

THE SOCIOLOGY OF LESBIANISM:

FEMALE 'DEVIANCE' AND FEMALE SEXUALITY

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Thesis submitted for the Degree of

Ph.D.

in the

University of London

January 1978

# PAGE NUMBERING AS ORIGINAL

## A B S T R A C T

This thesis presents an analysis of lesbianism within a two-fold perspective - the sociology of deviance (lesbianism as a 'counter-identity') and the sociology of female sexuality (lesbianism as it relates to the role of women in society). Throughout the text, I draw from both perspectives in order to present a contemporary view of lesbianism as a complex, social phenomenon.

Traditionally, academics and others who were concerned with this area have advocated an individual or 'non-problematic' approach, or both. A major contention of this thesis is that prior theories have obscured important, if not necessary, social factors which are relevant to a full understanding of lesbianism.

The methodology is clearly outlined in terms of data collection (interviews, questionnaires and participant observation), the purpose, goals and limitations of the research process.

Three key sociological concepts are put forth and affect the direction of the analysis. They are: lesbian identity, lesbian role and lesbian social organisation. These concepts are drawn from a basic assumption of this thesis - Lesbianism, like sexuality, is a social construction.

As the research process unfolds and the findings are revealed, we are continually confronted with lesbianism as a distinct, yet complex and changing social phenomenon which is directly related to objective social factors and subjective experience. A variety of relationships, organizational roles (of a political and non-political nature) and life-styles emerge from within the contemporary 'lesbian ghetto'. We observe how and why lesbian<sup>s</sup> organize their social lives.

It is hoped that a critical analysis of lesbianism will, not

only challenge certain ideas about lesbianism and the lesbian role in society, but also, point out to the uninformed observer, academic and lay person alike, the complexities which are involved in the understanding of the contemporary lesbian experience, as well as the sociology of lesbianism.

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**The Sociology of Lesbianism:  
Female 'Deviance' and Female Sexuality**

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PART I

LESBIANISM: AN OPEN AREA OF SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Chapter 1

Introduction: Why a Study of Lesbians?

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION: WHY A STUDY OF LESBIANS?

In 1972 during my undergraduate training at Fordham University in New York City, I had a tutorial on the sociology of sexual deviance with one of my professors, Dr. James Brown. At that time, I reviewed the literature in the field and because of the lack of information on lesbianism, I assumed that it was an almost untouched area in sociological research. As a result, a year later, in 1973, I began research for this Ph.D. thesis on the sociology of lesbianism.

Initially, I was very interested in the social factors which explained lesbianism. I looked for answers to questions such as: "Was a woman born a lesbian?", "Did lesbians want to be men?", "Was lesbianism just a sexual preference?", "Were lesbians sick, degenerate or perverted?" ... All of these questions and similar ones emerged from the material that I had read previously. They formed an undercurrent of suspicion which led to further questions concerning the social context of lesbian experiences.

For a full year (1973 - 1974), I worked on an extensive review of literature on lesbianism - in the areas of sociology, social psychology, psychology, and psychiatry. (See Chapter 2, "Lesbianism: A Review of Literature" for a detailed account of this review.) With the exception of two articles<sup>1</sup> which were directly related to the lesbian role, I had

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1. Cf. John H. Gagnon and William Simon, "Femininity in the Lesbian Community" in Social Problems, 15 (1967): 212-221; and also by same authors, "The Lesbian: A Preliminary Overview" in Sexual Deviance: A Reader (New York: Harper & Row, 1967) 247-282. N.B. It must be pointed out that since that time, the researcher has discovered two articles which have special reference to the lesbian role. They are: Gagnon and Simon, "A Conformity Greater than Deviance: The Lesbian" in Sexual Conduct: The Social Sources

found very little substantive work in the area of sociology. My suspicions were well grounded. Other sociological works,<sup>2</sup> which were indirectly related to lesbianism, offered explanations as to why and how this form of deviance was an adaptation to prison life or similar contexts.

At that moment in the research process, I knew why the general public remained uninformed about the sociology of lesbianism - the social context of lesbian behaviour, the social identity of lesbians and the social organization of lesbian activity. This sociology was practically non-existent.

However, we must keep in mind the fact that, oftentimes, the general social reaction to lesbianism may inhibit any interest or concern. Society tends to view the area with distaste, or possibly, disgust. (Yet, it is interesting to note that lesbianism has a certain appeal in sex shops and pornographic literature - any form of social disgust manages to keep well-hidden.)

