Parents of lesbian and gay persons also go through a similar process of restructuring the concept of parental identity and reorganize their perspective of family history and adjust their relationships with others and society in order to move from a homophobic reaction to an affirmative response (Murphy, 1989).
The restructuring of personal history was described as recasting the past (deMonteflores & Schultz, 1978; Henderson, 1984; Kleinberg, 1986). Lou Ann Lewis (1984) stated that children can know they are "different," and report experiences of social dissonance as early as 4 or 5 years of age. Alan Bell, Martin Weinberg, and Sue Keifer Hammersmith (1981) concluded that lesbians (N = 229) were 62% more likely to remember cross-gender behavior in childhood than 10% of the heterosexual controls (N = 101) from their 1981 research.

Bell et al. (1981) reported a relationship between lesbian awareness of her childhood gender-role interests, behaviors, and attitudes and emerging homosexuality. Parents also have suspected, or had an intuition about their children's sexual orientation and often report they recognized the lack of stereotypic conformity during their development (Bell et al., 1981; Green, 1980; Rosen, 1990; Saghir & Robbin, 1973). Early support for these findings was provided by Saghir and Robbin (1973). They were among the first to do studies on lesbians as well as gay men. From their research, Saghir and Robbin reported that 70% of 56 lesbians reported having "tomboyish features" during childhood as opposed to 16% of 43 heterosexual subjects. Saghir and Robbin concluded that tomboyishness that is persistent into adolescence can be a predictor for adult homosexuality in females. Eli Coleman and Gary Remafedi (1989) stated that parents often diminished the meaning of these childhood behaviors by labeling them as "only a phase" in development.

Strommen (1989) described a five-stage process model of parental acceptance of their son or daughter's homosexuality. The first stage
is subliminal awareness, a sense of suspected knowledge about different sexual behavior or attitudes than the social norm. Second, parents are impacted by the information by an overt, or covert, disclosure. Third, parents begin the process of adjustment and tend to minimize the occurrence and the long-term meaning by claiming homosexual behavior as a developmental phase and engaging loyalty for this family secret. Fourth, parents who are not foreclosed at any of the previous stages will process through the adjustment of the information and enter a stage of resolution. Resolution includes the mourning of the loss of the heterosexual role and the safety of the conventions of society as well as owning sexual orientation options within their family system. Last, the parents begin the integration process and present evidence of this stage through changed behaviors and attitudes toward their gay son or lesbian daughter.

Each stage of parental adjustment to the homosexuality of their child can be met with conflict, struggle, foreclosure, and/or resolution that results in an active process of relational interaction that provides growth within the family system (Bell et al., 1981; Bernstein, 1990; Cramer & Roach, 1988; Griffin, Wirth, & Wirth, 1986; J. B. Miller, 1991; Murphy, 1989; Sophie, 1982; Troiden, 1988). In 1989, Strommen reported that there was very little data about the impact of homosexuality on the siblings within family systems. Procidano and Heller (1983) did examine willingness to disclose intimate information (not specifically sexual orientation issues) and perception of family support to sibling groups and found that negative perception of support led to withdrawal patterns of contact and personal disclosures. J. B.
Miller (1991) emphasized that conflict or struggle was not a sign of failure within the family system, but rather an opportunity for all members to have a growth producing experience.

Parents who engaged the stages of resolution process as described by Strommen (1989) reported integration behaviors and have come to recognize the power of internalized homophobia just as their gay son or lesbian daughter did in their own process of identity formation (Kleinberg, 1986; Savin-Williams, 1991; Sophie, 1982, 1987; Troiden, 1988; Wall & Evans, 1991). Barbara Bernstein (1990) identified five thematic issues that occurred for parents in the process of resolving their attitudes toward homosexuality. The five themes are listed in order of importance as (1) the fear of social stigma, (2) self-spouse blame, (3) the recognition of potential losses, (4) fears and concerns about health and safety of their son or daughter, and (5) the fear of losing their relationship with their child. Bernstein (1990) stated that social stigma was difficult to resolve from two perspectives; first, a fear of criticism about their parental adequacy and, secondly, the potential for public awareness and embarrassment for the deviance of their offspring.

Carolyn Griffin, Marilyn Wirth, and Arthur Wirth (1986), as parents of lesbian and gay persons, identified four common actions experienced when working through redefinition of their son or daughter's sexual orientation. First, some parents break contact with their child, casting them out, forbidding further contact with siblings. Second, parents can actively focus their energy toward changing their son or daughter through (a) psychotherapy, (b) religious conversion, and
(c) encouraging heterosexual relationships. Third, parents can assume an ostrich posture and ignore the issue, the message, and the reality of their son or daughter's sexual orientation. Last, parents can move toward accepting the reality of their son or daughter's sexual orientation, often from a position of "standing by my son or daughter."

In a similar pattern parents, of lesbians also experience a nonlinear developmental process of acceptance and management of sexual orientation. Parents and their daughters seem influenced and effected by individualistic concerns that are specific to the family unit, as well as the ramifications of societal/cultural biases on their relationship (L. S. Brown, 1989a; Groves & Ventura, 1983; Kleinberg, 1986; Plummer, 1975; Sophie, 1987; Troiden, 1989). Ritch Savin-Williams (1989a) described the reflective appraisal of parental acceptance and reported that a lesbian is most comfortable with her sexual orientation when she perceives acceptance of her parents. Rosenberg (1979) addressed self-esteem fluidity and stated:

Reduced to essentials, the principle holds that people [parents and lesbians], as social animals, are deeply influenced by the attitudes of others toward the self and that in the course of time, they come to view themselves as they are viewed by others. (p. 63)

Sherry Zitter (1987) presented issues that are specifically about mothers who are working through an acceptance process of their daughters' lesbian identity. Zitter reported, from a feminist perspective, the three simultaneous processes occurring for mothers of lesbians: (1) internal attention to self (what does it mean about me), (2) interpersonal attention to the relationship between mother and daughter (what does it mean about us), and (3) societal dynamics that influence the
process for both of them what will "they" think about you, me, and us). From a relational perspective, in addition to all the dilemmas, stages, and reactions that are previously cited in the process of accepting a daughter's sexual orientation, a mother of a lesbian also experiences a differentiation process from her lesbian daughter that she doesn’t experience with her heterosexual daughters (Groves & Ventura, 1983; Zitter, 1987). Margaret Schneider (1989) defined, for adolescent lesbians, that the confusing process of differentiating as a lesbian "means [being] different and simultaneously being the same" (p. 129).

The cultural task of being a mother is to teach her daughter how to be a woman (Sholomskas & Axelrod, 1986; Zitter, 1987). Mothers of lesbian daughters often expressed guilt, humiliation, and shame about their maternal-role failure when sexual orientation was disclosed. This is one example of Zitter's (1987) description of mothers' internalization of the disclosure statement to reflect "what about me" and was a response of the mothers' internalized homophobic reaction to information about sexual minority. Zitter also stated that when the differentiation dilemma established clearer boundaries between mother of a lesbian and her daughter, two realizations can occur: (1) There can be internalized recognition of the mother's own repressed lesbian feelings and (2) it can cause confusion about her current sexual feelings.

In the differentiation struggle, there is a component of jealousy that could occur for some adjusting mothers of lesbians toward their daughters' partner because the primary woman-to-woman relationship shifts from the mother to the partner (Murphy, 1989; Zitter, 1987). Mothers of lesbians also have compounded grief from the assumptions
that they may never have grandchildren. In some religious traditions, there is additional concern that unmarried daughters will require the "headship" of her father until assumed by another man. This religious tenet can also cause fears of parental failure and humiliation if daughters are not appropriately covered.

Within the relational context of the family, there can be a shift in the daughter's role from the good daughter to the bad daughter. The shift can occur in this direction because often lesbians over accommodate to care for their parental relationships out of fear of losing them (Kleinberg, 1986). However, the age of coming out is also a critical factor because the dynamics of parental relationships and dependence is not consistent throughout the life span (Savin-Williams, 1989b). Parents and their lesbian daughters struggle with self-acceptance and then disclosing sexual orientation information to selected others as they go through the process together of adjusting and redefining their relationship with each other.

Disclosure of Sexual Orientation

Overview of Disclosure of Sexual Orientation

The following section describes the meaning and process of disclosing sexual orientation to self and others. In this section, the term coming out is used to discuss the personal and internalized process used by lesbians to organize a different self-identity. The process of informing others about this internalized occurrence and the redefinition of self as related to sexual orientation, are referred to as disclosure. This section
is divided into three parts: (1) coming out to self, (2) disclosure of sexual orientation to parents, and (3) the effects of self-silencing or staying closeted. In each section, issues specific to lesbians are included.

There are variations and similarities of coming out schemas within homosexual identity development theories (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; deMonteflores & Schultz, 1978; Kleinberg, 1986; Plummer, 1981; Sophie, 1987; Troiden, 1988). All of these theories describe a progression of cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral events in the coming out process. Each progression began at the personal level within the self-concept. As the experience became a more organized self-perception of lesbian identity, it moved from a personal into a private level and shared with others of a similar sexual orientation. When self-assurance about sexual orientation was acknowledged internally and a support system established, disclosure continued to occur privately to valued heterosexual others (such as family) and then publicly to the community at large (Bell et al., 1981; Cass, 1979; Eichberg, 1990; Jandt & Darsey, 1981; Kleinberg, 1986; Nemeyer, 1980; Troiden, 1988).

**Coming Out to Self**

In all of the theories on homosexual identities, there is an agreement that coming out to self precedes disclosure to others. Definitions of coming out vary, but each definition provided a framework and ideology for understanding this disclosure process. More recently, Marla Kahn (1991) defined coming out, from a personal perspective and with gender inclusive language, as "part of a maturational process of
achieving a coherent sense of personal identity" (p. 48). However, Gagnon and Simon (1968) defined coming out from a personal perspective but with noninclusive language as a "point in time where there is self-recognition by the individual of his identity as a homosexual and the first major exploration of the homosexual community" (p. 356).

In a homophobic culture that is inundated with noninclusive language and subtle biases, it was difficult to find definitions that do not perpetuate these prejudices. Therefore, the literature about sexual identity formation was reviewed critically for language bias and assumptions of gender-blending. For example, deMonteflores and Schultz (1978) presented a definition of coming out that addressed "the developmental process through which gay people recognize their sexual preferences and choose to integrate this knowledge into their personal and social lives" (p. 59). Following the guidelines on bias as suggested by the American Psychological Association (1991), an analysis of the deMonteflores and Schultz definition of 1978 reveals certain tacit assumptions: (a) that the "developmental" process is agreed upon, (b) that "gay people" is a noninclusive term and can imply only gay men, (c) sexual preference (rather than sexual orientation) implies a degree of choice that is not supported in psychological literature at this time, (d) "choose to integrate" knowledge is not the same as "choice to act" on sexual orientation as described earlier as a part of the fluidity of the lesbian coming out process. In reaction, Sophie (1987), like Kahn (1991), presented a broad definition of coming out that stated that disclosure of sexual orientation begins when the person has integrated the internal and external reality of sexual identity.
Jandt and Darsey (1981) indicated that the phrase coming out historically suggested a rite of passage in many cultural settings. For example, it is a term used by African women when they literally come out from their hut to announce their womanhood after an internment of preparation for adult life. Similarly, in Western culture, there is a sanctioned example of the classic debutante coming out party. This social function signified a change in identity status from girlhood to womanhood, a young woman who is "available" for courting and marriage in some social-economic circles. In both of these examples, the transition of personal identity is first clarified to self, then family, significant others, and finally to the community at large. This is similar to the process described as the coming out experience for lesbians, except lesbians can't routinely anticipate acceptance of others and sanction of the dominant culture (L. Lewis, 1984; Sophie, 1987).

A lesbian's maturational process of coming out requires a cognitive reframing of self and a behavioral adjustment of living. The behavioral change and self-definitional process of re-identifying herself occurs through internal and external communication about her sexual orientation (Jandt & Darsey, 1981). However, the negative connotation of being a homosexual as prescribed by law and social custom in Western culture confuses the communication process of disclosing sexual orientation. In addition, because of homophobia and the inherent dangers in a sexual minority group, a secret subculture is created that remains hidden, invisible, and marginalizes gay and lesbian people (L. S. Brown, 1989b; Browning, 1987; Fassinger, 1991; Gartrell, 1984; Kleinberg, 1986; L. Lewis, 1984; Ponse, 1978; Strommen, 1989; Troiden,
1989; Wall & Evans, 1991). Therefore, part of a lesbian's maturational process of coming out is to resolve the internalized homophobic contamination in order to perceive and value her homosexual identity as an "essential" way of life (Kleinberg, 1986; Ponse, 1978; Troiden, 1988).

Ruth Fassinger (1991) cited Weinberg's (1972) definition of homophobia as "a term used to describe the fear and hatred that characterizes reactions to gay people by family, friends and society" (p. 159). The theories of homosexual identity formation all addressed the reconciliation of the dissonance between self-perceptions and the perceptions of others at the interpersonal level and in the community (L. S. Brown, 1989a; Kahn, 1991; Kleinberg, 1986; L. Lewis, 1984). Homophobia is both a prevailing cultural attitude and an internalized force that complicates the disclosure process (Fassinger, 1991). Therefore, resolving the issues of internalized and externalized homophobia is critical as an early stage of the coming out process (Gartrell, 1984; Kleinberg, 1986; Nemeyer, 1980; Troiden, 1988; Zitter, 1987).

John DeCecco (1982) defined four components in the personal conceptualization of sexual identity as an effort to establish definition and meaning of sexual orientation. These four components include: (1) clear definition of biological sex, meaning that chromosomal and morphological sex are usually congruent; (2) clarity about gender identity, meaning conviction of being male or female; (3) congruence of social sex role, meaning integration of physical appearance, personality, mannerisms, and interests; and (4) sexual orientation conceptualized as gay or lesbian with the understanding that physical sexual activity is not required.
Lesbians and gay men come out (authentically claim their identity to self) and disclose their sexual orientation to others because the culture maintains a strong heterosexual assumption. Therefore, lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals have the task of disclosing sexual orientation in order to be authentically known. The heterosexual assumption is not a passive phenomenon, it is an active religious, legal, ethical, medical, educational, and parental perspective and traditions of the culture are shaped to define the population as heterosexual (Kleinberg, 1986; Strommen, 1989; Wall & Washington, 1991).

Laura Nemeyer (1980) presented qualitative data on lesbians (N = 25) about the process of "coming out to the self" (p. 80). The responses were categorized into eight areas related to the coming out process (explanations are provided for those categories that are not self-explanatory): Nemeyer’s categories were: (1) knowing oneself; (2) the easy ones, referring to those who found their coming out process painless; (3) selective inattention, referring to those lesbians who engaged in same-sex sexual activity before naming themselves lesbian; (4) struggles; (5) language, terms, and fit, reflect the vernacular of the decade, that is, queer, bull dyke, fem, lezzy, butch, or dyke; (6) homophobia, (7) body image; and (8) uses in therapy.

Lesbians, as women, have been socialized in female roles and often have learned to negate their own experience in order to protect others (Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Jack, 1991). Kleinberg (1986) stated that the coming out process allowed lesbians to attend to themselves, as well as attending to others, in two ways: (1) it provides a rite of passage into adult sexual identity and (2) it is an
acknowledgment of her need to balance her differentiated, authentic self from nonlesbian others.

The experience of coping with the coming out process is different for adolescent lesbians than for adult lesbians (Burch, 1993). Among the differences, adolescents are in a stage of social identity development that requires peer support (Erikson, 1968). Adolescent lesbians have difficulty obtaining and identifying peer support due to (a) the invisibility of the subculture at the community level and (b) the lack of mentors and role models. However, there is evidence of increased reference to same-sex experience in the women's music communities as well as same-sex eroticism in the rock culture (Schneider, 1989). Therefore, a public bridge is buried deep within adolescent pop culture.

Lori Stern (1991) reported the devaluing self attitude that is often adopted by a resisting adolescent as "she protects herself by agreeing with those who belittle her while knowing they are wrong because they do not truly know her" (p. 109). Gilligan (1991) commented on the coming of age (for girls) in a culture where their embodied sexual desire is silenced. However, for lesbian adolescents, their embodied sexual desire is censored as well, but without the support of bathroom and recess conversations (Heyward, 1989a).

**Disclosing Sexual Orientation to Parents**

The decision by a lesbians, gay men, or bisexual persons to disclose their sexual orientation to their parents is a difficult life task (Cramer & Roach, 1988; Herold & Way, 1988; Kleinberg, 1986; Kus, 1980; McDonald, 1982; Savin-Williams, 1989a). Groves and Ventura
(1983) reported differences in coming out between men and women. For women, they reported that the early socialization into women's roles influenced lesbian disclosure patterns of her sexual orientation to her parents. Relational theory described women's socialization process as one of learning intuitive skill and the mastery of a mutually empathic relationship (Jordan, 1991; J. B. Miller, 1991; Surrey, 1991). The mutually empathic capacity that is systematically built into girls' relationships with their mothers, and later with other girls and women, influences how women take care of and are responsible for themselves and others simultaneously in a nonpathological manner (Gilligan, 1982; Jordan, 1987, 1991; Kleinberg, 1986; J. B. Miller, 1991; Stiver, 1991; Surrey, 1991).