What little the general public does know about lesbianism (or wants to know) is affected by the attitudes and respective ideologies of community workers, doctors, social workers, psychologists and therapists

1. Continued from p. 4:

of Human Sexuality by the same authors (London: Hutchinson, 1973) 176-216; and Charles McCaghy and James K. Skipper, "Lesbian Behaviour as an Adaptation to the Occupation of Stripping" in Social Problems, 17, 2 (1969), 262-270.

2. Articles: David Ward and Gene Kassebaum, "Homosexuality: A Mode of Adaptation in a Prison for Women", Social Problems, 12, 2 (1964), 159-177; and Rose Giallombardo, "Social Roles in a Prison for Women", Social Problems, 13, 3 (1966), 268-289.

Books: Ward & Kassebaum, Women's Prison: Sex and Social Structure (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1965); and Giallombardo, Society of Women: A Study of a Women's Prison (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1966), and also by the same author, The Social World of Imprisoned Girls: A Comparative Study of Institutions for Juvenile Delinquents (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1974); see especially pp. 146-147, "Lesbianism as a socializing agent".

who perpetuate certain beliefs. Primarily, these individuals uphold the belief that lesbianism is a personal problem, besides being deviant in society (in terms of acceptable, social norms). Their stance emphasizes that lesbianism should be dealt with on an individual level with a sympathetic (or possibly, 'benevolent'), if not an epidemiological concern.

Whether or not we share the above attitudes, we should be aware that these beliefs convey certain ideas about the 'nature of lesbianism' and cloud a sociological understanding of lesbianism-lesbian role, lesbian identity and lesbian social organization. Basically, the problem is this: researchers and 'interested others', who have dominated this area of concern, have been limited by their search for the causes of lesbianism and, therefore, "etiology obscured sociology". Their diligent search neglected important sociological facts. Lesbianism, analyzed solely on the subjective level, was viewed as a fixed entity with arbitrary occurrence on that level.

In academic circles and in therapeutic contexts, lesbianism came to be considered as an individual genetic quirk, a psychological malfunctioning, a mental illness, an immaturity, an abnormality, or simply, perverted. All of these explanations led one to conceptualize notions like "arrested heterosexuality", "dominant mother figure", "dominant father figure", "abnormal hormones", or "faulty genetic composition". These notions were the important causal factors from which the individual roots of lesbianism emerged.

Gradually, I became dissatisfied with all of the above variations in explanations. For me, as a sociologist, they were not only too concerned with etiology, but also, stemmed from similar assumptions about the nature of sexuality in society. (For example, sexuality is unchanging

and static; or sexuality is simply a biological fact of life.)

The following theory which is presented in this thesis questions the validity of previous explanations of lesbianism. Furthermore, I challenge their respective assumptions which I find to be "dubious" in terms of a contemporary understanding of lesbianism.

There are three basic assumptions from which a contemporary theory of lesbianism emerges. They are:

1. Sexuality is viewed as a social construction. In other words, the idea that sexuality is not a fixed biological entity but rather a social fact, which varies in terms of particular cultural and social conditions, is maintained. (Therefore, from this we see that one's biology affects one's sexuality only in so far as it sets up the physical parameters for acceptable social relationships vis-à-vis any given culture or society.)
2. Lesbianism, because it may be identified within the purely 'sexual' sphere of social life (i.e., as a sexual preference for women, a sexual 'deviation', or homosexual activity), may also be analyzed as a social construction.
3. Lesbianism is a unique, complex social phenomenon which, if analyzed sociologically, may be examined in light of lesbian identity, role and social organization.

Following from this initial starting point, the thesis will reveal some interesting findings to the reader. The format of the thesis is direct. In Chapter 2, I will present an analysis and critique of existing theories of lesbianism. Part II, "The Research Process: Methodology and Theoretical Framework", is a discussion of the ways in which I collected my facts and the particular limitations, difficulties, goals and dynamics - all important factors which directed the research process. Also the setting for a sociological perspective on lesbianism leads us to a consideration of the social construction of sexuality, female sexuality and deviance. The most important section of the thesis, Part III, reveals the inter-relationship between the key research concepts and the empirical data. It exposes the intricacies of the contemporary

lesbian experience and lesbianism as a complex social reality. The final chapter offers some conclusions to the reader. (I would like to point out to the reader that there is a Glossary of Terms at the end of the thesis text. This Glossary should prove helpful to you as you read along and should also enable you to gain a quick grasp of important research concepts.)

#### A Final Introductory Note: The Research Imperative

There was a continual tension which was present for me during the entire research process. It was inescapable. Basically, the tension existed for me between the social scientific notion of objectivity which demands detachment, distance and removal from the subject area, in order to be "value free" and the subjective experience of myself as a woman and as a lesbian. It is important, therefore, that the reader is presented with the facts as they have existed. Before you delve into the major bulk of the research, you are aware of the facts, the tensions, the dynamics of this study - the researcher as both "inside" and "outside" the lesbian perspective.

However, I will make explicit to you that I have engaged in a critical analysis of the sociology of lesbianism and that the research process will be clearly defined. I present my observations, my findings, my data ... as a detailed "descriptive account", as well as an 'objective' empirical study. I expose them to you as accurately as possible - as I have observed and recorded them, as other lesbians have observed, and as other lesbians have related their experiences to me. In terms of my own bias (that is, seeing myself more as a woman than as a lesbian sociologist or a sociologist of lesbianism, or however you view me), I have observed the facts.

**PART I: LESBIANISM: AN OPEN AREA OF SOCIOLOGICAL  
RESEARCH**

**Chapter 2      Lesbianism: A Review of Literature**



## CHAPTER 2

### LESBIANISM: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### The Theories Introduced

As I stated previously, I will present in this chapter a review of literature on lesbianism. This was my first area of concern in the research process. For a year, I was involved in analyzing the data, studying the facts and collecting valuable source material. Before I attempted my theoretical and empirical study of lesbianism, I realized the necessity of saturating myself with prior theories which had been presented and put forth as 'working models'.

Four theoretical perspectives which have dealt with lesbianism are: the sociological orientation; the 'general' psychological orientation;<sup>1</sup> the existential,<sup>2</sup> and the political<sup>3</sup>. This chapter is

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1. For the purpose of ease and not clarity, I have decided to include within the area of 'general' psychological orientation both psycho-analytic and psychiatric approaches. Basically, the main emphasis of a general psychological orientation is on the individual. With this in mind I utilize this general category in order to contrast it with the sociological orientation, the social approach. For an interesting exposé of the subtle differences among theories which I consider related to the general psychological orientation, cf. Gay Liberation Pamphlet No. 1, Psychiatry and the Homosexual (London: Gay Information, 1973).
  2. For an existential perspective, cf. deBeauvoir, Simone, The Second Sex (New York: Bantam Books, 1961) for an interesting approach in Chapter XV, "The Lesbian", pp. 379-399.
  3. Political perspectives are found within recent feminist and gay liberation works. Four particular examples are: Sidney Abbott and Barbara Love, Sappho was Right on Woman: A Liberated View of Lesbianism (New York: Stein & Day, 1972); Jill Johnston, The Lesbian Nation: A Feminist Solution (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973); The Boston Women's Health Collective, Our Bodies, Ourselves (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973) especially, "In Amerika, They Call us Dykes: A Boston Gay Collective", pp. 56-73; and Don Millisan, The Politics of Homosexuality (London: Pluto Press, 1973). For the general area of homosexuality and its political implications.

concerned with the first two orientations, the sociological and the general, psychological ones.

A tension exists between these two theoretical levels. On the one hand, sociologists stress deviance, the socialization process and the social labelling process - the social factor approach. On the other hand, those who are interested in psychological explanations emphasize personal problems, neurosis and the subjective response to them - the individual approach. Within both perspectives, but predominantly the psychological one, theories are developed which present lesbianism as a well-defined category of human behaviour in society. In other words, these theories or working models reveal a 'non-problematic' interpretation of lesbianism. At this time, the reader should recall one of the basic assumptions of this thesis - Lesbianism is a unique, constantly changing complex social phenomenon. Presumably, if we assume this to be true, then lesbianism is not easily explained, categorized, or identified. Furthermore, any substantive explanation of lesbianism must be essentially problematic. This is a major contention of the thesis.

The review will begin with an analysis and critique of existing theories. Later, I will develop an analysis of the social organization of lesbians in a large metropolitan area and ground this analysis upon empirical data. We will come to view the lesbian as a social individual with varying psychological needs as well as social functions, responses and interactions within her particular milieu, the lesbian ghetto and society at large - a problematic approach. But first, let us continue with the review.