Kleinberg (1986) described the fears and motivations lesbians identified as they prepared for disclosure of their sexual orientation to their parents. The fears of disclosing sexual orientation included (a) potentially hurting others, (b) disappointing parents, (c) rejection, (d) loss of love and approval, (e) being seen as sick, (f) causing family discord, (g) causing disequilibrium within essential relationships, and (h) being judged as selfish. The motivations for disclosure of sexual orientation as addressed by Kleinberg included: (a) the desire for parents (others) to authentically share their life experience; (b) to differentiate themselves from parents, especially mothers; and (c) as an act of love to be honest and inclusive.

In contrast, David Cramer and Arthur Roach (1988) reported the motivations for gay men to disclose sexual orientation to parents included: (a) to "hurt back," due to anger and frustration; (b) to inform;
and (c) to be known. Although Cramer and Roach wrote from a different frame of reference than Kleinberg (1986), there was a common theme of preparation, timing, and a conscious disclosure to parents about sexual orientation, gay men and lesbians both expressing hope to be authentically accepted (Cramer & Roach, 1988; Griffin et al., 1986; Kleinberg, 1986).

Therefore, the positive effects of disclosing sexual orientation to parents include the experience of (a) feeling authentically known; (b) releasing the secret experience; (c) being recognized as partnered, when applicable (especially around holiday celebrations); and (d) the hope of acceptance (Kleinberg, 1986; Murphy, 1989; Nemeyer, 1980; Savin-Williams, 1989b; Schneider, 1989). Kleinberg (1986) found that lesbians' acts of coming out to parents represented a "coming back into and preserving these relationships where previously secrecy had diluted intimacy" (p. 9).

The theoretical rationale for disclosure decisions about sexual orientation are identified as a part of the developmental process (Cass, 1984; Coleman, 1982; Dank, 1971; deMonteflores & Schultz, 1978; Plummer, 1981; Ponse, 1978; Savin-Williams, 1989b; Zitter, 1987). Beth Zemsky (1991) cited the American Psychological Association and reported "research has indicated that coming out is a lengthy developmental process, with an average of 16 years from first recognition to identity synthesis" (p. 197).

Ponse (1978) stated that disclosure to family and supportive others represents an effort (a) to increase personal commitment to a lesbian life-style choice, (b) to elicit support and acceptance for their
sexual orientation, and (c) to promote de-stigmatization of gay life style. "Adopting a non-traditional identity involves re-structuring one's self-concept, reorganizing one's personal sense of history and altering one's relations with others and society" (deMonteflores & Schultz, 1978, p. 60).

Heyward (1989a) proclaimed that coming out is not just a step toward personal authenticity; it is step "into a posture of social and political deviance and resistance" (p. 5). The feminist perspective asserts that out of political resistance lesbians recognize the process of relational empowerment. Therefore, coming out is not only a differentiation process, but also an implicit and explicit form of inviting others to adapt and change concurrently. Thereby, knowing the experience of growing more mutually empathic with selected others chosen for disclosure (L. S. Brown, 1989a; Golden, 1987; Heyward, 1989a; Kleinberg, 1986; J. B. Miller, 1991; Nemeyer, 1980; Surrey, 1991).

Ponse (1978), Coleman and Remafedi (1989), Troiden (1988), and Christine Browning (1987) are among those who emphasized that parental acceptance of sexual orientation, like disclosure of sexual identity, was a gradual nonlinear process. Both disclosure of sexual orientation and acceptance presented a direct and indirect focus on cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral adjustment. Parents require time for the process for cognitive understanding conversion while they can initially react with open denial, dismissing the legitimacy of the disclosure, or perhaps labeling it a passing developmental phase (Ponse, 1978).

Included in the parents' adjustment of having a lesbian daughter is a process of resolving personal fears and homophobia of persons (now
daughters) who are different. Unlike nongays or members of particular racial groups, "lesbians are in the usual position of belonging to a culture to which their parents do not belong" (Zitter, 1987, p. 185). A more refined part of the adjustment process requires the integration of the idea that their daughter's sexual orientation is only one part of who she is (Bell & Weinberg, 1978; Schneider, 1989; Troiden, 1988). The sexual identity development process is an ongoing and ever changing experience that also requires identity management for lesbians and their parents (Browning, Reynolds, and Dworkin, 1991).

An additional way that lesbian communication was compromised and adjustment hindered was emphasized in Jordan's (1987) work on empathic knowing, desire, and sexuality. Jordan stated that "a woman's voice often will not be heard, even when it is quite clear, if woman's reality is not congruent with societal values" (p. 3). Very often the disclosure of sexual orientation must take multiple forms and repeated efforts to have an individualized message heard by parents. Kahn (1991) identified additional factors that influence the disclosure process and addressed issues of intimidation. Kahn stated that women who have liberal attitudes, but report intimidation experiences in the family of origin, must fight considerable dissonance to express their difference.

Another factor influencing disclosure that is identified in Kahn's (1991) work emphasized "possible loss of the relationship outweighs the need for openness" (p. 68). Savin-Williams (1989a) reported the fear that the price for coming out and disclosing sexual orientation to parents resulted in (a) becoming half-members of family units, and
(b) generalized fear of loss of family through alienation, being ignored or distanced. Savin-Williams (1989a) reported that potential losses and interpersonal dissonance create discomfort and an elevated stress level.

Due to these risks cited for disclosure of sexual orientation, Bianca Cody Murphy's (1989) study of lesbian couples (N = 20) reported two findings: (1) Lesbians disclose sexual orientation to mothers one year earlier than to fathers, and (2) disclosure of sexual orientation occurred more frequently when living with a partner. Murphy reported from her research that disclosure seems to be thought through before it is engaged and occurs when living style has forced potential awareness by family members.

Disclosure styles are as diverse and varied as the person doing the disclosing of sexual orientation (DeCecco, 1982; Henderson, 1979; Jandt & Darsey, 1981). First, a direct style of disclosing a lesbian identity might be by verbal or written communication. The style of disclosing verbally or in written form also varied to include forms of apology, personal pride, as an educational format, openly confrontational, or a nonchalant presentation (DeCecco, 1982; Jandt & Darsey, 1981). Second, an indirect style of disclosure might include the non-verbal cues of dress, music, art, humor, political perspective, or literature that is incidentally, or purposefully, displayed for parental investigation (Ponse, 1978; Schneider, 1989; Sophie, 1987). Whatever the method or style of communication, disclosing sexual orientation to valued others, such as parents, is part of a homosexual heritage. Jandt and Darsey (1981) explained that because the general cultural assumption is that children are not lesbian or gay males, the task of disclosing sexual
orientation falls to those who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual. The "closet" is also part of the homosexual heritage. Heyward (1989a) stated: "A closet is a lonely, cramped place in which to hide . . . a place of disconnection and disembodiment in which, because we are out of touch with one another, we are out of touch with ourselves" (p. 4).

In Nemeyer's (1980) qualitative study about coming out, the women (N = 25) all "spoke to the researcher about their decisions and inner thoughts about telling their families" (p. 88). From the research data, Nemeyer stated a variety of considerations and ramifications of coming out, to include ethnic considerations, geographic location, some participants "sort of" told and that for some parents time and information were helpful, and for other families distance and tension increased. Nemeyer found that the decision-making criteria about disclosure of sexual orientation reflected the care, concern, and sense of responsibility role participants felt toward valued others (Gilligan, 1982; Kleinberg, 1986).

Wendy Rosen (1990) reported findings specific to the mother-daughter relationship in disclosure of sexual orientation. Among the findings in Rosen's work, lesbians who have disclosed their sexual orientation to their mothers is reported as an increased quality of interaction on a continuum from connected to disconnected, with a marked shift of moving toward connection. There was also evidence of relational resiliency in Rosen's accounts of disclosure of sexual orientation by lesbians with their mothers.

Browning (1987) identified the multidimensional, continuous process of adjustment to the coming out issues from a cognitive,
emotional, and behavioral perspective. First, there is an identity shift with resulting cognitive restructuring for the parent as well as the lesbian daughter. Second, parents' feelings that evolve range from denial to acceptance and are composed of an emotional focus that is nonlinear.

The behavioral adjustment for parents included active participation in the activities involved with the direct and indirect processes of identity development, such as (a) establishing a support system and (b) identifying their own opportunities to disclose this information to others.

In agreement with Browning (1987), Troiden (1989) identified the fusion of emotionality in the commitment stage of his theory. Troiden also identified the cognitive shift for parents of homosexual persons about the meaning of practicing same-sex relationships. In this stage, there is an expression of satisfaction with the life style change as the internal and external adjustments lead to a newly defined way of life.

Effects of Self-Silencing

The final section of this chapter is designed to present information about the (a) impact of cultural silencing of women and girls, (b) the clarification of self in a silenced or censored existence, and (c) specific impact of self-silencing on lesbians. These topic areas are selected to provide an increased understanding of how the dominant culture influences girls and women to be silent and to accommodate to others' needs even in the face of knowledge. In silenced women there is a diminished sense of personal existence and value. Finally, specific information is included about how lesbians experience invisibility from a silenced identity.
The Impact of Cultural Silencing of Women and Girls

The impact of the cultural influence on women's patterns of language for intimate and vulnerable thoughts has reference to common rhetoric. Historically, in Western culture women have taught their daughters to be less verbal than sons in hopes of arranging good marriages for compliant, well-mannered girls. This practice resulted in the development of enhanced empathic and intuitive skills, often referred to as "women's intuition" (Belenky et al., 1986; Chodorow, 1989; Gilligan, 1982; Jordan, 1991). In many non-Western cultures intuitive knowing is highly esteemed for males and females. For example, an African healer is highly esteemed for innate knowledge and intuition.

An historical rhetoric refers to "women's talk." Women's talk is stylistically hesitant and question-posing with focus on practical and interpersonal content that is typically devalued in Western culture by both men and women (Belenky et al., 1986). Furthermore, Belenky et al. described the historical and culturally ingrained idea that femininity and womanhood have a common theme that women, like children, should be seen and not heard.

Silencing of women is worldwide. In some cultures some women develop a language of their own. In the Hunan Province in central China there was a totally female language, "Nushi" (women's writing). Nushi was phonetically different than any standard Chinese and was invented by rural women for their secret use (Morgan, 1992). This language was so precious to those women that it was buried with them so they might be able to communicate in the land of the dead. Therefore, much of
Nushi has been lost, or protected from the dominant culture.

There are accounts of young girls creating a language of their own, written in metaphoric description with pictorial characters in order to satisfy personal perception and expression (Rogers, 1991). On a smaller scale than the Human women, personal language describes vulnerable and secret content of forbidden speech. The effect of cultural silencing resulted in self-expression pushed into the underground. Underground language has always been a powerful and an effective communication tool for the oppressed. For example, spirituals of the Underground Railroad prior to the emancipation of the slaves in the United States provided information, direction, and hope in secretive messages. Lesbian communities also have a private language and secret communities where a common language can be spoken and understood (Belenky et al., 1986; Morgan, 1992; Rogers, 1991).

The Clarification of Self in a Silenced Existence

Belenky et al. (1986) defined a sequence of growth from silence and a subjective knowing, toward connected, procedural, and then constructed knowing. Clarification of how persons are silenced and then how personal power is constructed from growth producing experiences blend this work with the tenets of relational theory (Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982, 1991; J. B. Miller, 1991). In the present study, the concept of silencing is clarified by Belenky et al.'s Women's Ways of Knowing.

Silence is described by Belenky et al. (1986) as feeling "deaf and dumb" and being isolated from others because the language needed to

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reflect common experiences is not practiced or known. Belenky et al. reported that silenced women couldn't describe themselves. They often referred to themselves in subjective terms of the geographic space around them, "describing only what they see gazing outward from their own eyes" (p. 32).

Relational theory stated that there was no self in isolation. Therefore, self-esteem is tied to the quality of relational attachments (Surrey, 1991). Gilligan (1982), Jack (1991), and Kaplan (1991) reported that guilt, shame, and depression are associated with feelings of failure to maintain connections and the severing of intimate ties. Jack (1991) stated that when a woman is taught to silence her own (self) needs and feelings for the good of the other, she had learned that her needs are less important, she had no "right" to them, and has established the foundation for diminished self-concept.

**The Specific Impact of Self-Silencing on Lesbians**

J. B. Miller (1991) referred to the loss of self as disconnection. Jordan (1991) and Kaplan (1991) stated that when women are limited or punished for their self-expression a loss of self is experienced. Jack (1991) found that depressed women describe a loss of self that is directly related to an experience of silencing within intimate relationships. Self-silencing passively describes an experience of fear, oppression, and/or loss. The accommodation to secret keeping and the moral imperative to be compliant with a real or perceived greater power has often been a survival technique that has made the person (woman or man) less heard, less visible, less functional (Gilligan, 1982; Jack, 1991). Women
who are oppressed in relationships with power differentials, shame and humiliation diminish women's sense of self (Gilligan, 1982; Jack, 1991; J. B. Miller, 1988, 1991; Stiver, 1984). Therefore, in women's experience when voice is silenced or censored, a diminished sense of self-esteem occurs for two reasons. The first reason, an intense feeling of worthlessness occurs and is due to a loss of trust in others (to remain connected); and second, there is a loss of trust in one's self (to maintain the connection).

Dana Jack and Diana Dill (1992) reported that "self-silencing contributes to a fall in self-esteem and feeling a 'loss of self' as a woman experiences over time the self-negation required to bring herself into line with schemas directing feminine social behavior" (p. 98). The lesbian development theories suggested that growth past the inner shame and homophobia occurred when authentic, verbal connections were established within lesbian communities, followed by acceptance from valued others (to include parents) (Cass, 1979; deMonteflores & Schultz, 1978; Kleinberg, 1986; Ponse, 1978; Troiden, 1989). Recent studies on the self-esteem of lesbians by Richard Leavy and Eve Adams (1986), Savin-Williams (1989a), Schneider (1989), and Sholomskas & Axelrod (1989) have shown that self-esteem depletes when confronted by real, or perceived, oppression from peers, family (especially mothers), or when feminist identity is less developed.

Schneider (1989) stated that self-esteem is a major issue, one of the first recognized by the lesbian adolescent, because the culture at large holds such a negative view of homosexuals. Male and female adolescents are often in relational and cultural conflict. Adolescents
who also question their sexuality and have concerns about homosexuality reported feelings of estrangement. Lesbian adolescents reported being silenced to their peers as well as their family.

Sholomskas and Axelrod (1986) studied how mother-daughter relationships influenced women's sense of self. The indications from the study showed that less hostilities perceived in the mother-daughter relationship the greater level of self-esteem for women. Similarly, Savin-Williams (1989a) found, from the research on parental influence on the self-esteem of gay and lesbian youth, that perceived acceptance is crucial for lesbians to feel comfortable with their sexual orientation. Leavy and Adams (1986) studied feminism as a correlate to self-esteem in lesbians and reported that the stronger the feminist identity the greater sense of positive self. Therefore, the relationship of a lesbian sense of self-value is influenced by external factors, such as, parents, mother-daughter dyad, and feminist identity.

A developmental task in lesbian identity development is the differentiation process from nongay parents, particularly mother (Burch, 1993; Heyward, 1989a; Kleinberg, 1986). However, Heyward (1989a) stated that for lesbians "growth as persons-in-relation is facilitated, not primarily by differentiating ourselves from one another, but by connecting. It is within our connectedness that we are able to recognize and value our differences" (p. 13). Jack (1991) cautioned that when there is a blurred distinction between the authentic and compliant selves, a woman's tendency to silence her feeling self in order to conform to the culture creates a greater relational disconnection causing feelings of self-betrayal.
Jack (1991) made an important distinction between the compliance and acquiescence of self-silencing and the manifestation of characterological dependency. The latter is described as a submissive form of self-degradation; the former can be subject to change through cognitive restructuring. Heyward (1989a) addressed the relationship for lesbians between relational empowerment and coming out as "staying with the confusion" in order to move (change) into a more authentic self. Heyward stated, "The truth is: nothing is as profoundly healing as real, mutual presence" (p. 9). Heyward's ideas parallel those of the relational theory.

Summary of the Literature Review

Relational theory evolved to include more diverse content about psychological development and in that diversity emphasized that relational well-being is central to women's experience (Jordan, 1991; Kaplan et al., 1991; J. B. Miller, 1991; Stiver, 1991; Surrey, 1991). Heyward (1989b) stated that there continues to be a knowledge deficit about the diversity of women's experience and needs, especially with regard to minority women. In the construction of the understandings of women's relational approach to psychological growth, the strength of listening to the self-expression of women's values, morals, and life experiences has been identified as valuable. The "relational approach to psychological understanding" (J. B. Miller, 1991, p. vi) of women, more commonly known as relational theory, provides insight into women's experiences and needs (Surrey, 1994).

The literature and research on women's development identifies a
strong tendency by women to compromise their relationships with others
due to a collusion of silence that reflects personal sacrifice and lack of
entitlement (Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Jack, 1991). From the
studies about girls and female adolescents, there is increased under­
standing that girls are systematically taught by cultural and social expec­
tations to silence themselves and defer to others (Gilligan, 1982; Stern,
"care as self-sacrifice" as a giving to others in the absence of mutuality.
The literature contains very little information about lesbians colluding in
silence and the cost of their selflessness in their relationship with par­
ents or peers (Heyward, 1989a; Kleinberg, 1986; Nemeyer, 1980;

The formation of homosexual identities addressed the diversity
and variability of psychological, biological, and sociocultural process
(Golden, 1991). The theories and research associated with the forma­
tion of homosexual identities reflected the movement out of the patho­
logical model into a process model that presented with a clear definition
of self-concept and is nonlinear (Cass, 1984; Troiden, 1988). The
stages of lesbian identities are reported throughout the literature, but can
be consolidated, as by Sophie (1986), into four stages from awareness
toward integration. All theories reflected this progression from self-aware­
ness toward integration with valued others (Cass, 1984; Coleman,
1982; deMonteflores & Schultz, 1978; Groves & Ventura, 1983;
Sophie, 1986; Troiden, 1989). However, there is very little information
and research addressing the relationship between supportive environ­
ments and disclosure of sexual orientation to parents. Lawrence Kurdek
and Patrick Schmitt (1987), Procidano and Heller (1983), and Savin-Williams (1989b) provided research that confirms the need for support to feel accepted by others and maintain an adequate sense of self (self-esteem).

The literature review also reflects the pattern that research about coming out has historically used gay men as subjects with findings generalized to lesbians. However, Groves and Ventura (1983) reported that lesbians have more in common with heterosexual women than with gay men. The recognition of homosexual gender differences has validated and encouraged homogeneous-gender samples for homosexual research (L. S. Brown, 1989b).

Coming out is an internal process of self-identification as a lesbian. Once this identity is acknowledged, there is a disclosure process to bring personal authenticity into relationships with valued others. Kurdek and Schmitt (1987) suggested that women are more likely than men to report that their parents are a part of their support network. Lesbians are more likely than gay men to desire to disclose their sexual orientation to parents to bring them into their support system.

Parent(s) of lesbians experience an adjustment process in the integration of information about the sexual orientation of their daughters into daily family life. However, there was little information in the literature that identified the influence of perceived parental support and disclosure of sexual orientation. The current study looked at perception of parental support and disclosure of sexual orientation from the perspectives of relational theory and sexual identity development process and the effect of oppression on sexual minority women.
CHAPTER III

METHOD

The method chapter is organized in four sections: (1) sample, (2) procedures, (3) instrumentation, and (4) data analysis. These sections will describe the specific directions used in the design of this research project.

Sample

A purposive sample (Patton, 1990) of lesbian participants was drawn from southwestern Michigan. One hundred eighty-two participants voluntarily responded to 200 invitations to participate in a research project. The sample was purposefully obtained by using a variety of recruitment methods in order to increase diversity of participant characteristics.

The recruitment of participants was directed toward adult lesbians (18-99 years of age) who would voluntarily agree to participate in the project at the invitation of a study distributor. A distributor agreed to recruit participants, administer the packet, and be a resource to the participant as needed. The distributors were lesbian-identified, or lesbian-affirmative, professionals who were asked to select participants from the lesbian community and not from their private practice. Distributors were also encouraged to invite participation from women who were diverse in socioeconomic status, race, education, and employment but who lived
within the geographic restrictions previously described.

In addition to the distributor selection process, posters (see Appendix N) were placed in women's (lesbian affirmative) bookstores within the geographic study area. A copy of the poster was printed in a local lesbian publication as a paid advertisement. Posters were also placed at several other lesbian affirmative locations within a large, Midwestern university. These recruitment procedures were included in the distribution process to increase diversity of respondents from this hidden population. Posters provided instructions for interested volunteer participants about how to contact a distributor in their area for participation materials.

Procedures

Ten volunteer lesbian identified distributors were selected from a list compiled from personal knowledge and by recommendation of trusted others. The final distributor selection was based on (a) professional qualification, (b) commitment to the 2-month recruitment/distribution/collection period, and (c) willingness to work within the guidelines in the distributor procedure (see Appendix I).

Distributors received both verbal instructions and a written procedure (see Appendix I) of the distribution and collection policies to maximize clarity and uniformity. The distributors had access to the primary researcher for unforeseen questions, additional materials, and clarifications at any time during the 2-month period of time designated for data collection, March 1, 1993, through April 30, 1993.
Fan-Out Procedure

A three-tier fan-out procedure was developed in order to enhance the distributor’s ability to reach a diverse sample within lesbian communities. The fan-out procedure provided an opportunity for each distributor to reach two tiers of participants. The first tier was the distributor level. The distributor could request those immediately known to them to participate (second tier) and then request the participants to refer others known to them (third tier) to contact the distributor if they wanted to participate.

As a result of this procedure, only the 10 lesbian identified distributors were known to the researcher. However, distributors who chose to participate in the study were also protected by the voluntary process. Therefore, distributor participation in the study remained anonymous to the researcher.

Questionnaire Tracking Method

Each distributor was provided the number of packets they requested. Two-hundred questionnaire packets were sequentially numbered between 500 and 699 and a form was included in the administration materials with the number of the packet dispensed recorded in sequential order. The specific packet number dispensed to each distributor were recorded on the master tracking record (see Appendix K). The master tracking record was designed to record four functions: (1) check out open-packets as dispensed, (2) check in sealed and unused open-packets, (3) account for a returned informed consent per packet, and
(4) to record the individual Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) (Beck et al., 1961).

Instrumentation

The packet used in the current study was distributed to volunteer participants by distributors according to the procedural guidelines. Participants received written instructions and written consent information within each packet. Each participant had access to the distributor if questions or concerns developed. The written instructions directed participants to answer the sections independently in one sitting. Participants were not monitored during their completion of the instruments.

The two instruments selected to measure the variables in the present research questions were the Perceived Social Support-Family Scale (PSS-Fa) (Procidano & Heller, 1983) and the Silencing the Self Scale (STSS) (Jack, 1991). These instruments were selected on the basis of their psychometric properties and the following criteria: (a) both instruments provided scales of continuous measure that could be dichotomized for statistical analysis; (b) studies were cited by the authors as having demonstrated ratings of high reliability and evidence of internal consistency (Jack & Dill, 1992; Procidano & Heller, 1984); (c) externally, both instruments had positive face value and content validity; and (d) both instruments provided a measure of best fit to the variables. In addition to these selection criteria, the STSS was also chosen for its gender specific properties, providing an additional focus and fit for woman oriented research.
Perceived Social Support-Family Scale

The Perceived Social Support-Family Scale (PSS-Fa) was developed by Procidano and Heller (1983). This scale "is designed to measure the extent to which an individual perceives that his/her needs for support, information and feedback are fulfilled" (Procidano & Heller, 1983, p. 2). The PSS was developed to measure support from two perspectives: family scale (PSS-Fa) and friend scale (PSS-Fr). Only the family scale (PSS-Fa) was relevant for this current research project and was selected to measure perceived parental support by study participants.

The PSS-Fa was selected based on the authors' findings of a relationship between perceived support and willingness to disclose information to family members. In comparison studies between family and friends, Procidano and Heller (1983) reported that "low PSS-Fa subjects showed marked verbal inhibition with sibs [siblings]" (p. 1). These comparison studies also supported the power of the longevity and durability of family systems, and indicated that families' opinions and perceived support was important in order to risk influencing disclosures.

Procidano and Heller (1983) reported that the PSS-Fa had "high test-retest reliability (r = .83 over a 1-month interval) and high internal consistency (Cronbach alpha = .90)" (p. 3). In addition, Procidano and Heller predicted that low perceived support might be a causal element of depression. However, they cautioned "that depressed individuals may simply perceive less support as part of their negative self-appraisal" (p. 13).
Silencing the Self Scale

The Silencing the Self Scale (STSS) (Jack, 1991) was developed as a measure of self-silencing behavior. This measurement inventory was designed with sensitivity to feminine cultural imperatives that teach women to sacrifice self for the good of the other. Jack and Dill (1992) reported that "cognitive schemas [learned from the dominant cultural/social models] about how to create and maintain safe, intimate relationships lead women to silence certain feelings, thoughts and actions" (p. 98). Therefore, women's willingness to disclose emotionally laden information to valued others seems influenced by the potential risk of injuring the valued relationship. The STSS was selected as the appropriate instrument to measure the potential for self-silencing behavior.

Jack and Dill (1992) reported that the STSS demonstrates significant correlation ($r = .62$) with the BDI. Validation studies were done on three different nonlesbian populations of women (Jack & Dill, 1992) and revealed strong reliability and internal consistency of the STSS (Cronbachs) ranging from .86 to .94. The test-retest reliability was also positive and ranged from $r = .88$ to $r = .93$. However, the validation studies suggested that the "data supporting the scale's construct validity are primarily correlational and do not allow for causal statements
regarding STSS variance with social context" (Jack & Dill, 1992, p. 104).

The STSS contains four subscales and Jack and Dill (1992) defined these as:

1. Externalize Self-Perception, described as "judging the self by external standards" (p. 98).

2. Care as Self-Sacrifice, meaning the securing of attachment figures and "putting the needs of others before the self" (p. 98).

3. Silencing the Self is described as an "inhibiting [of] one's self-expression and action to avoid conflict and possible loss of relationship" (p. 98).

4. The Divided Self clarified as "the experience of presenting an outer compliant self to live up to feminine role imperatives while the conflicted inner self grows angry and hostile" (p. 98).

The four STSS sub-scales represent theoretically distinct concepts and are internally consistent. Alphas (Cronbachs) on sub-scales are satisfactory, except for sub-scale 2 (care as self-sacrifice), which is marginal and should be used separately with caution. (Jack & Dill, 1992, p. 102)

The subscales were not used separately in this current study, and the data are presented in full scale values.

The instrument is useful in researching feminine gender issues that relate to a cultural/social context. Similar to the PSS-Fa, the STSS is significantly correlated with a more traditional instrument that measures depression, the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck et al., 1961).

Permission was granted by Dana Jack (see Appendix D), author of the STSS, for use of and reprinting of this instrument in the questionnaire and in the appendix of the dissertation (Jack, 1991).
The Beck Depression Inventory

By request of Dana Jack, the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) (Beck et al., 1961) was included in the data obtained for the current project to increase the data base of the correlation studies between the STSS (Jack & Dill, 1992) and the BDI. These data were sent to Dana Jack at the end of the study. There was no intent to use the BDI in the statistical analysis of the current research project. Permission for the inclusion of the BDI in this current project questionnaire was granted by Dr. Aaron Beck through the Center for Cognitive Studies (Appendix E) and The Psychological Corporation as the copyright holders of this instrument. Permission was not granted for inclusion of this instrument in the appendix of the dissertation (see Appendix E).

Questionnaire Booklet

In the following section, the design of the questionnaire and the administration process are described. Each booklet contained a participant instruction sheet, questions related to demographics, lesbian life experiences, and the previously described three instruments in an eight-page four-part format (see Appendix H). The sections of the questionnaire booklet were ordered: Part I, Demographics and lesbian life experiences; Part II, Perceived Social Support-Family Scale; Part III, Silencing the Self Scale; and Part IV, the Beck Depression Inventory.
Part I: Demographic Data and Lesbian Life Experiences

The first section of the questionnaire was designed to collect demographic data and life experience information about the sample of lesbian participants. In the demographic section of the questionnaire, questions were included for (a) race, (b) geographic residence, (c) age, (d) birth order, and (e) number of siblings in the family of origin.

The questionnaire included questions about the participants' educational experience as well as her parent(s) educational achievement. Questions also asked for current income level and current occupational classification according to the categories suggested by Saunders, Tupac, and MacCulloch's (1988) lesbian profile.

Lesbian life experiences were addressed in Part I of the questionnaire, as well as perceptions of parental beliefs, attitudes, and awareness of homosexuality. The participants were asked to identify the person(s) who provided their primary parenting function and refer consistently to this identity throughout the questionnaire when references were made to parent(s). In this section, there were forced-choice questions that inquired about alcoholic families; gay, lesbian, or bisexual parents; and attitudes that parents held about homosexual life-styles. There also was an inquiry about losses, separations, and disconnections. Finally, there was a two-part short answer question requesting a description of personal disclosure experience.

Data about disclosure of sexual orientation were obtained in three ways: (1) a direct question about the participants age of disclosure of sexual orientation to parent(s), (2) a perceptual question of parental
awareness of sexual orientation (specifically addressed) if parents had been, or not been, told about sexual orientation), and (3) a short answer question that allowed for a written explanation of the participant's disclosure experience.

Data about the perception of parental support were obtained from two items on the questionnaire. These items were (1) a forced-choice response of the participants' perception of their parent(s) attitude toward homosexuality as either supportive or homophobic, and (2) a continuous measure on the PSS-Fa scale indicating support or nonsupport (Procidano & Heller, 1983). In addition, the data obtained from the short answer question also provided insight into the participants' perceptions of their parent(s') support of a lesbian identity and decisions about disclosure.

Part II: PSS-Fa

The PSS-Fa is contained on one page. The items on the PSS-Fa address feelings, attitudes, and experiences that occur to most people in their relationship with their families. Each of the 20 declarative statements are answered as "yes," "no," or "don't know." For each item, the response indicative of perceived social support is scored as +1. Therefore, scores are on an interval measure from 0 to 20. Scores equal to, or greater than, 10 indicate perceived support, and scores less than 10 indicate poorer perceptions of support from parental systems.
Part III: STSS

The STSS was presented on two pages, with a space provided at the end of the instrument to insert written responses to the last item which provided an opportunity for personal explanation of self-assessment if it is answered with negative responses.

The STSS has 31 items, each answered along a Likert measure of "strongly disagree," "somewhat disagree," "neither agree or disagree," "somewhat agree," and "strongly agree." Specific items are inverted to control for acquiescence in the response set and, therefore, also inverted for scoring. Once appropriate scores were inverted, scoring is straightforward providing a continuous, interval measure from 31 to 155.

Part IV: BDI

The BDI was included in this study, for reasons previously described, in order to provide additional correlational data about the STSS and the BDI for Dana Jack's longitudinal studies. Jack (1991) stated that "researchers developing scales to measure cognitive correlates of depression have been more interested in universal distortions of thought processes and content than in gender-specific beliefs" (p. 228). In addition, Jack reported that the reason gender difference didn't appear in instruments like the BDI was that the instrument doesn't discriminate for beliefs about the self in intimate relationships.

Jack and Dill (1992) cited Baumgart and Oliver's uses of the BDI as a measure of depressive symptomology because this instrument (a) "measures severity of depression along a continuum from health to
illness, (b) it can be self-administered, and (c) it has been well validated in research with varied populations” (p. 101).

This instrument contains 21 items, each reflecting a condition of depression. These items are scored according to the selection of each item in an additive fashion. The scores provide a continuous measure ranging from 0 to 63. This instrument can be categorically defined in both psychiatric and nonpsychiatric populations as 1-9 nondepressed, 10-15 mildly depressed, 16-23 moderately depressed, and scores greater than 24+ as severely depressed which is the same criteria used to reconnect with distributors when participant scores were elevated.

Permission for the inclusion of the BDI was granted by Dr. Arron Beck through the Center for Cognitive Studies (see Appendix E) and the Psychological Corporation as the copyright holder of this instrument (see Appendix E). In accordance with the copyright restrictions, this instrument is not printed in the context of the dissertation or in the appendix.

Analysis of Data

Analysis of the data relevant to the first research question, was accomplished by using a chi-square statistic. It was predicted that one variable would be independent of the other. The expectation was that positive parental support would yield higher disclosures and more perceptions of supportive attitudes toward homosexuality, and that the expectation was that the chi-square values would be significant beyond the $p = .05$ level.

The second research question addressed the relationship between STSS and disclosure and perceptions of parental support. The
differences between the means were statistically tested by $t$ test for independent samples with a $p = .05$ confidence level selected. The expectation was that increased level of support resulted in less silencing. These data were computed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS-X) software, and with consultation from the university computing services at Western Michigan University.

A two-part, open-ended question was analyzed by qualitative methods. The responses to the question were prepared for analysis by transferring the written content on to cards color coded as disclosed versus nondisclosed. The transcription was checked by a nonparticipating reader. Each response set was then categorized into themes for each question. These thematic set categories were illustrated by excerpts from participant responses (see Appendix A).

Special Considerations

Participants received information on the participant instruction sheet (page 1 of the questionnaire) and on the informed consent form about how the results of this project would be available to them. A summarized statement of the research results was placed in the participating local bookstores and at the community announcement centers where posters advertising the study had been displayed. The research summary statement (Appendix O) was sent to the lesbian publication that advertised the current project for possible inclusion, at the editor's discretion, in a forthcoming issue. Finally, all distributors received copies of the research summary statement to distribute as needed to interested participants who requested them.
Participant Protection

There were no foreseen, inherent risks to the participants as a result of their voluntary participation in this paper and pencil questionnaire. Vance and Green (1984) suggested that confidentiality begins by addressing the right to decline participation without question or explanation. Confidentiality was guarded by the use of a nonidentifying informed consent form (see Appendix F). Participants were asked to date and mark the consent form indicating they read the form and agreed to the process described therein. Two informed consents were contained in each booklet, one copy to be returned with the questionnaire and one copy to be retained by the participant. If a packet was returned to the researcher without a marked consent form, it was discarded.