#### The Sociological Orientation - The Social Factor Approach

Within the sociological perspective on lesbianism, one can cite

three major areas of concentration which have developed during the last three decades. These areas are: statistical, adaptational and interactional. As stated previously, some sociologists have presented lesbianism as a social phenomenon within deviancy theory. This respective presentation will be dealt with primarily within our explanation of the interactional analysis of lesbianism.

### Statistical Model

In 1953, Kinsey et al., in their classic study<sup>4</sup> of female sexuality, found that at the time of marriage, nineteen per cent (19%) of all single women and five per cent (5%) of all women had had a lesbian relationship in which orgasm was experienced. Of the nineteen per cent (19%), half of these women had a lesbian experience with a single partner. Also of the 19%, only twentynine per cent (29%) had three or more partners and four per cent (4%) had more than ten partners.

Through his data, Kinsey explicitly discounts various theories which purport that homosexual activity may be the result of fixations, moral degeneracy, neurosis, psychosis, etc. Therefore, they propose in light of their data that factors leading to homosexual behaviour are:

1. the basic physiologic capacity of every mammal to respond to any sufficient stimulus;
2. the accident which leads an individual into his or her first sexual experience with a person of the same sex;
3. the conditioning effects of such experience;
4. the indirect but powerful conditioning which the opinions of other persons and the social codes may have on an individual's decision to accept or reject this type of sexual contact.<sup>5</sup>

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4. Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy, Clyde E. Martin, Paul H. Gebhard, Sexual Behavior in the Human Female (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Company, 1953).

5. Ibid., p. 447.

The implications of this study provided an insight into sapphic activity as sexual behaviour per se without any prior requisite, i.e., psychological illness ... It is obvious, however, upon reading Kinsey's text that important sociological features are omitted. Nevertheless, these omissions help to direct our research task which is to present a fuller analysis of lesbianism. Clearly, social features, such as the individuated and negotiated meanings of sexual behaviour, the organization of these meanings on the social level, as well as the interplay and co-ordination of the two in a variable process, namely, life in society, do come closer to a presentation of lesbianism as basically, problematic.

### Adaptational

#### Lesbianism in Prison Communities

Two major sociological studies, Ward & Kassebaum<sup>6</sup> and Giallombardo<sup>7</sup> discuss lesbianism within the prison context. Both studies explicitly state that lesbianism exists in the prison situation with its socially constructed and structured barriers to full heterosexual access. Therefore, lesbianism emerges as a direct response to heterosexual deprivation and is sustained within an atmosphere<sup>8</sup> which intends to justify and encourage homosexual adaptation.

In their discussion of the severe impact of imprisonment on women, Ward and Kassebaum point out that an inmate's former identity

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6. David A. Ward and Gene G. Kassebaum, Women's Prison: Sex and Social Structure (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1965); also by the same authors, Cf. "Homosexuality: A Mode of Adaptation in a Prison for Women", Social Problems (1964), 12, 2, pp. 159-77.
  7. Rose Giallombardo, Society of Women: A Study of a Women's Prison, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1966); see also her article, "Social Roles in a Prison for Women", Social Problems (1966), 13, 3, pp. 268-289.
  8. Ward and Kassebaum discuss the development of a folklore of female prisoners. It serves to build up and support this atmosphere. The implication is that turning out (having a homosexual affair in prison) makes prison life "bearable" (p. 75).

(wife, mother ...) outside of prison becomes meaningless, accidental or illusory vis-à-vis new prison labels. In terms of these new labels and in turn, inmate role differentiation, Ward and Kassebaum propose sex role as the distinguishing factor. Therefore, one speaks of Homosexual or Heterosexual; JHT (Jailhouse Turnout) or True Homosexual; and Butch or Femme. Ward and Kassebaum state: "The primary need of a majority of female prisoners is to establish an affectional relationship which brings in prison, as it does in the community, love, interpersonal support, security and social status."<sup>9</sup> This need, therefore, helps to promote homosexuality as a direct response to the pains of imprisonment. Similarly, in her study, Giallombardo discusses the development of an informal homosexual social structure in Alderson, "as representing an attempt to resist the destructive effects of imprisonment by creating a substitute universe within which the inmates may preserve an identity relevant to life outside the prison".<sup>10</sup>

The milieu which is created with the loss of liberty and autonomy reveals lesbian activity, functioning as a motivating force and as a principle of social organization.