In order to provide assistance to persons who expressed concern to their distributors about their own coming out experience, the distributor materials packet had a referral form (Appendix M) to suggest supportive options to inquiring participants. The referral form included (a) counseling resources, (b) names of supportive individuals within respected communities who agreed to have their names listed, (c) lesbian affirmative and supportive groups (social and/or professional), and (d) relevant literature about cultural resources during the coming out process.

Special Procedure to Observe Copyright Restrictions

As previously explained, Dana Jack (1991) requested additional data for ongoing research on the correlation between the STSS and the
BDI as a condition of permission to use the STSS. Therefore, permission to use the BDI was obtained with several restrictions imposed by the copyright and ownership by The Psychological Corporation was included with this questionnaire. First, due to the sensitive data obtained by the BDI, it was necessary to secure an ethical procedure, within this project, to demonstrate professional responsibility for the BDI to the copyright holder and to the study participant.

Due to the copyright restrictions associated with the BDI from the copyright holder, The Psychological Corporation, the following provisions were made: (a) the questionnaire was distributed and collected interpersonally (not mailed to or from participants), and (b) the BDI was not reprinted in the context of the dissertation or appendix.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The results obtained in the study are presented in three sections within this chapter. The sections are subtitled as (1) a description of demographic characteristics of the participants which includes information about the participants’ reported lesbian life-experience, (2) the results for each hypothesis, and (3) a summary statement derived from a qualitative analysis of data provided by the open-ended questions.

Introduction

Volunteer lesbian participants for this study were recruited to maximize diversity according to the guidelines defined in the research design. Two hundred questionnaires were prepared for distribution to research participants. One hundred eighty-two (91%) of the distributed questionnaires were returned for analysis. Two (1.0%) of the questionnaires were disqualified from analysis as they were returned unmarked and sealed in the envelope provided. This procedure was included for persons who privately chose to reconsider their participation in this study after accepting a packet of materials. Therefore, 180 (90%) of the 200 questionnaires were usable and included in the analysis of the data.

The sample for this current study consisted of 180 volunteer lesbian-identified women ranging in age from 20 to 63 years, with a mean age of 35.6. Over one-third (37.8%) of the participants identified
themselves as first born with 14.7% as only children in their family of origin. All participants in this current study indicated they were living in the specified geographic location with 80.5% of the sample specifying urban residence. The sample selection was verified as a nonclinical population with a mean score of 9.56 categorized as nondepressed on the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck et al., 1961).

Following are a series of tables describing the demographic data.

As shown in Table 1, the majority (90.0%) of the sample were White/Euro American. The Asian American, Black/African American, and Latina/Hispanic participants comprised the remaining 10.0%. There were no American Indian responders included in the study, with one participant (0.6%) designating Pacific Islander.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/ethnicity</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina/Hispanic</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Euro American</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>90.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>179</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Other was designated Pacific Islander.
As indicated in Table 2, the annual income of the sample ranged from less than $9,999 to greater than $80,000. The economic category represented by the largest percentage (29.4%) of participants showed an income between $20,000 and $29,999 per year. However, in this sample, more than two-thirds (68.3%) of the participants reported an annual income level of less than $30,000.

### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income level</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-9,999</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000-19,999</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20,000-29,999</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30,000-39,999</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40,000-59,999</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60,000-79,999</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80,000+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>180</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated in Table 3, the educational level reported by the sample ranged from completion of grade school to earned doctorate. Of the 99.4% who reported an education level greater than grade school, (a) 23.5% graduated from high school, (b) 22.3% received associate
degrees, (c) 23.5% were awarded bachelor degrees, (d) 25.1% completed master degree programs, and (e) 0.5% earned doctoral degrees. Therefore, 71% of the sample reported scholastic achievement beyond high school. In response to the questionnaire, 78% of the sample also reported more educational experience than her parent(s).

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational level</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate degree</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>25.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 4, the largest parent category represented by the sample was birth parents (73.9%), followed by single mothers (11.1%). Therefore, more than 90% of the sample reported that they received parenting by their birth parent or parents.

Additional family descriptors obtained from the questionnaire indicated that 22.8% of the participants reported having divorced parents. The mean age during their parents' divorce was 10.97, standard
deviation of 7.54, with a range from 1 to 35 years. Of the participants in this sample, 40.6% identified their parents as alcoholic, slightly greater than a ratio of 1 to 3. Finally, 13 (7.2%) of the sample reported they have a gay, lesbian, or bisexual parent(s).

Table 4

Frequency and Percent of the Sample Distribution of the Person(s) Indicated as Providing the Primary Parenting Function

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary parent</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birth parent(s)</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>73.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoptive parent(s)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single mother</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single father</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father and stepmother</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother and stepfather</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster parent(s)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other family members</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same-sexed parent(s)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Other includes teacher, pastor/minister, girlfriend’s mother, and self.

In Table 5, the mean, standard deviation, and age range of the various life experiences of lesbian identity formation, were summarized.
Table 5
Means and Standard Deviation Summary of the Sample's Age-Related Lesbian Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age-related (years) experience</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age at the time of the study</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>35.60</td>
<td>9.54</td>
<td>20-63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of emancipation from family</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>19.09</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>12-32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of first awareness of being a lesbian</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>20.26</td>
<td>9.63</td>
<td>4-52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of first lesbian sexual experience</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>22.42</td>
<td>8.02</td>
<td>9-52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of first partnered lesbian relationship</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>24.09</td>
<td>7.71</td>
<td>9-46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of first disclosure to father</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>25.04</td>
<td>7.16</td>
<td>12-42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of first disclosure to mother</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>25.32</td>
<td>7.69</td>
<td>10-46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of first shared living relationship</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>25.56</td>
<td>7.53</td>
<td>15-52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The variations in n represent the variance in reported life-experience.

The sample indicated a progression, by mean chronological age, from emancipation from family (19.09), first awareness of being lesbian (20.26), toward first same-sex sexual experience (22.42), to first partnered lesbian-identified relationship (24.09). These values are all followed by disclosure to father (25.04), mother (25.32), and first shared living relationship (25.56).

Statistical Findings

In the present study two research questions, each with four hypotheses designed to statistically address the question, were
developed. Following are the research questions, hypotheses stated in null form, and statistical tables.

1. **What is the significance of the relationship, if any, between lesbians' perception of parental support and disclosure of sexual orientation?**

   A chi-square statistic was used to test the hypotheses of the first research question. A significance level of .05 was set to reject the null hypothesis.

   **H₀₁**: Lesbians' perceptions of parental support are independent of the reasons to, or to not, disclose sexual orientation to parent(s).

   As shown in Table 6, more than twice as many lesbians (67.8% vs 32.5%) reported perceptions of poor parental support versus perceptions of good parental support and indicated disclosure of sexual orientation to parent(s) had not occurred. Therefore, PSS-Fa scores were not independent of the decisions about disclosure of sexual orientation to parents ($\chi^2 = 8.96$, df = 1, $p = .0027$) and the null hypothesis was rejected.

   **H₀₂**: Lesbians' perceptions of their mother's attitude toward homosexuality are independent of their father's attitude toward homosexuality.

   As shown in Table 7, the chi-square test for independence was rejected because mother's and father's attitudes toward homosexuality are more likely to be similar than dissimilar ($\chi^2 = 40.3532$, df = 1, $p \leq .0000$. Seventy-seven percent (32.2% + 40.7%) of the sample reported a perception that both parents have similar attitudes toward homosexuality.
### Table 6

Chi-Square Relationship Calculated From Statements of Disclosure of Sexual Orientation to Parent(s) by Levels of Perceived Parental Support-Family Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived support</th>
<th>Disclosure (n = 84)</th>
<th>Nondisclosure (n = 77)</th>
<th>Row total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived good parental support (PSS-Fa ≥ 10)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>56.0</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived poor parental support (PSS-Fa &lt; 10)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Column total</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $\chi^2 = 8.96$, df = 1, $p = .0027$.

### Table 7

Cross Tabulation of Sample Perception of Mothers' Attitude Toward Homosexuality With Fathers' Attitude Toward Homosexuality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mothers</th>
<th>Homophobic</th>
<th>Supportive</th>
<th>Row total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homophobic</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Column total</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $\chi^2 = 40.3532$, df = 1, $p \leq .0000$. 

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$H_0^3$: Lesbians' perception of their mother's attitude toward homosexuality are independent of perceptions of parental support.

As indicated in Table 8, a chi-square statistic of $\chi^2 = 29.8762$, $df = 1$, $p \leq .0000$ was attained for those who reported perceptions of mothers as homophobic. Four times as many reported perceptions of poor parental support as those who reported positive perceptions of parental support. Conversely, for those who indicated perceptions of mothers having affirmative attitudes toward homosexuality, twice as many reported perceptions of positive support compared with those who reported perceptions of poor parental support. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 8
Relationship Between the Perception of Mothers' Attitude Toward Homosexuality by Sample Scores on the PSS-Fa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Homophobic</th>
<th>Supportive</th>
<th>Row total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor parental support</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good parental support</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Column totals</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $\chi^2 = 29.8762$, $df = 1$, $p \leq .0000$.  

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H₀⁴: Lesbians' perceptions of their father's attitude toward homosexuality are independent of perceptions of parental support.

As indicated in Table 9, a chi-square statistic of $\chi^2 = 6.0720$, $df = 1$, $p = .0137$ was computed. The sample population was evenly divided in the endorsements of perceptions of father's attitudes toward homosexuality (49.7% homophobic perceptions versus 50.3% affirmative perceptions). From this even split, those who reported perceptions of father's attitudes as homophobic twice as frequently endorsed perceptions of poor parental support versus positive perceptions of parental support. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 9
Relationship Between the Perception of Fathers’ Attitude Toward Homosexuality by Scores on the PSS-Fa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Fathers perceived</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Homophobic</td>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n %</td>
<td>n %</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor parental support</td>
<td>48 67.6</td>
<td>34 47.2</td>
<td>82 57.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good parental support</td>
<td>23 32.4</td>
<td>38 52.8</td>
<td>61 42.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Column totals</td>
<td>71 49.7</td>
<td>72 50.3</td>
<td>143 100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $\chi^2 = 6.0720$, $df = 1$, $p = .0137$. 

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The second research question of the present study was:

2. **What is the significance of the difference, if any, between lesbians’ perception of parental support and self-silencing behavior?**

An independent $t$ test was used to test the hypotheses supporting the second research question. A level of significance of $p > .05$ was set to reject the null hypotheses.

$H_{0a}$: There is no difference between lesbians' perceptions of parental support and scores of self-silencing behavior.

As indicated in Table 10, the null hypothesis was rejected as participants with perceptions of poor parental support scored significantly higher on the STSS than those with positive perceptions of parental support ($t = 2.67, df = 177, p = .01$).

**Table 10**

$t$-Test Summary Table Comparing STSS Mean Scores and PSS-Fa Scores Between Good Support and Poor Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of support</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Silencing the Self Scale</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Poor support</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>80.61</td>
<td>23.44</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Good support</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>71.69</td>
<td>20.45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$H_{0b}$: There is no difference between lesbians' self-silencing behavior and perceptions of mother's attitudes toward homosexuality as supportive or homophobic.
As indicated in Table 11, the null hypothesis was rejected as there were significantly lower mean scores on the STSS when compared with reported perceptions of mothers having a supportive attitude toward homosexuality versus homophobic attitude ($t = 4.07$, $df = 115$, $p \leq .00$).

**Table 11**

$t$-Test Summary Table Comparing STSS Mean Scores and Perception of Mother’s Attitude Toward Homosexuality as Homophobic Versus Supportive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Silencing the Self Scale</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Homophobic</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>84.52</td>
<td>24.28</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>4.07(^a)</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Supportive</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>69.93</td>
<td>18.81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)Separate variance estimate was used.

$H_0$: There is no difference between lesbians self-silencing behavior and perceptions of father's attitudes toward homosexuality as affirmative or homophobic.

As indicated in Table 12, the null hypothesis was retained as there were no statistical differences found between the mean scores on the STSS between perceptions of fathers with supportive attitudes versus homophobic attitudes toward homosexuality ($t = 1.51$, $df = 141$, $p = .13$).
Table 12

$t$-Test Summary Table Comparing STSS Scores and the Perception of Father’s Attitude Toward Homosexuality as Homophobic Versus Supportive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Silencing the Self Scale</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Homophobic</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>79.92</td>
<td>22.86</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Supportive</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>74.15</td>
<td>22.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$H_0^{d}$: There are no differences between lesbians' self-silencing behavior and reported decisions to disclose versus decisions to not disclose sexual orientation to parent(s).

As indicated in Table 13, the null hypothesis was retained as the $t$ test statistic comparing the mean scores on the STSS between decisions to disclose sexual orientation to parent(s) versus decisions to not disclose sexual orientation to parent(s) showed no significant difference ($t = -1.55$, df = 159, $p = .13$).

Summary Statement of the Qualitative Analysis

The third section of this chapter addressed the summary from the qualitative analysis of the open-ended question in the questionnaire with narrative examples provided in Appendix A. The open-ended, two-part question asked for the reason it was important for the participants to disclose, or to not disclose, sexual orientation to parent(s). The range of responses to each choice in the question was divided into two sections:
Table 13

$t$-Test Summary Table Comparing the Mean STSS Scores and the Sample's Admission of Having Disclosed Versus Having Not Disclosed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample's admission</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Silencing the Self Scale</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Disclosed</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>72.90</td>
<td>21.57</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>-1.55</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Not disclosed</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>78.37</td>
<td>23.21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) self-oriented responses, and (2) other-oriented responses. The self- and other-oriented responses yielded thematic sets for both parts of the question.

Following the recommendations and reporting styles of the American Psychological Association (1991), Rudestad and Newton (1993), and Strauss and Corbin (1990), each explanatory response to the question was reviewed and categorically divided into thematic sets. Each thematic set was identified, described, and titled; several verbatim illustrations were selected to accompany each thematic set and are located in Appendix A. This method of defining the content of written responses to the question was chosen for this present study because it provided categorical clarity for reporting.

The first part of the written response question asked: "If you have come out to your parent(s), please indicate the reason that it was important for you to disclose your sexual orientation to your parent(s)?"

The responses to this question was categorized into two sets that
focused on (a) a self-oriented disclosure or (b) an other-oriented disclosure. The self-oriented disclosure identified responses that addressed reasons for disclosure from a personal need or interest. The other-oriented disclosure category identified responses that addressed reasons for disclosure from the perspective of the other's well-being or other's best interest.

**Self-Oriented Disclosure**

Both of the general categories were further divided into descriptions of several thematic sets and titled. The four emergent themes from the range of responses in the self-oriented category reflect the motivation of some lesbians to disclose sexual orientation to parent(s). These themes were labeled (a) a moral/ethical code, (b) an end to the hiding, (c) authenticity, and (d) self-acceptance.

Identification of personal morals was a frequent theme that specifically addressed a need to be honest and not lie about a lesbian-identified life. Statements selected for this set addressed personal ethics and evidence of a moral imperative. The set labeled *end the hiding* was different than the *moral imperative* set in that hiding was laborious, a task of tedious vigilance. Therefore, the task related to living in deceit was personally unacceptable and addressed a need to end the hiding rather than the personally unacceptable position of being deceitful in the set labeled ethical/moral.

The third response set addressed a desire to be authenticity known by parents as a lesbian identified woman. The statements in the *authenticity* set specifically addressed a personal need for the
differentiation between self and other (mother) to be acknowledged. However, the need for authentic recognition was different from the responses in the last set labeled self-acceptance. A major difference was that statements in the authenticity set asked for parent(s) to know and in the acceptance set asked for parent(s) to accept. There was no assumption that being acknowledged as a lesbian in the authenticity set was followed by parental acceptance.

Other-Oriented Disclosure

The range of reasons noted in the responses of those who described an other-oriented perspective for their disclosure of sexual orientation to their parent(s) included (a) partner acceptance, (b) they asked, so I told them, and (c) having beenouted to parents by others. A need to have a partner accepted as a family member motivated some disclosures of sexual orientation, especially identified with holiday celebrations. The second set, they asked, so I told them was different than responses addressing moral imperatives or wanting an end to the hiding. There was no implication, in the other-oriented perspective, that disclosure would have occurred if parent(s) hadn’t asked.

Finally, the third theme identified in this set addressed reasons for disclosure based on information that parent(s) have been informed by others. Although most responses addressing this issue had a reactionary quality, reasons for dialogue about sexual orientation to parent(s) was motivated by the action of another.

The second part of the written response question asked: "If you have not come out to your parent(s), please indicate the reason that it is
important for you TO NOT DISCLOSE your sexual orientation to your parent(s)?"

The responses from this question were also placed in general categories of self-oriented reasons and other-oriented reasons to not disclose sexual orientation to parent(s). These category definitions are the same as in the first part of this question. The self-oriented nondisclosure identified responses that addressed reasons to not disclose from a personal need or interest. The other-oriented nondisclosure category identified responses that addressed reasons to not disclose from the perspective of the other person's well-being or best interest.

Self-Oriented Nondisclosure

Self-oriented statements that reflected the participants' rationale for not disclosing their sexual orientation to their parent(s) were further divided into six thematic sets. These sets were labeled (a) fear of being disowned, (b) to maintain positive family connections, (c) disclosure is not necessary, (d) foreclosure in sexual identity development process, (e) fear of personal safety, and (f) diminished parental relationship.

The thematic set labeled fear of being disowned were items that expressed fear of loss and anticipated grief in the rupture of parental relationships. The fear of loss set was different than maintaining positive family connections set by the evidence that maintaining positive connections was a task of personal compliance and responsibility, not associated with loss and grief. The thematic set that was labeled disclosure not necessary described situations where a personal need to share information about sexual orientation was not a problem for the
participant and indicated a high level of personal tolerance for the dissonance. The not necessary thematic set was different from foreclosure in sexual identity development which specifically identified less need to disclose due to fluidity of identity along stage or trajectory models by returning safely to "out to self and not out to others."

The fear of personal safety set were collections of personal concerns that homophobic reactions might be physically, emotionally, or sexually unsafe. Finally, the thematic set collected under the label diminished parental relationship suggested no personal need to reopen a relationship that seems empty and lost.

Other-Oriented Nondisclosure

The other-oriented explanations of decisions to NOT disclose sexual orientation to parent(s) identified concerns, care, and responsibility for their parent(s') situations or partner's preferences. Six thematic sets were identified in this general category, as well. These sets are labeled: (1) perceived homophobia; (2) parental aging and/or illness; (3) fear of hurting parents by inflicting confusion, embarrassment, or blame; (4) religious prohibition; (5) other external prohibitions; and (6) they haven't asked and I haven't told.

Issues addressed in the written responses that identified perceptions of homophobic attitudes in parent(s) that were associated with nondisclosure of sexual orientation also indicated not wanting to impose this information on parent(s). The fear of hurting parent(s) set was distinguished from perceived homophobia because in the fear set there were no concerns about parental attitude toward homosexuality, only
concern that disclosure information might cause embarrassment, internalization of blame by parents, and confusion.

Withholding disclosure of sexual orientation to aging or ill parent(s) was identified as a thematic set because it was reported as unkind, uncaring, or irresponsible to disclose information without time or energy to process it. This category was different than fear of hurting because if not for the limitation of time and energy disclosure was desired and might have occurred.

Religious prohibition was represented two ways, (1) out of respect for the beliefs and values of parents, and (2) out of fear of how these values might be imposed on them, to include exorcisms or hospitalization to cure the pathology. Religious prohibition was distinguished from other prohibitions due to the manifestation of power that religious convictions can inflict versus the more temporary power others might impose on silencing disclosure of sexual orientation. The other prohibitions set specifically described situations where others had influence over the choice or opportunity to disclose sexual orientation to parents, such as partners request, legal concerns (such as child custody), or occupational restrictions.

The final thematic set was labeled they haven't asked, and I haven't told them because it leaves the decision to disclose to the curiosity of the parent(s) and not generated out of lesbian sexual identity development. This set was different than not necessary to tell set in the self-oriented category because of the emphasis that the disclosure is determined by the parent not the self.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The relational approach (J. B. Miller, 1991) to the psychological understanding of women was chosen as the theoretical foundation for this current research project for two reasons: (1) the desired population for study were lesbians and lesbians are women, and (2) J. B. Miller's theory stated that making and maintaining relationships was central to the well-being of most women. The lesbian identity developmental theory identified disclosure of sexual orientation to parents as a most difficult task (Cass, 1984; Cramer & Roach, 1988; Golden, 1991; Kleinberg, 1986; Kus, 1980; Savin-Williams, 1989a). This task is different for lesbians than gay men because women often (a) self-silence (Jack, 1991) and (b) self-sacrifice (Gilligan, 1982) personal needs for the sake of maintaining the status quo in valued relationships.

Lesbians who value connections with parent(s) struggle against two potential losses when disclosing sexual orientation to them: (1) being disowned, dismissed, and denied if sexual orientation is disclosed to parent(s) and not accepted or acknowledged; and (2) being misunderstood or inauthentically known if sexual orientation is not disclosed to parent(s) (Borhek, 1993). In the current study, it was proposed that there would be a relationship between lesbians' perception of parental support and disclosure of sexual orientation.
In addition to the task of managing ongoing psychological development, such as defined in relational theory, lesbians concurrently manage sexual identity development that continually differentiates them from their relationship with the dominant culture, specifically parents and especially mothers. The differentiation process causes a change in relational definition with parents that is not experienced by nonlesbian women.

From this theoretical understanding, two questions were formulated for the current study:

1. **What is the significance of the relationship, if any, between lesbians' perceptions of parental support and disclosure of sexual orientation?**

2. **What is the significance of the difference, if any, between lesbians' perceptions of parental support and self-silencing behavior?**

The variables in this present study were: (a) disclosure of sexual orientation to parents, (b) perceived parental support, and (c) self-silencing. Self-silencing was added to clarify the feminine cultural imperative to self-sacrifice in the face of conflict (Gilligan, 1982; Jack, 1991). Answers to the research questions may increase the understanding about the two-prong loss dilemma for lesbians: (1) the potential loss of family connection if disclosure is made and not accepted and (2) the loss of family connection if disclosure is not made and authenticity sacrificed.

In the present study, 180 adult lesbian-identified participants from southwestern Michigan area volunteered to complete a four-part confidential questionnaire that provided demographic data and lesbian
life-experience information. In addition, the questionnaire included three continuous measure instruments: (1) Perceived Social Support-Family Scale (PSS-Fa) (Procidano & Heller, 1983), (2) Silencing the Self Scale (STSS) (Jack, 1991), and (3) the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) (Beck et al., 1961).

The data were analyzed by (a) chi-square statistic and (b) t-test comparisons of the differences in sample means. A summary of findings included: (a) twice as many participants who reported perceptions of poor parental support indicated decisions to not disclose their sexual orientation to parent(s); and (b) of participants who reported perceptions of mother's attitude toward homosexuality as homophobic, four times as many also reported perceptions of poor parental support. However, of perceived attitudes of fathers as homophobic, only twice as many also endorsed perceptions of poor parental support. It was also found that mothers and fathers held similar attitudes toward homosexuality. Findings related to self-silencing behavior included: greater silencing behavior when (a) perceptions of parental support were negative rather than positive, and (b) mothers were perceived as homophobic rather than affirmative toward homosexuality. There was no significant relationship between self-silencing behavior when (a) fathers were perceived as homophobic and (b) decisions about disclosure of sexual orientation.

In addition to the research questions, a short answer response about the reason for disclosing, or not disclosing, sexual orientation to parents was obtained. The questions provided qualitative data from lesbian life-experiences, that is, explanations in the participants' own words about how or why decisions for disclosure were determined.
The open-ended questions were included in the questionnaire to provide an opportunity for lesbians to tell their coming out experiences because this personal story often is silenced. The written responses were helpful in understanding the quantitative analyses. The contribution of lesbian experiences of their relational dilemmas suggested a shift from the self-sacrificing care and concern of the parental relationship (other-oriented responses) to a responsible care and concern of the self, as legitimate and whole (self-oriented responses). This is consistent with Gilligan's (1982) statement that "women's insistence on care is at first self-critical rather than self-protective" (p. 100).

Discussion

The sample study revealed an adult population of predominantly white lesbians, who have been educated beyond high school and were economically independent. An effort to provide diversity for sample recruitment was attempted in order to generalize the findings from this study about lesbians to other lesbians in the southwest Michigan area. However, as shown by the demographic data of this study, the sample was not racially diverse. Therefore, the data obtained from the present study is limited and can only be generalized to others who are similar to the sample. However, this information doesn't preclude that to be lesbian in southwest Michigan is to be a white and Euro American. It does caution about generalizing these findings to African-, Asian-, Latina-, and Native-American women. Due to the invisibility of the culture, there are no regional statistics of actual lesbian demographics. However, the present study was demographically similar to other studies of lesbians in
North America.

The findings about family structure provided insight into the life experiences of lesbians in southwest Michigan. Seventy-three percent of the participants indicated that they received primary parenting from intact family systems. This might account for the reported perception that mothers and fathers have a similar attitude toward homosexuality. Eighty percent of the families were urban-based, and more than one third of the sample were first born in the family system. First born are often speculated to be more independent and self-determined, a characteristic that might indicate being more psychologically prepared for the ramification of parental reaction to disclosure of sexual orientation.

The findings of age-related lesbian life-experiences demonstrates a linear progression of chronological occurrences that is consistent with the theoretical stages of lesbian identity development (Cass, 1979; Sophie, 1986; Troiden 1988). The mean age of first awareness of being lesbian (M age = 20.26) reflects adult cognitive processing, rather than an adolescent sexual identity. This finding supports some of the work about lesbian adolescent processes and their need to resist homosexual feelings, forcing sexual identity underground, and maintaining invisibility to peers and family (Savin-Williams, 1989a; Zemsky, 1990). Lesbian adolescents lack mentors and have limited access to supportive networks and communities that provide assistance and guidance in the formation of their lesbian identity.

Emancipation from the family of origin is indicated by the sample as the initial life task (M age = 19.0). Most parents don’t get included in the identity process again until a living environment is shared with a
lesbian partner (M age = 25.56). The freedom to explore same-sex interest and curiosities occurs most often when emancipation from the family of origin is complete and entering into early stage of identity confusion (Cass, 1984). Sharing living space with a lesbian partner phenomenologically looks different to parent(s) than living with a same-sex roommate. Therefore, the disclosure of sexual orientation to parent(s) (mothers M = 25.32; fathers M = 25.04) in this sample occurred when lesbian life-experience was in a stage of identity accept­ance (Cass, 1984).

Based on the findings of the current study, the task of disclosing intimate information (lesbian identification) to parent(s) proceeds most often when there is a perception of positive support. This finding is consistent with the results of the Perceived Social Support-Family Scale (Procidano & Heller, 1984) for disclosing intimate information in sibling groups when positive support was perceived. Therefore, the implication and support for educating parent groups of younger prepubescent children about alternative sexual identity development might provide a less value-laden milieu for future lesbian women and gay men to disclose their sexual orientation. A second implication from this present study suggests that as lesbians work through the issues of sexual identity formation they may require increased information of how to foster growth producing, mutual relationships with parent(s). For example, mentoring programs or peer educators may make the transitions and disclosures less disruptive to parental relationships and family systems by providing supportive information and helpful suggestions.
In order to more fully understand the dynamics of parental support, variables were measured from two perspectives: (1) personal support, as well as, (2) general support for homosexuality. Regardless of the family constellation, respondents described most parents as having a similar attitude about homosexuality. For the purpose of this study, the attitude of homosexuality was described as either affirmative support for homosexuality or homophobia. This finding suggested that (a) the perceiver viewed parents as unified, (b) the opinions and attitudes of parents might have been determined by overheard dialogues, or (c) the perceiver determined parental attitude by way of hearsay from others, for example, extended family or family friends.

Further investigation of perceived support showed that most mothers and fathers who were perceived as having an affirmative attitude toward homosexuality were also perceived as parents who were personally supportive. This finding suggested a continuity of response by the participants. For example, those participants who reported perceptions of parent(s) as having an affirmative attitude toward homosexuality might subsequently have perceived their parents as personally supportive without disclosure or discussion. These perceptual conclusions of parental attitude and personal support were not intended to be predictive of the outcome of a disclosure of sexual orientation. However, the findings suggested that there is a relationship between perceptions of positive parental support and an attitude toward homosexuality with disclosure of sexual orientation.

The results of the second question described the differences between perceived parental support (positive and negative) and
self-silencing behaviors. The differences indicated that the perception of negative parental support was related to greater self-silencing behavior. These findings are consistent with the literature that persons with poor support are less encouraged by the culture to verbally address their own needs or ideas and are self-silenced (Jack, 1991) or without voice (Gilligan, 1982). Self-silencing is more than being nonverbal about sexual orientation. Self-silencing can be as severe as silencing of thoughts and foreclosure of development (Gilligan, 1982; Jack, 1991). This finding was also consistent with the idea that decisions about sexual orientation issues are carefully disclosed to trusted others. Disclosure occurs when there is a concurrent psychological readiness that allows for psychological tolerance of the potential dissonance (Cass, 1979; Falco, 1991). However, it is emphasized that the findings of the present study are not time bound. Greater self-silencing behaviors may change when psychological readiness is achieved, or when there is less perceived threat of danger to the parental relationship. This belief seems consistent with Sophie's (1987) idea that the tasks of homosexual identity management are a nonlinear process that allows for the resolution of attitudes, biases, and confusions.

When mother's attitude toward homosexuality was perceived as homophobic, rather than supportive, the difference in self-silencing behavior was also significant. Therefore, as lesbians assess their mother's attitude toward homosexuality, decisions about disclosure of sexual orientation might be influenced by the perceptions of that attitude. However, whether the attitude is real or perceived, the relational dynamic between a lesbian and her mother seems adversely affected by
the perception of dissonance. The relational dynamic identified in this present study is consistent with the findings reported by Jack and Dill (1992) where the influence of perceived dissonance and oppression produce greater self-silencing behavior, a pulling inward, out of connection and reporting a loss of self.

Greater self-silencing behavior is demonstrated by women who find themselves in dissonant or oppressive controversies (Jack & Dill, 1991). However, for lesbians, the oppression is invisible to, and hidden from, their mothers; therefore, the silencing of the self is a silencing of the connection between them. The oppression that results in silencing is consistent with Rosen’s (1990) statement of how homophobia is a deterrent to lesbian identity integration. Although the disclosure of sexual orientation to mothers might facilitate the differentiation process (Murphy, 1989; Zitter, 1987), the findings of the present study were consistent that disclosure of sexual orientation occurs more readily when perceptions of parental support are positive. Chodorow (1989) explained that differentiation was not a process of being separate from another, but rather a particular way of being in connection with another.

Lesbians in this study did not demonstrate a significant difference in self-silencing behavior when the perception of father’s attitude toward homosexuality was affirmative versus homophobic. This finding that perceptions of mother-daughter dynamics are different than father-daughter dynamics is consistent with the work of Theresa Bernardez (1991), Chodorow (1989), and Rosen (1990), who suggest there are different concerns about the mother-daughter relationship than the father-daughter relationship. From the perspective of relational theory,
there is power in the empathic relationship between women. Jordan (1991) suggested that "inner knowing" is less mutual between fathers and daughters than between women. Therefore, the inner connection with fathers of lesbians may be less threatened and not require self-silencing. It is also possible that a sense of connectedness with fathers isn't based on the sharing of "inner truths" of self but on the recognition of accomplishments and independence.

The lesbian identity development theories speculate that sexual orientation is disclosed to mothers before fathers, although not specifically so demonstrated in this study. However, Murphy (1989) suggested that mothers often communicate [or prohibit the communication of] the information about sexual orientation to fathers for their daughters. Perhaps, this is an overt sign to daughters of the power of the empathic relationship and connection between them. Then again, this might be a covert sign of the control or resistance a mother can have on integrating acceptance of her lesbian daughter.

As shown in the present study, there was no significant difference of lesbian self-silencing behavior between the decision to disclose or to not disclose sexual orientation to parent(s). The value of this finding was the increased understanding that lesbians were not significantly silenced by the process of making a decision about disclosure of sexual orientation. Rather, there was greater self-silencing reported in this sample when there were perceptions of poor parental support and perceived attitudes of homophobia than when there was positive parental support or perceptions of affirmative support for homosexuality. Therefore, the power of homophobia and the inherent risk, and fear, of
injuring the connection of the parental relationship elicits greater self-silencing behavior than the power of making a choice about disclosure of sexual orientation to valued others. The implication is that the concern lesbians address in disclosure of sexual orientation is not about verbalizing lesbian specific words and concepts. Rather, the concern is communicating the words and concepts to engage others in greater relational understanding. The focus of self-silenced behavior is more about oppression and a less than acceptable self-identity than it is about being a lesbian identified woman.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the present study, the following recommendations for future research and education are recommended:

First, a longitudinal replication of this current work might demonstrate the fluidity of lesbian identity formation and the effects of disclosure of sexual orientation to parent(s). A longitudinal study might also provide increased information about the formation of lesbian identities and identity management. An effort to replicate the present study might also include a different effort to increase sample diversity. The effort might include utilizing regional women’s music festival, conferences, or political arenas and to select distributors from within racial, socio-economic, and politically diverse groups. Varied recruitment techniques could increase the opportunity for nonacademic, professional women to also participate in research.

A third recommendation addresses the need to investigate the dynamics of father-daughter relationships in lesbian families. There are
data and theories about the mother-daughter dyad and some information about how lesbian daughters differentiate from their mothers. A greater understanding about the father-daughter dyad might provide increased information about how lesbians can prepare for disclosure of sexual orientation to parents.

Reducing knowledge deficits through research can provide guidelines for educational programs for parents and/or lesbian daughters that might reduce the homophobic attitude by dispelling myths. The reduction of homophobic attitudes within family systems might reduce the fear of disconnection and allow parents and their lesbian daughters to have authentic interactions.