In direct relationship to this activity, various degrees of role refinements spin out a whole series of contingent behavioural responses. For example, a distinction is made between a penitentiary turnout and a lesbian. The former responds to heterosexual deprivation through homosexual adaptation, while the latter prefers homosexual relationships, exclusively. Similarly, Ward and Kassebaum speak of a Jailhouse Turnout as opposed to the True Homosexual. They discuss the distinctive roles, butch and femme, in terms of sex relevant behaviour, as well as the normative expectations held by the entire prison population.

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9. Ibid., p. 76.

10. Giallombardo, op. cit., p. 129.

Although Ward and Kassebaum do develop a typology set within the two major role models, butch and femme, they contend that these respective models reflect either the long range commitment to homosexuality or a temporary, situational, solution. This solution represents a response not only to the pains of imprisonment, but also to one's needs, self image and social and sexual relationship to the outside world. Ward and Kassebaum also believe that when inmates speak about loyalty, sharing, trust and friendship, they are talking about these qualities in relationship to a homosexual partner or to a close friend and not, to the inmate community.

The Ward and Kassebaum study emphasizes homosexual adaptation as a major mechanism of adjustment to prison life. However, they do recognize the existence of other modes of adaptations such as rebellion, withdrawal and accommodation. Giallombardo, however, locates the homosexual relationship, the "marital dyad", within the inmate social system as a primary structural unit. This unit or dyad, as Giallombardo terms it, is characterized by calculated solidarity. As a unifying principle, calculated solidarity illustrates the constant, interpretive activity of an inmate as she perceives each situation within her personal interest. Therefore, Giallombardo terms the inmates solidarity or structural orientation as "quasi-collectivistic".<sup>11</sup> The degree of solidarity increases as one goes from distant to nuclear relationships. Through her search for the connecting links between various inmate dyads, Giallombardo's analysis extends far beyond that of Ward and Kassebaum. Giallombardo uses the analogy of a kinship system to show how these social units organize to form relatively stable family units. Also, these units serve to integrate the inmate community into a system of reconciling,

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11. Giallombardo, op. cit., p. 129.

competing and conflicting motives,<sup>12</sup> as well as a system of divergent interests, needs and sentiments. Sex and age are the principal bases of kinship role differentiation. These distinctive roles extend across racial lines as well as social class.

In both studies of prison homosexuality, lesbianism is presented as non-problematic within the inmate setting. The implications do reveal that homosexual behaviour, considered as maladaptive outside of a prison setting, functions as adaptive within the inmate culture. A major deficiency in both of these studies is the implication that the prison structure reflects almost totally the external social structure of society. Cultural definitions do exist and are ascribed to male and female roles, but, do they necessarily determine the direction and focus of the inmate system? One cannot deny the impact of the total institution upon the individual inmates, as neither Ward and Kassebaum nor Giallombardo would deny. However, the question here is one of emphasis. For our authors, the process of turning out for women inmates seems to represent acculturation into patterns which provide support, emotional security ... during a period of time characterized by the removal of a certain behavioural opportunity. On the other hand, could one say that this process implies a certain 'disculturation' or untraining period which makes one temporarily incapable of managing certain features of daily life in the outside world - if and when she returns to it?<sup>13</sup> (i.e., heterosexual involvement for JHT).

As Goffman implies, a tension exists between the institutional world and the home world. This resultant tension has the potential to

12. Ibid., p. 104.

13. Erving Goffman, Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: 1961), p. 23. Goffman also discusses the effects of one's relationship with the outside world, a world which is systematically denied to an inmate.

act as a "strategic leverage in the management of men".<sup>14</sup> Possibly this tension becomes resolved in the inmate's engaging in a homosexual relationship. However, are we then led to believe that this relationship is the result of the importation of cultural values from the heterosexual world?

Both studies do imply that lesbianism as an adaptation to prison life does supply the necessary support and gratification that is peculiar to the needs of women in society. While it is controlled and maintained by the inmate codes, as well as the implicit support of staff, it appears as a functional alternative to 'normal' heterosexual relationships. However, a problem arises. If we assume, as our authors do, that the prison culture reflects the same needs and values as women living in society, then we extend our analysis to this respective existing culture with less deterministic implications. Translated into these terms, the tension of living an 'ultra feminine' life or the pressures to conform to a female stereotype,<sup>15</sup> may cause a woman to reject this culturally imposed role. The tension mounts, therefore, within one's existing universe. A conjecture arises: a woman may become a lesbian as a response to the social demands to conform to the heterosexual image of the 'typical female'. Yet, for our authors and for many, this choice would be non-functional for the individual woman as well as society.