A fifth recommendation suggests that lesbian communities organize informal gatherings for persons who need guidance, insight, and support during the disclosure process. These workshops could use information gained from research such as the present study, as well as the experiential stories of others who have been in similar situations. Informal gatherings might provide support from within the lesbian community that will teach disclosure management techniques as well as provide the strength and resources necessary to take the risk to disclose sexual orientation to parent(s). Mentoring programs and trained peer counselors might provide quality support and depathologize normal sexual identity development dilemmas for lesbians and their parent(s).
Appendix A

Qualitative Results of Open-Ended Question
Qualitative Results of Open-Ended Question

A two-part, open-ended question on the questionnaire provided an opportunity for research participants to describe their own experience and rationale about how decisions to disclose sexual orientation to parent(s) occurred. According to the guidelines of American Psychological Association (1991) and Rudestam and Newton (1993), these explanatory responses were reviewed, unitized, and categorically divided into thematic sets. Following the reporting style of the American Psychological Association (1991), each thematic set was identified, described, and several verbatim illustrations accompany each identified theme.

The thematic sets were divided into two major categories, those reflecting (a) a self-oriented disclosure and (2) an other oriented disclosure. These categories reflected the motivation of a lesbian's disclosure of her sexual orientation to parent(s).

**Self-Oriented Disclosure**

1. **Authenticity**

Many respondents addressed their intent to be open, known, understood, and to be able to share themselves in a genuine way.

My sexuality was putting a great wedge in the relationship with my mother and I thought that perhaps if she really knew, she may be able to understand my perceptions and thoughts better.

It was important for me to let my mother know that I am a lesbian, so she could have more understanding of my life and the things that are important to me. It was an important step because we are not necessarily close and I believe if I had not told her we would have grown further apart.
It was important to come out to my mom, as I wanted to share with her who I truly was/am. I believed then and believe even more now that to break down the barriers, I needed to risk showing/being my whole person.

I wanted my mother to know me.

Because I didn’t want to live two different lives.

2. Moral/Ethical Care

Very many respondents reported a need to not lie, to be honest or respectful to their parents about their sexual orientation.

I did not want to lie anymore about what was happening in my personal life. I felt that if they heard it from someone else, it would hurt more than if they heard it from me that I am a lesbian.

I realized I am a lesbian and decided to tell them rather than pretend I’m straight. It would be self-defeating and disrespectful to lie to them.

I told them because I wanted to be honest and so that they would stop wondering why I couldn’t find a "good man" after not being married for 11 years.

I struggled with the risks of coming out, but felt compelled to talk honestly with my parents regarding my lesbianism. I hoped that I would find some peace through being fully known for who I am.

3. To End Hiding

This theme is identified separately from authenticity and the ethical reaction "to not lie" through indicators that the secret was oppressive. Many lesbians spoke of being tired of hiding and pretending to be someone they weren’t.

It was important to me to be who I was and hiding my sexuality was getting exhausting!
I was tired of having to hide it from them and pretend I was doing "straight" things.

I felt uncomfortable hiding such a large part of my being. It was easier to come out than to try to hide it.

Tired of hiding. Tired of de-dyking the house for family visits. Wanted my relationship to be recognized for what it is.

4. Acceptance of Self

Several participants identified their need to come out as their hope for personal acceptance. The responses in this theme set required language that suggested more than being known or understood; they specifically identified a need to be accepted, want approval or support.

I am very out to everyone. I want to know that the people around me accept me for who I am.

I needed a confidant at the time of break-up. Went to mother for advice and support.

It was important to me to tell my mother, and not keep her out of my life. She doesn’t quite know how to respond to my sexual orientation, but it will take time. Most important, she doesn’t reject me.

Other-Oriented Disclosure

1. Acceptance of Partner

A few participants stated that it was important to come out to their parent(s) so their parent(s) would be invited and included in family functions.

I am in a committed partnership and wanted "us" to be treated as part of the family.
I wanted my partner to be included in family gatherings and accepted as my partner like everyone else’s spouse.

2. They Asked; I Told Them

Several participants reported that they are out to their parent(s) because they were asked directly and responded honestly to the questions. In most sets there was a frequent reference to the participant’s relational need with her mother. An interesting observation of this thematic set was that there were more obvious references to fathers than in other categories.

I was asked by my father if I was a lesbian and I said yes. It was important to me to be frank and honest about my sexuality—not for his sake—but because my sexuality is such an integral part of my life.

My dad came out and asked me, so I told him. My mom found out from my dad.

My father says he knew before I did, so he asked me. I told him.

My dad met my ex-partner and talked about us and our break-up. He came home and asked me to talk about myself. He was very supportive.

My father came to me with comments of understanding and acceptance of my partner, and myself.

3. Outed by Others

A few respondents explained that their sexual orientation was disclosed to their parents by other people.

I was forced “out of the closet” by my former partner’s parents.

I told my brother, he told my parents.
I didn’t voluntarily come out to my parents. My mother found out about my sister’s sexual orientation, and told her she wished she had never been born. So, I called a family meeting and told them that this is how we are, it is not their fault, not ours, it just is.

I didn’t come out on my own, my ex-husband told my parents.

4. Miscellaneous Motivation

There were a few responses that identified motivation to disclose their sexual orientation that didn’t fall into the larger thematic sets that suggested the diversity of reasons disclosure is motivated.

I disclosed my orientation out of a sense of social responsibility, hoping to be accepted and reduce homophobia.

I have come out to my mother for two reasons, as an obligation as a daughter to share and to decrease homophobia.

Because my father was going to tell another in a long line of "fag jokes."

I have my own life now, so if they don’t understand, I don’t have to depend on them.

For my mental health and peace of mind.

I chose to not play games with my life as I am dying of cancer and have been in my relationship for 10 years.

The second question asked: "If you have not come out to your parent(s), please indicate the reason that it is important for you TO NOT DISCLOSE your sexual orientation to your parent(s)?" From this question, two major categories were also identified: (1) self-orientated nondisclosure and (2) other-orientated nondisclosure. The first category focused on the need or concern of the parent(s) (other-oriented), and the second major category identified the needs of the respondent (self-oriented).
Each major category had several thematic sets and exemplify participant perspectives and rationale.

This was only one method of defining the content of this open-ended question and doesn't preclude to exhaust the possibilities that other methods exist. It provided the researcher with categorical clarity for reporting.

**Self-Oriented Nondisclosure**

Self-oriented statements reflect the participants' rationale for not disclosing their sexual orientation to their parent(s) based on concerns of a personal nature. The thematic sets in this division focus on (a) being disowned, (b) maintaining positive family connections, (c) not necessary, (d) identity development process, (e) personal fear, and (f) diminished parental relationship.

1. **Fear of Being Disowned**

Many participants addressed issues of fear of being disowned, or not accepted by their parents based on disclosing information about their sexual orientation.

> Fear! Fear of hurting them and fear of rejection and loss of family.

> I am afraid that they will abandon me/disown me. I am also afraid that they would not allow me to see my sister.

> I know that my parents would reject me and I would no longer be welcome in the family. They would tell me that they do not ever want to see me again.

> My mother found out and no longer speaks to me or has anything to do with me. Therefore, I feel that it would
only completely destroy the minute relationship that exists between my father and myself.

In my early 20s my mother suspected it about the woman I was with; she made this comment to me: "If you ever turn out that way you won't be allowed in my house again."

Actually, it is very important for me to come out to my parents. However, it scares me that I might lose them altogether. My mother is very concerned with appearances. I fear she will disown me. I am an oldest child, I feel a lot of pressure to make them proud.

2. Treated Like Family

Many partnered respondents addressed a need to withhold disclosure about their sexual orientation to protect their current experience of being "treated like family."

My parents are accepting of me and my partner as they know us now, but I fear their reaction if I told the truth.

My mother accepts and supports my current 10-year relationship and I conduct myself in a way to not make my sexual orientation an issue with her, i.e., I don't embarrass her.

I haven't come out to my mother. When I have talked about the topic she let me know she thinks it's dirty and would be disappointed if I made this "choice." She treats my lover well and invites her to family events. It seems smoothest "untalked" about for now.

3. Not Necessary

Many participants expressed a personal sense that there was no need to disclose their sexual orientation to their parent(s) as it wasn't necessary in their identity process.

I am who I am, and it is not important to me that they approve or disapprove of my actions or life-style.
My parents are very liberal politically and I am certain they know but I have no need for their approval and they never pick up on opportunities I present to open the topic further.

My parents have accepted my partner and my choices. It doesn't seem necessary to attach "lesbian" to my life-style.

4. Identity Development in Progress

Participants suggested that they are in a process of self-awareness and not yet prepared to share their sexual orientation with their parent(s).

I am in the process of coming out—I haven't come out to my parents because I wanted a stronger sense of self-security.

I have just come to terms with my own sexuality and I do not feel compelled to share this with my parents at this time.

I do not feel ready to tell them yet; I plan to soon!

5. Personal Fears

A few respondents identified specifically being afraid, feeling scared, or fearful of disclosing sexual orientation to their parents. Although other categories overlapped with this theme at times, these illustrations seemed specific to personal fear.

The reason I haven't told my parents is first I am scared to tell them. Secondly, I have a 5-year-old brother. I feel if I told them they would not allow me to see him.

Fear of anger and misunderstandings.

I am afraid of general disapproval and homophobic reactions.
6. Current Relationship With Parents Fractured or Distanced

Several participants addressed their distanced or broken relationships with their parents and, therefore, expressing that disclosure of sexual orientation wasn’t relevant.

The fact that a large distance separates us has not lent itself for the need for disclosure.

At this time it does not seem appropriate. I live six hours away from them and see them very infrequently.

We live far apart so the issue has never been forced.

I haven’t spoken more than 50 words to my father since I’ve become involved with women, so the occasion and reason has not arisen.

My father has never been supportive of anything I do or am. I have no reason to feel compelled to talk to him about such a sensitive area in my life.

Because of a 700 mile geographical distance between myself and my mother, I wanted to "come out" in person vs. over the phone. I only see her once or twice a year and will probably tell her some time in the future.

Other-Oriented Nondisclosure

The other-oriented explanations of decisions to not disclose sexual orientation to parent(s) identified many respondents' concern and responsibility for their parent(s). Six thematic sets were identified. They described some diversity of thought and, yet, common collection of experience. Each set is labeled, described, and illustrated with verbatim examples.
1. Perceived Homophobia

Many participants addressed the awareness about their parent(s)' hatred or fear of same-sexed relationships as known through previous conversations and/or contact about gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues.

My mother in particular has always been extremely vocal about how disgusting homosexuality is to her. When she talks about homosexuality, her entire voice and demeanor emphasize her disapproval. It has been easier to not share this important side of myself with my parents.

Parents are homophobic, talk badly about gays a lot.

My father has never been supportive of anything I do, or am. Coming out to him would be suicide. He has threatened to kill homosexuals; and although I really doubt he would, I am not taking any chances.

My father is extremely homophobic. My mother is open, but her boyfriend is homophobic and anti-gay.

2. Aging or Parental Illness

Many participants stated they did not want to hurt their aging or ill parent(s) by disclosing their sexual orientation.

Mother is too old to understand (88), she has severe memory loss.

I don’t want my father to have a heart attack. His health is fragile.

My mother was dead by the time I was aware of it. My father had just experienced the death of my mother and was depressed. He is elderly and in poor health. Although I include my partner in all activities (and so does he), I feel no need to discuss the exact nature of the relationship with him.

A few participants addressed the theme of concern for aging and ill parents, but add their desire to have disclosed their sexual orientation.
Father is 85 years old, he would likely have difficulty with the disclosure. I see little need to put him through the pain it would likely cause him at this late stage in his life. If I were younger, I might disclose my sexual orientation.

My parents are 87 years old and my father has Alzheimer Disease. I decided when I entered this relationship, that since I wasn’t sure of my mother’s reaction, it was not important for her to know. If she would ask, I would tell her.

They are quite old and I feel they would be hurt by my disclosure at this time. I continue to debate this issue in my own mind. I would acknowledge if they asked and may eventually decide to disclose.

3. Fear of Hurting Parent(s) by Inflicting Confusion, Embarrassment, or Blame

Several participants suggested that parents who might be confused, embarrassed, or blaming themselves about a daughter’s lesbian orientation might be in pain, or hurting, reflects the effort to self-sacrifice to avoid this injury.

My parents would blame themselves for my "problem."

I haven’t told my mother because I feel it will hurt her. She wants us to be happy and have more than she did. Happiness to her is a family, husband, and a good job. My mother had a family, but it isn’t close. My father stopped coming home when I was in fifth grade. My mother didn’t enjoy her job. I believe I will tell my mother sometime this year.

I fear that my parents would blame themselves and that they would feel a lot of pain.

The following responses address the complicating factor of being financially dependent on parents.

I don’t want to hurt my parents and make them cry. I am still financially dependent on them and don’t want them to stop supporting me through school.
My dad is a physician; he would not pay for my education if he knew about me. My mom is very irrational and only wants grandchildren. They are afraid of what their friends say and think and be embarrassed about me. They would also blame each other and I would feel stuck in the middle. All of this would hurt them a lot.

4. Religious Prohibition Due to Religion of Parent(s)

Several responses addressed concern about parent(s) with religious doctrines that hold anti-gay beliefs and attitudes and have proselytizing or repentant components.

I believe my parents' religious convictions would not allow them to accept my being a lesbian. My mother is a pastor of the church and father is a blue collar worker but actively supports and partners my mother’s ministry.

I chose not to come out to my mother because I feared breakdown in our relationship. I also do not want to hear or deal with her Christian Fundamentalist judgment and oppression.

Mom would pray over me and expect to cure my sins.

No deal because she would be so sad because she would think Christ was out of me and then she would not let up on me until she thought Christ was in me.

5. Other External Prohibitions

Some participants addressed their unique concerns and restrictions about disclosing their sexual orientation to their parents.

My mother told me that I cannot tell my father.

My partner's children do not know about their mom. I am waiting for her to tell them first.

Fear of my children finding out and being turned against me, or taken from me.
I want to come out to them, but they won’t take me seriously unless I come out while partnered with a woman. I’m out to everyone else but people who talk to parents.

6. They Haven’t Asked, I Haven’t Told

They theme of "they haven't asked, I haven't told" represents a rationale for many participants who described disclosure of sexual orientation based on the parent’s desire to know.

If they asked, I would be pleased to tell them, but they have always accepted the women I bring home. My parents and I have never discussed "sexual" issues and this is one.

My mother is 52. If she asked, I would certainly talk to her about it. but, she is of a generation that would not particularly want to know, I believe. I have always been myself around her, brought home women, never men. She surely knows, but I believe considers this private information.

My parents are aware of my living arrangements. If they choose to question me about it, I would not lie. They both appear not to want to deal with it.
Appendix B

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Permission
Date: February 10, 1993

To: Janet Tarkowski

From: M. Michele Burnette, Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 93-02-01

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "Coming out: The relationship between perceived parental support and a lesbian's decision to disclose her sexual orientation to her parents" has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the approval application.

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

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

Approval Termination: February 10, 1994

xc: Betz, CECP
Appendix C

Personal Communication for Permission to Use the Perceived Social Support Scale
January Snyder Tarkowski, R.N., M.A.
c/o Robert Betz, Ph.D. Dissertation Chairperson
Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan 49007

November 9, 1992

ATT: Georgia Prince
Plenum Publishing Corporation
233 Spring Street
NY, NY, 10013

In the article: Procidano, M & Heller, K. (1983) Measuring perceived social support from friends and from family: Three validation studies American Journal of Community Psychology, 11(1), 1-24, there is a Perceived Social Support Scale, pages 20-
23. This is a formal request to reproduce the scale in my current dissertation research survey as well as place a copy in the body of the dissertation as well.

My current project is, Coming out: The influence of perceived parental support on a Lesbian's decision to self-disclose sexual orientation to her parents. This current study hopes to examine the double bind of lesbian women who risk disconnection from their parents through disclosing their sexual orientation and being disowned or choosing not to disclose and feeling unknown (disconnected) to them.

In your response, please include permission to insert a copy of the PSS and your response letter in my dissertation, as well as to submit a copy of your letter granting permission to University Microfilms and others needing to examine this authorization.

I appreciate your assistance with this project. As I look forward to initiating this study, I await your formal authorization.

Thank you for your participation in my research.

Sincerely,

Janet T. Tarkowski, R.N.

cc: dissertation

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Appendix D

Personal Communication for Permission to Use the Silencing the Self Scale
Janet Snyder Tarkowski R.N., M.A.
Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, MI 49007

September 17, 1992

Dana Crowley Jack, Professor
Fairhaven College
Western Washington University
Bellingham, WA 98225

Dear Professor,

As a follow up to our telephone conversation, I submit this formal request to you, and your colleague for permission to use The silencing the self scale for my doctoral research project. This project, Coming out: The impact of perceived parental support on a Lesbian's decision to self-disclose to parents, examines the double bind of lesbian women who risk disconnection from parents through disclosing sexual orientation and being disowned or not disclosing and feeling unknown. The correlation between relational disconnection and depression in women makes the inclusion of the Beck Depression Inventory a valuable tool as well.

Please include, in your response, permission to insert a copy of the STSS in my dissertation, as well as copy of your letter granting permission to University Microfilms and others needing to examine this authorization.

I appreciate your invitation to open communication. I have ordered a copy of Silencing the Self and look forward to its arrival early next week. Also, I confirm my agreement to provide you with the data collected from this project, when it is complete, for further integration into your work.

Thank you for your participation in my research and doctoral studies.

Sincerely,

Janet T. Tarkowski

cc: dissertation
October 5, 1992

Janet Snyder Tarkowski R.N., M.A.
Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, MI 49007

Dear Ms. Tarkowski,

You have permission to use my copyrighted scale, "The Silencing the Self Scale," in your doctoral research project, Coming out: The impact of perceived parental support on a Lesbian's decision to self-disclose to parents. You may insert a copy of the STSS in your dissertation, and University Microfilms may copy the scale as necessary when duplicating your dissertation.

In return, you have agreed to provide me with the data collected from this project, when complete, to add to the growing body of data on the scale. You are welcome to contact me at any time with any questions you have in using the scale, or with questions pertaining to your research. It sounds like a very interesting project.

I am enclosing a copy of the scale, a copy of the article reporting psychometric properties in the Psychology of Women Quarterly, instructions to respondents, and scoring instructions.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Dana Crowley Jack, Professor
Appendix E

Personal Communication for Permission to Use the Beck Depression Inventory
Janet Snyder Tarkowski R.N., M.A.  
c/o Robert Betz PhD, P.I.  
Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology  
Western Michigan University  
Kalamazoo, Michigan 49007  

September 17, 1992  

Center for Cognitive Therapy  
133 South 36th Street; Room 602  
Philadelphia, PA 19104  

Dear Dr. Beck,  

This is a formal request to reproduce the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) to use for my doctoral research project. This project, Coming out: The impact of perceived parental support on a Lesbian's decision to self-disclose sexual orientation to parents, examines the impact of the double bind of lesbian women who risk disconnection from parents through disclosing sexual orientation and being disowned or choosing not to disclose and feeling unknown to them. The evidence of the correlation between relational disconnection and depression in women makes the inclusion of the Beck Depression Inventory a valuable tool in this current research design (Jack & Dill, 1992).  

In your response, please include permission to insert a copy of the BDI and your response letter in my dissertation, as well to submit as a copy of your letter granting permission to University Microfilms and others needing to examine this authorization.  

Information and data from this current study will be dispensed to Dana Crowley Jack, Western Washington University, for further integration into her on-going work with BDI and the Silencing the self scale.  

I appreciate your participation in this project and would appreciate any further information you might have that will be useful in this endeavor. As I look forward to initiating this study, I await your formal authorization.  

Thank you for your participation in my research.  

Sincerely,  

Janet T. Tarkowski, R.N., M.A.  

cc: dissertation
Dear [Name],

On behalf of Aaron T. Beck, M.D., I am responding to your recent inquiry regarding our research scales.

You have Dr. Beck's permission to use and reproduce the scale(s) checked below only for the designated research project that you described in your letter. There is no charge for this permission.

However, in exchange for this permission, please provide Dr. Beck with a complimentary copy of any reports, preprints, or publications you prepare in which our materials are used. These will be catalogued in our central library to serve as a resource for other researchers and clinicians.

- Beck Depression Inventory (BDI)
- Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI)
- Hopelessness Scale (HS)
- Suicide Intent Scale (SIS)
- Scale for Suicide Ideation (SSI)
- Cognition Checklist (CCL)
- Socio-occupy-Autonomy Scale (SAS)
- Dysfunctional Attitude Scale (DAS)
- Beck Self-Monitoring System (BSMS)
- Daily Record of Dysfunctional Thoughts (DRDT)
- Patient's Guide to Cognitive Therapy (PGCT)
- Form Used by Patients to Evaluate Therapy Sessions (FFETS)
- Daily Record of Thoughts (DRS)
- Cognition Checklist (CCL)

If you have any further questions, feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Vicky Mayne
Research Materials Coordinator
Center for Cognitive Therapy

NOTE: Permission for inclusion of the BDI, BAI, HS, SSI, and BSCT in any publication must be obtained from The Psychological Corporation. Telephone: 1 800-222-0752.
Ms. Janet T. Tarkowski  
c/o WomanCare, Inc.  
2836 West Main  
Kalamazoo, MI 49007  

Dear Ms. Tarkowski:  

Thank you for your letter of September 17 to the Center for Cognitive Therapy concerning use of the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) in your dissertation research. Your letter was forwarded to me for reply because The Psychological Corporation publishes this test for Dr. Beck, and administers the rights in his behalf.  

Before we can proceed with your request, we will need additional information from you.  

Please provide a brief but detailed description of your project, including its purpose, your method of administration and the approximate number of subjects to be tested.  

Also, please provide a letter from your faculty advisor or committee chairman which endorses this project. This letter should be on university letterhead, and provide assurance that all testing will be conducted under his or her direct supervision.  

When we have received the above documentation, we will proceed with your request. Please be aware that you will need to purchase from us all BDI materials necessary for your testing since we do not grant permission for reproduction. However, you will be eligible for a 50% discount if the use of the test is approved.  

Also, if your project is approved, please be aware that do not grant permission for inclusion of our tests in the appendices of dissertations or theses due to test security.  

I will wait to hear further from you.  

Sincerely,  

Christine Doebbler  
Supervisor  
Rights and Permissions  

HARCOURT BRACE JOVANOVICH, INC.
Brief Project Description

Project Title

Coming out: The influence of perceived parental support on a lesbian's decision to disclose her sexual orientation to her parents.

Statement of the problem

There is a limited amount of empirical work done to apply the Relational Theory of Women's Development to lesbians. There are no studies that utilize this theoretical perspective to the question of a lesbians decision to disclose her sexual orientation to her parents. Disclosure often results in a "double bind" for lesbians who risk disconnection (loss) from their parents through disowning when disclosure takes place, or risk disconnection (being unknown by their parents) if disclosure is avoided. (BDJ measurement).

The purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to measure the diversity among lesbians through the question: what is the influence of perceived parental support on a lesbians decision to disclose to her parents.

Method of administration

This current study will be distributed to lesbians in a fan out distribution. Lesbians are an invisible sub-culture; this invisibility will randomize the population. Two women will dispense 100 questionnaire packets to ten others (10 each), each lesbian will distribute to others known to them in the MidWest, one person will disperse (10 packets) in each other major geographic location; to include MidWest (Michigan), North East, Pacific Coast, and South West and additional packets will be available for interested others several Women's Bookstores, and advertised through several Lesbian publications.

Approximate number of participants

250 packets will be initially prepared for distribution. These will be dispensed during one initial mailing to all the target persons. The study will continue for two months. If less than 100 responses are received, the study will continue until 100 returns are obtained by the researcher.

Additional packets will be provided as requested, or if a second fan-out mailing is indicated to reach n of 100.

Total number of Beck Inventory's requested: 300.
November 2, 1992

Ms. Christine Doebbler, Supervisor
Rights and Permission
The Psychological Corporation
555 Academic Court
San Antonio, TX 78204-2498

Dear Ms. Doebbler:

Please be advised that Ms. Janet T. Tarkowski's dissertation project (see attached description) has my endorsement as her faculty doctoral committee chairperson. All testing involving the Beck Depression Inventory will be conducted under my direct supervision.

Thank you for your assistance in helping Ms. Tarkowski achieve her educational goals.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Robert Betz, Ph.D.
Professor/Director
Licensed Psychologist (MI)

cc: Ms. Janet Tarkowski

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November 10, 1992

Ms. Janet T. Tarkowski
c/o WomanCare, Inc.
2836 West Main
Kalamazoo, Michigan 49007

Dear Ms. Tarkowski:

Thank you for the additional documentation concerning your use of the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) in your dissertation research.

Unfortunately, we cannot grant your request to use the material due to your method of test administration. The BDI is a secure test which is restricted to administration and interpretation by and under the direct supervision of a qualified psychologist. We do not believe it is appropriate to mail the test to unqualified individuals in a situation where there will be no guarantee that the materials will be returned, or that the copyright in the materials won't be breached by unauthorized duplication.

We will be happy to reconsider your request if you can alter your test administration method so that all materials will remain secure in the hands of a qualified individual.

Thank you for your interest. If you have questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Christine Doebbler
Supervisor

HARcourt BRACE JOVANOVICH, INC.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Project Title: Coming out: The relationship between the level of perceived parental support on a lesbian's decision to disclose her sexual orientation to her parents.

Statement of the Problem:

There is a limited amount of empirical work done to apply the Relational Theory of Women's Development to lesbians. There are no studies that utilize this theoretical perspective to the question of a lesbian's decision to disclose her sexual orientation to her parents. Disclosure often results in a "double bind" for lesbians who risk disconnection (loss) from their parents through disowning when the disclosure takes place, or risk disconnection (being unknown by their parents) if disclosure is avoided. Evidence of the correlation between relational disconnection (measuring level of intimacy with the Silencing the Self Scale) and loss with the Beck Depression Inventory has been positively correlated in the work of Dana Jack, Western Washington University.

The Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study is to measure the diversity among lesbians through understanding the relationship between perceived parental support and disclosure to parents.

Design and Methodology:

This current descriptive-correlational study will examine the relationship between how the dependent variables, a) perceived parental acceptance and b) the status of outness to parents (yes or no) corresponds with the variations of the independent variables c) level of intimacy or connection and its d) hypothesized association with a measure of depression from health to severe.

The current project will be distributed by volunteer coordinators (at least Master's level counseling psychology equivalent's) who will recruit at least ten participants for this current study. Each distributor will have written instructions to assure uniformity of distribution and process. Each distributor will do a common mailing of sealed responses in the SASE provided and accepts responsibility to personally return all unused packets to the researcher. Packets will be coded with distributor identifying marks to assure complete return of these packets.
There will be Project Posters in several women's bookstores with a common number a lesbian might call if she wishes to volunteer for this study, and a coordinator will arrange to meet with her and provide the survey packet. No packets will be randomly left in these locations for general access.

Anticipated Number of Participants:

200 packets will be initially prepared for distribution, since unused packets will be returned they can be redistributed to another coordinator if requested. This study will be limited to one month for the first distribution, and if a second distribution is needed, or desired to reach an acceptable n, or to meet the needs of women choosing to volunteer, the packets will be re-coded and redistributed by coordinator professional lesbians.

The total number of Beck Inventory's requested will be 200.

Current project researcher: 
Janet T. Tarkowski, R.N., M.A.
Limited Licensed Psychologist

Dissertation Chairperson: 
Robert L. Betz, Ph.D.
Fully Licensed Psychologist
November 24, 1992

Ms. Janet Tarkowski  
c/o WomanCare, Inc.  
2836 West Main  
Kalamazoo, MI  49007

Dear Ms. Tarkowski:

Thank you for your November 19 letter requesting permission to use the Beck Depression Inventory for testing purposes for use in your dissertation research.

In order to protect the combined usefulness of the test, and as a responsible test publisher, we believe it is our responsibility to maintain the security and integrity of our tests. Consequently, we cannot allow items or portions of the test to be bound in, stapled with or microfilmed with your dissertation.

We will gladly grant permission for use of the test if the above restrictions will be adhered to. Please sign and return a copy of this letter to me for my files. You may then contact Sue Smith in Qualifications at (800) 228-0752, ext. 293, to order your materials. Please indicate to Mrs. Smith that you are to receive the 50% student discount.

Also, please forward a copy of your dissertation when it is completed so that I may retain a copy in our library. If you have any questions regarding the above please contact me directly.

Sincerely,

Christine Doebbler  
Supervisor  
Rights and Permissions

UNDERSTOOD AND AGREED

[Signature]

Ms. Janet Tarkowski  11-30-92

HARCOURT BRACE JOVANOVICH, INC.
Appendix F

Informed Consent
Informed Consent

The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect information from lesbians about coming out. The questionnaire takes about 30-40 minutes to complete, depending on the time spent on the short answer items.

The principal investigator in this research is:
Janet Snyder Tarkowski, M.A., a doctoral candidate in the Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology, at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Research about lesbians has been limited, due in part, to the need within our communities to remain invisible to the dominant culture. As a lesbian, I respect our need for confidentiality and yet, I also have a strong recognition for the need for US to know and understand ourselves more accurately. Your participation in this project will contribute to this effort.

Your participation is voluntary! By completing this questionnaire you are giving your informed consent to participate in this study. All collected data will be protected to maintain confidentiality for all participants. Your response is to be sealed in the envelope provided and returned to the person distributing the study to you. (The responses may not be mailed due to the copyright restrictions of the instruments.)

IN ORDER TO PROTECT YOUR PRIVACY AND PROTECT YOUR RIGHTS TO AN INFORMED CONSENT, PLEASE CHECK THE BOX AT THE BOTTOM OF THIS FORM TO INDICATE YOUR CONSENT AND UNDERSTANDING OF THIS PROJECT:
DO NOT USE YOUR SIGNATURE ON THESE FORMS.

Please keep one copy of this consent form, with the names of the distributor and this researcher, for your future reference. Please place the other copy into your distributor’s envelope marked consent only. The distributor will return all the consents in a sealed envelope to the researcher.

Read carefully; this is written out of care and concern for you.

In rare instances, when absolutely required as an ethical response to the health or safety of a participant as determined by a severely elevated score on one of the instruments, a distributor will be notified to re-connect with a participant. In the event this should occur to you, you will be contacted by your distributor to discuss the elevated score and to assist with a referral as necessary. The distributor will be notified of severely elevated findings within 72 hours of the return of the packets.

☐ I have read and understand the purpose of this research study on this date

Janet Snyder Tarkowski, M.A., Principal Investigator.
2836 West Main, Kalamazoo, MI 49006 /// (616) 398-4477

Janet Snyder Tarkowski, M.A., Principal Investigator.
2836 West Main, Kalamazoo, MI 49006 /// (616) 398-4477

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Informed Consent: Participants are informed that their participation in the study is voluntary. They have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice. Participants will be contacted by phone to discuss any questions or concerns about the questionnaire they may have. Contact: Jane Turkowad, 663-381-4477.
Appendix G

Participant Instructions
Participant Instructions

This study is designed for lesbian participants. Your voluntary completion of this survey indicates to this researcher that you identify yourself as a lesbian. In this survey, you will be asked specific questions about your lesbian experience.

Research about lesbians has been limited due, in part, to the need within our communities to remain invisible to the dominant culture. As a lesbian, I respect our need for confidentiality and yet, I also have a strong recognition for the need for us to know and understand our culture more accurately. Your participation in this study will contribute to this effort.

Your participation is voluntary!

If you do not wish to participate, and you have this survey packet, please return your questionnaire —unmarked—sealed in the envelope provided—to the research distributor who invited your participation. This protects you from pressure to participate, and the privacy to make your own decision. All forms must be returned due to the copyright restrictions and conditions given to me by those who hold these copyright privileges of the instruments used in this survey. Thank you for your cooperation.

If you wish to participate, in this project, please complete the survey packet (answering all questions as they apply to you today). When you have finished the survey please return it to the research distributor sealed in the envelope provided. The distributor will personally return all sealed packets to the research investigator.

When this study is finished, a summary of the study results will be available to you in three ways:

a) Each participating bookstore will receive a short summary statement to be posted in a common announcement area.

b) Summary statements will be sent to several Lesbian publications for possible inclusion.

c) All participants can request a statement of the study results from their distributor in July, 1993.

***All distributors will have a REFERRAL LIST available to you at your request: (a list of counselors who are sensitive to these issues, community support systems, or helpful books).
QUESTIONNAIRE

Please complete each page before beginning the next page. In order to protect and respect anonymity of all participants, please do not write any identifying notations on this form. When you have finished, seal your responses in the envelope provided and return it to the distributor, who will personally deliver sealed responses to researcher.

Answer all questions as they apply to you today.

Part I: General demographic information.

1. ______ How old are you? ______ Number of children in your family of origin?
   ______ Birth Order: From first to last, indicate which sibling you are in this family
   ______ How old were you when you moved out of your childhood family home?
   (If you still live with your parents, leave this blank)

2. Indicate your race/ethnicity
   a) Black/ African American
   b) White (not Hispanic)
   c) Latina/ Hispanic
   d) Asian American
   e) Native American
   f) Other. (Specify)

3. Select the appropriate letter (from the map below) indicating:
   ______ your current geographic residence
   (city,......) or (rural,......)
   ______ your parents geographic residence
   (city,......) or (rural,......)

4. Please indicate your current level of annual income:
   a) less than $9,999
   b) $10,000 -19,999
   c) $20,000 - 29,999
   d) $30,000 - 39,999
   e) $40,000 - 59,999
   f) $50,000 - 79,999
   g) greater than $80,000

5. Please indicate your current occupational group
   a) laborer
   b) clerical
   c) managerial
   d) government
   e) educational
   f) professional
   g) creative
   h) student
   i) (other)

6. Please indicate the person(s) who provided your parenting: (choose all who apply)
   a) birth parents
   b) parents of adoption
   c) single mother
   d) single father
   e) step-mother + father
   f) step-father + mother
   g) foster parent
   h) other family member
   i) same-sexed parent partnership (male,......); (female,......)
   j) other
   (specify)

7. Please indicate the person(s), from the list above (#6), who YOU consider to be your parents. Place the corresponding letter in the box.