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14. Ibid., p. 24.

15. Most recent feminist publications are adamant about society's demand that women be seen only in terms of housewives, mothers or sex symbols. With the advance of modern technology, there is an increasing awareness of the impact of the media upon our daily lives. Women's liberationists express the belief that the media is one of the greatest perpetrators of the myths about women, especially in terms of this female stereotype. For a good discussion of this point, cf. Hole, Judith and Ellen Levine, Rebirth of Feminism (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1971), III Areas of Action, 6 Media 247-277. This point will be discussed at a later point in the thesis.



### Lesbianism and Stripping

In their brief study,<sup>16</sup> McCaghy and Skipper discuss the occupation of stripping as supportive of lesbian behaviour. They point out three factors which are peculiar to stripteasers and may contribute to their homosexual behaviour. They are:

1. isolation from affective social relationships;
2. unsatisfying relationships with males; and
3. an opportunity structure which allows for a wide range of sexual behaviour.

From the above, it follows that general disillusionment with 'opportunistic males' may turn a stripper toward lesbianism. Lesbianism creates an opportunity for warm, intimate relationships without the problems which accompany relationships with men. Therefore, for McCaghy and Scott, lesbianism is seen as an adaptation to the life of stripping as well as a rejection of those social features which impinge upon her private, personal relationships. Skipper and McCaghy make an analogy between homosexuality which is peculiar to prison life and homosexuality which is characteristic of some strippers. Within a structural framework, they cite homosexuality as an adaptational response to both social situations. However, it seems that in this analogy the key factor is the isolation from affective social relationships. Both the inmate and the stripper have little opportunity for 'meaningful' relationships within their respective settings. Therefore, the implication is that lesbianism becomes a viable option or alternative which is necessary to mitigate feelings of the alienation which seems predominant.

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16. Charles McCaghy and James K. Skipper, "Lesbian Behavior as an Adaptation to the Occupation of Stripping", *Social Problems*, (1969), 17, 2. pp. 262-70. For an insight into the occupation of stripping itself, cf. same authors, "Stripteasers: The Anatomy and Career Contingencies of a Deviant Occupation", *Social Problems* (1970), 17, 3, pp. 391-405.

### Interactional

The most wellknown sociological explanation of Lesbianism is proposed by Simon and Gagnon.<sup>17</sup> Viewing lesbianism within the context of deviance, specifically sexual deviance, these authors realize that the lesbian role by this very context has a unique position in society. However, Simon and Gagnon are more concerned with the conventional patterns of a lesbian as she moves through the various life cycles which confront every woman living in society. In light of this explanation, it is necessary to discuss various points which these analysts stress. They are:

1. lesbianism as a more labile stereotype which is capable of greater integration into the fantasy life of society;
2. lesbians as following conventional feminine patterns in developing their commitment to sexuality;
3. lesbianism as a dynamic and variable process;
4. lesbianism as organized around a collectivity (community) which provides social support, the facilitation of the sex union, a source of ideology and language, as well as community resistance to society;
5. lesbian adjustment as perceived in light of family, role strain, quest for love and self acceptance.

Firstly, Simon and Gagnon discuss the lesbian as a more adaptive stereotype which is capable of "greater integration into the fantasy life of the society".<sup>18</sup> In their discussion, Simon and Gagnon point out that society seems less interested in the repression of homosexuality among

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17. John H. Gagnon and William Simon, Sexual Conduct: The Social Sources of Human Sexuality (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1973); see Chapter Six, "A Conformity Greater than Deviance: The Lesbian", pp. 176-216. Also by same authors, "The Lesbian: A Preliminary Overview", from Sexual Deviance: A Reader (New York: Harper & Row, 1967); "Femininity in the Lesbian Community" from Social Problems (1967), Vol. 15, pp. 212-221.

18. Simon and Gagnon, op. cit. (1973), p. 177.

females than among males.<sup>19</sup> Since men are the main producers of sexual fantasies, they can create the notion of an aroused woman (whether homosexual or heterosexual) and ultimately find sexual stimulation. The myth behind this exposition, as Simon and Gagnon explain, is that the lesbian in the eyes of the 'male fantasy-producers' is necessarily viewed as a potential heterosexual who will respond fully to a male. Society will not accept that for some women sexual relationships with males is an impossibility. An example of this position is stated by a well-known English psychiatrist.