IN FURTHER QUESTIONS REFERING TO PARENTS: PLEASE CONSISTENTLY REFER TO THOSE PERSON(S) YOU IDENTIFY IN YOUR RESPONSE TO #7

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8. Are any of the parenting persons listed in question #6 known to you as: Gay, Bisexual or Lesbian?  _____NO _____YES

9. Is there evidence, to you, that the parenting persons listed in question #7 are: Alcoholic?  _____NO _____YES

10. Do you consider your parents (#7) to be: MOTHER FATHER
   a. ________homophobic ________
   b. ________supportive ________

11. Indicate the highest level of educational experience: (choose one category per person)
    (note: parenting person(s) refer to #7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yourself</th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Father</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Grade School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) High School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Associate Degree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Bachelors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Masters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Doctorate</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. If it applies to you: Please indicate the type of college you attended and your age of completing your studies: (check all that apply) (If currently enrolled, report your current age)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College type</th>
<th>Age of Completion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) two year community college</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) two year business school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) four year liberal arts college</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) University</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Doctorate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13. Answer all that apply to you, write NA in the spaces that do not apply: (do not leave any blank spaces)

<p>| |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age of first awareness of yourself as a lesbian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of first lesbian sexual experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of first disclosing sexual orientation to mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of first disclosing sexual orientation to father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of first partnered relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of first partnered relationship in shared living arrangement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. Indicate your perception of your parents awareness of your sexual orientation
    (select one category per parent; refer to question #7)

    (FATHER) (MOTHER)

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I have not told and I think they do not suspect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I have not told, but I think they know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I have told, but they discount this information (&quot;only a phase&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I have told and have discussed details.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(modified from Shechter and Gilbert, 1983)
15. Indicate if there has been a major disconnection from your parent(s) through death, divorce or separation.
   (Check all indicators that apply)

   A. LOSS THROUGH DEATH:

   PARENTING MOTHER   //   your age at the time of parental death
   PARENTING FATHER   //   your age at the time of parental death

   B. LOSS THROUGH DIVORCE OF PARENTS

   _______DIVORCE of mother and father
   _______Your age at the time of this divorce

   C. LOSS THROUGH OTHER SEPARATIONS FROM PARENT(S):

   _______a) parent illness (physical or psychological)
   _______b) abandonment (physical, emotional or psychological)
   _______c) foster care (legal placement or family arrangement)
   _______d) early emancipation
   _______e) parent incarceration
   _______d) other __________________________

   (specify)

16.A & 16.B: Please write a short response to one of the following questions.

   *Choose between 16.A and 16.B***

16.A If you have come out to your parent(s), Please indicate the reason that it was important for you TO DISCLOSE your sexual orientation to your parent(s):
   (contaın comments to the space provided)

16.B If you have not come out to your parent(s), Please indicate the reason that it is important for you TO NOT DISCLOSE your sexual orientation to your parent(s):
   (contaın comments to the space provided)
PART II: The statements that follow refer to feelings and experiences that occur to most people, at one time or another, in their relationships with their families. For each statement there are three possible responses:

(Yes, No, Don’t know)

Please circle the response that most describes the feelings and experiences of your relationship with your parents (or them) as it is for you today. If your parents are deceased, please respond to all questions as you remember it.

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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, No, DK</td>
<td>1. My parent(s) give me the moral support I need.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, No, DK</td>
<td>2. I get good ideas about how to do things or make things from my parent(s).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, No, DK</td>
<td>3. Most other people are closer to their parent(s) than I am.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, No, DK</td>
<td>4. When I confide in my parent who is closest to me, I get the idea that it makes them uncomfortable.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, No, DK</td>
<td>5. My parent(s) enjoy hearing about what I think.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, No, DK</td>
<td>6. My parent(s) share many of my interests.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, No, DK</td>
<td>7. My parent(s) come to me when they have problems or need advice.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, No, DK</td>
<td>8. I rely on my parent(s) for emotional support.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, No, DK</td>
<td>9. There is a parent I could go to if I were just feeling down, without feeling funny about it later.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, No, DK</td>
<td>10. My parent(s) are very open about what they think about things.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, No, DK</td>
<td>11. My parent(s) are sensitive to my needs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, No, DK</td>
<td>12. My parent(s) come to me for emotional support.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, No, DK</td>
<td>13. My parent(s) are good at helping me solve problems.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, No, DK</td>
<td>14. I have a deep sharing relationship with my parent(s).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, No, DK</td>
<td>15. My parent(s) get good ideas about how to do things or make things from me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, No, DK</td>
<td>16. When I confide in my parent(s), it makes me uncomfortable.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, No, DK</td>
<td>17. My parent(s) seek me out for companionship.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, No, DK</td>
<td>18. I think that my parent(s) feel that I’m good at helping them solve problems.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, No, DK</td>
<td>19. I don’t have a relationship with my parent(s) that is as close as other people’s relationships with their parent(s).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, No, DK</td>
<td>20. I wish my parent(s) were much different.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(Prostema & Heber, 1983)
Part III: Please circle the number that best describes how you feel about each of the statements listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I think it is best to put myself first because no one else will look out for me.</td>
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<td>2. I don't speak my feelings in an intimate relationship when I know they will cause disagreement.</td>
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<td>3. Caring means putting the other person's needs in front of my own.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Considering my needs to be as important as those of the people I love is selfish.</td>
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<td>5. I find it is harder to be myself when I am in a close relationship than when I am on my own.</td>
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<td>6. I tend to judge myself by how I think other people see me.</td>
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<td>7. I feel dissatisfied with myself because I should be able to do all the things people are supposed to be able to do these days.</td>
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<td>8. When my partner's needs and feelings conflict with my own, I always state mine clearly.</td>
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<td>9. In a close relationship, my responsibility is to make the other person happy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Caring means choosing to do what the other person wants, even when I want to do something different.</td>
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<td>11. In order to feel good about myself, I need to feel independent and self-sufficient.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. One of the worst things I can do is to be selfish.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. I feel I have to act in a certain way to please my partner.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Instead of risking confrontations in close relationships, I would rather not rock the boat.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I speak my feelings with my partner, even when it leads to problems or disagreements.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Often I look happy enough on the outside, but inwardly I feel angry and rebellious.</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. In order for my partner to love me, I cannot reveal certain things about myself to her.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
18. When my partner's needs or opinions conflict with mine, rather than asserting my own point of view I usually end up agreeing with her.

19. When I am in a close relationship I lose my sense of who I am.

20. When it looks as though certain of my needs can't be met in a relationship, I usually realize that they weren't very important anyway.

21. My partner loves and appreciates me for who I am.

22. Doing things just for myself is selfish.

23. When I make decisions, other people's thoughts and opinions influence me more than my own thoughts and opinions.

24. I rarely express my anger at those close to me.

25. I feel that my partner does not know my real self.

26. I think it's better to keep my feelings to myself when they do conflict with my partner's.

27. I often feel responsible for other people's feelings.

28. I find it hard to know what I think and feel because I spend a lot of time thinking about how other people are feeling.

29. In a close relationship I don't usually care what we do, as long as the other person is happy.

30. I try to bury my feelings when I think they will cause trouble in my close relationship(s).

31. I never seem to measure up to the standards I set for myself.

If you answered the last question with a 4 or 5, please list up to three of the standards you feel you don't measure up to:

1.
2.
3.

©*Jack (1991)
This questionnaire consists of 21 groups of statements. After reading each group of statements carefully, circle the number (0, 1, 2 or 3) next to the one statement in each group which best describes the way you have been feeling the past week, including today. If several statements within a group seem to apply equally well, circle each one. Be sure to read all the statements in each group before making your choices.
Appendix I

Distributor Procedure
Distributor Procedure

In order to maintain uniformity in the distribution process, the following guidelines and procedures are provided.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS:
1. Participants are adult, 18-99 years of age.
2. Participants are lesbians
3. Participants are non-clinical women, who volunteer to participate.
4. Participants are diverse in social-economic status, race, education, and employment.
5. Participants are at all levels of outness.

SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS AND DISTRIBUTION OF PACKETS:

STEP I: 1. Select participants who are willing to complete the packet and return it to the distributor within a timely fashion.

STEP II: 1. Recruit lesbians known to you
   a) Reinforce that participation is voluntary.
   b) Be supportive of research about lesbians and its benefit within our communities.
   c) Ask if participant has any questions about the process of being in this type of research.
   d) Answer all questions and inquiries within a timely fashion. DO NOT HESITATE TO CALL ME IF NECESSARY; (616) 388-4477!
   e) Re-assure the participant that there are complete ethical standards of confidentiality between and among the research team.
   f) Reassure the participant that there is no expected risk.
   g) Give the participant a questionnaire packet, to include:
      1. Informed consent forms (2)
      2. Participant instructions, (page 1)
      3. Questionnaire booklet (8 pages)
      4. Packet envelope
      5. A small pencil
      6. A pride button
   h) Ask the participant to read the informed consent and the participant instructions and mark both copies of the informed consent if she agrees to complete a questionnaire.
   i) Ask the participant to fold one consent and to place it in your envelope marked "CONSENTS ONLY".
   j) Be sure you witness the informed consent forms, as it will provide participants a reference of your name.
RETURN OF QUESTIONNAIRE PACKETS TO THE RESEARCHER:

1. Questionnaire Packets may be personally returned to me at my home, (719 Liberty) and placed in a covered collection box that says "COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRES".

2. Questionnaire Packets may be returned to my office (2836 West Main) and placed in a covered box that says "COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRES".

3. Questionnaires can be picked up from you, at your convenience by the researcher, call: (616) 3884477.

Questionnaires cannot be mailed to the researcher.

Part II:

1. Secure the "NUMBER-FIRST NAME" record in your file.

2. Seal the pre-stamped envelope marked "Consents Only". These consents can be mailed to the researcher, or they may be returned at the time all questionnaire packets are returned.

a) These consents and records will be stored in this sealed capacity for at least three years, in accordance with the guidelines of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board.

IN THE EVENT THERE IS A SEVERELY ELEVATED SCORE ON THE BECK INVENTORY, QUESTIONING HEALTH AND SAFETY OF A PARTICIPANT, THE FOLLOWING PROCEDURE WILL OCCUR:

1. The instrument of concern will be scored first. WITHIN 72 HOURS OF RETURN, if the score is severely elevated...

   a) I will notify you, and ask that contact with this person be made to discuss this finding and make referrals as necessary.

   b) I will request a follow up message regarding these concerns.

   c) I will ask you mail the "NUMBER FIRST-NAME" list in the SASE for storage with the sealed consent envelopes.
STEP III:

1. Ask volunteers who are known to you to recommend other lesbians to participate, and arrange a time to meet with them.
   
a) Follow the sub-steps "a" - "j" just as you did in Step II
   
*** Record the participants telephone number and first name on the "NUMER-FIRST NAME" record on the line corresponding to their packet number.

IF THE PARTICIPANT ASKS QUESTIONS THAT DIRECTLY REFER TO THE CONTENT ITEMS WITHIN THE QUESTIONNAIRE, CONSISTENTLY REPLY WITH THESE GUIDELINES:

1. "Answer items with regard to your current feelings and behaviors in your relationship to the parent you identify in question #7".

2. "Re-read the instruction for the item(s) in question and answer as best you can... as you feel about it today".

3. Encourage responses as opposed to items left blank

4. Encourage participants to not seek help from others, or to collaborate with others while doing this research.

PLEASE DO NOT OFFER AN INTERPRETATION OF ANY ITEM

RETRIEVAL OF QUESTIONNAIRE PACKETS:

1. Ask the participant to seal their questionnaire in the envelope provided.
   
   ***note that you have extra envelopes***

2. Ask the participant to place the envelope in your large collection envelope.

3. Participants may keep pencils provided in their packets.
   
   ***note that you have extra pencils***

4. Please thank each participant for their time and energy while participating in this project.
Appendix J

Coding Procedure for Packet Identification
Coding Procedures for Identification

Part I: CODING OF PARTICIPANT PACKETS:

A. Numeric codes:

1. Using a sequential numbering stamp, beginning at 500, four items in the participant packet will be numerically labeled, in the upper right hand corner with the same coded number.

These include:

a. the questionnaire: For the purpose of:

   1. Providing a tracing mechanism to notify the distributor of a severely elevated Beck Inventory
   2. The number will be enclosed with an interrupted line (.........), as a reminder it will be cut off when the Beck is scored and WHEN NECESSARY, the SEVERELY ELEVATED BECK PROCEDURE will be activated.
   3. The identifying coded numbers will be separated from the questionnaire once the Beck information is deemed secured.

b. two informed consents (2); For the purpose of:

   1. having a record of marked and dated consent for every distributed questionnaire, that is placed (by the participant) into a designated envelope marked "Consents Only".
   2. This envelope will be sealed by the distributor, and stored by the researcher for the required three years after the study is completed.

c. packet envelope; For the purpose of:

Recording on the "Master Tracking" Record:

1. Recording, by this researcher, the designated distributor.
2. Recording, by this researcher, the return of a sealed packet from a distributor.

Recording on the "NUMBER FIRST-NAME" record

3. Record keeping by the distributor of packet distribution.
4. Record keeping by the distributor of the packet return.
Part II: CODING OF THE DISTRIBUTOR PACKETS:

A. Numeric Code

1. Using the sequential numbering stamp, two (2) additional items will be stamped.

   a. NUMBER FIRST-NAME RECORD
      1. Corresponding to the sequential numbered packets, a distributors "NUMBER FIRST-NAME RECORD" will be stamped.
      2. The researcher will double check that the packet numbers and the NUMBER FIRST-NAME RECORD prepared for a distributor are complete and exact.

   b. Envelope marked "INFORMED CONSENTS ONLY"
      1. The envelope will be prepared to correspond with the numbered packets, so when it is sealed by the distributor before returning it to the researcher, there is a record of the informed consents that have been marked and dated.
      2. This envelope (Informed Consents Only) will be stored by the researcher for the required three years.

Part III: CODING OF RESEARCHER INFORMATION SHEETS

A. The researcher will maintain and secure a:

1. "Master Tracking Record" for the purpose of:
   a. maintain an accurate account of the packet distribution process
   b. maintain accurate records of the distributor participation
   c. maintain accurate account of the packets returned, in order to maintain responsibility of the Beck Inventories according to the condition of the copyright permission.
   d. Maintain a tracking record of Severely Elevated Beck Inventories so that an ethical follow up system can be activated and record maintained of that follow up procedure.
   e. Maintain a system of securing the marked and dated informed consents indicating participant understanding of this project.

2. and storage area that will provide orderly access to any records during the prescribed time record retention.
B. ALPHABETICAL

1. The researcher will assign each distributor an alphabetic code on
   the Master Tracking record, to identify the packet with a distributor.
   -- The Master Tracking Record will reflect the distributor
      who received the Packet and its contents,
   -- The Master Tracking Record will reflect when a
      sealed envelope is returned by a distributor.
   -- In the event that a packet is returned UNMARKED,
      it will be renumbered in a second wave of distribution
      (NUMBERS WILL BE USED ONLY ONE TIME)

2. The Master Tracking Record and list of distributors will be sealed
   at the completion of the data collection and stored for three years.
Appendix K

Master Tracking Record
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DISTRIBUTOR CODE</th>
<th>DATE OUT</th>
<th>DATE IN</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>000801</td>
<td>4/15</td>
<td>4/20 X</td>
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<td>000802</td>
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Appendix L

First Name—Number Record
## NUMBER-FIRST NAME RECORD

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Appendix M
Referral Form
REFERRAL FORM

Professional: ______________________

Non-professional: ______________________

Helpful reading:


Appendix N

Advertisement Poster
Lesbian Research

Research helps us to know more about ourselves, and not to be defined by the dominant cultural assumption:
a time to validate our reality

IF you are interested in participating
in a Doctoral Study about lesbian coming out issues,
designed by a lesbian researcher:

Please call Janet Tarkowski M.A.
at (616) 388-4477,
leave a message of your first name and telephone number
You will be contacted by a member of the research team and arrangements made for participation

Participate with Pride
Appendix O

Summary Statement for Participants
SUMMARY OF RESEARCH

My sincerest appreciation to all who participated in my current research project as distributors, participants, consultants, editors, packet stuffers, pencil sharpeners and button makers. Every role, every contribution, every encouraging word has made this project possible to complete.

The focus of the research project was to provide clarity and increase understanding about lesbian's perception of parental support and disclosure of sexual orientation. The research also provided an opportunity for lesbian research specific to our geographic area, by a lesbian researcher, from a lesbian-affirmative doctoral committee who believe that we all gain strength and are empowered from learning more about ourselves.

As identified in the research findings, lesbians with perceptions of parents as personally supportive, or who are perceived as having affirmative attitudes toward homosexuality, more frequently make disclosures of sexual orientation. In addition, mothers and fathers are most often perceived as holding opinions about homosexuality that are similar to one another. Although mothers and fathers might be perceived as having similar opinions, lesbians in this study were less silenced with their supportive mothers and no difference in silencing behavior determined with their fathers.

Among the findings of this research, lesbians were adversely impacted by homophobia, to the extent that non-support from valued others was silencing and added to feelings of oppression. The implications of this study direct us to work toward defusing the power of homophobia through education, affirmative media, visibility, mentorships, peer counseling and continuing support for each other as disclosure issues surface. In addition, active participation in sharing our own coming out stories, to affirm our identity as well as normalize the process for others. In examining the coming out process, we learn to respect the differences among us, within us and between our stories...knowing our own realities and having respect for our differences. Through these shared experiences, we begin to know how diverse (and yet, how similar) our life-experience can be.

Again, my appreciation to, and of, the women who provided the information, time, care, energy and love to make this project possible. Women who shared information about themselves so we might continue to grow gay, proud and free.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


thinking to psychological theory and education. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.