Homosexual relationships between women tend to be more persistent and perhaps more satisfying than their male equivalents. Nevertheless, this solution is always faute de mieux and those lesbians who protest that, for them, this kind of relationship is better than any possible intimacy with a man do not know what they are really missing. There is no doubt that for women who, for whatever reason, have been unable to get married, a homosexual partnership may be a happier way of life than a frustrated loneliness; but this is not to say it can ever be fully satisfying.<sup>20</sup>

Let us digress in order to clarify this position. The basic assumptions of this view are twofold: (1) Sexual activity in order to be completely fulfilling must be heterosexual and, (2) the lesbian is really a latent heterosexual. In this view, the possibility of a lesbian's life as being a way of life, natural and fulfilling is denied. If one believes that all persons are born sexual (not heterosexual or homosexual, just sexual)<sup>21</sup> and that sexual orientation depends upon the

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19. Possibly this lack of interest is indicative of what Hedblom terms the 'low detection' of Lesbianism. Society seems to accept public overtures of affection between two women. Therefore, any affection is seen within the heterosexual context. Hedblom also points out that female sexuality involves more systematic sexual repression. So, it is easier to maintain a "veneer of respectability". Jack Hedblom, "The Female Homosexual ..." (41-64) in McCaffrey, J., The Homosexual Dialectic (Englewood Cliffs, 1972).

20. Anthony Storr, Sexual Deviation (London: Heinemann, 1964).

21. Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, Lesbian/Woman (New York: Bantam Books, 1972), p. 22.

social environment as well as individual personal experience, one can view the lesbian as not only a person who is engaged in a satisfying way of life, but also as a woman who finds herself in a natural way of being and loving.

Simon and Gagnon stress that the social career of a lesbian and her commitment to homosexuality can be understood only by considering the impact of the socialization process upon her as a woman. A corollary of this idea is that female sexuality (heterosexual or homosexual) is typified by a response to love and to sexual stimulation which is not at an emotional distance<sup>22</sup> (person-centred sexuality).

Vis-à-vis male sexuality, female sexuality implies training in love prior to training in sex. In our society, to be female implies non-aggression, dependence, passivity, conformity, emotionality, ad infinitum.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, Simon and Gagnon believe that lesbians are subjected to the same subtle and not so subtle influences which are experienced by their heterosexual counterparts. Yet, in the present time, with the changing position of women in Western society, one is challenged if one speaks of female socialization in such well-defined categories. Presently women are struggling to liberate their minds and men, as well, from sex roles with their various forms of oppressions. Within this context feminists challenge the domestic pattern and many of the all pervasive contingencies. Some women talk in terms of a sexual revolution as a necessary demand for social change.<sup>24</sup> In light of these

22. Jessie Bernard, The Sex Game (London: Leslie Frewin, 1968), p. 62.

23. See Talcott Parsons, "Age and Sex in the Social Structure of the United States", American Sociological Review (1942), 7, 604-616. Here, in a dated article, Parsons tries to expose the various female roles which correspond to women in society. He speaks of the domestic pattern which finalizes in motherhood.

24. Shulamith Firestone, The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for the Feminist Revolution (New York: Bantam Books, 1970).

demands, it can be hypothesized that the need for a more inclusive definition of a lesbian is necessary. Perhaps with the advent of social change for women, the lesbian is caught in the same dilemmas as her heterosexual sisters. How does one as a woman in society become more self-determined, autonomous, independent, and live a viable social existence? This question is not to imply that all women will make this choice, but that the choice is at least available for them.

Clearly Simon and Gagnon's notion of conventional socialization can be extended to include this type of commitment to female sexual identity.

Lesbianism is a dynamic and variable process which is organized around a collectivity of individuals seeking support, the facilitation of sexual union, source of ideology and language, and community resistance. As a result, the community provides an acceptable milieu which can be termed the "individual real group". As Goffman states, "The individual real group is the aggregate of persons who are likely to have suffered the same deprivation as the individual in the group because of having the same stigma".<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the community has a common identity resulting from the social designation of stigma.

Gagnon and Simon imply that the lesbian has less need for this respective community alliance because her homosexuality is not immediately alienating from conventional society. Implicit in this view is the idea that males are more apt to develop and depend on subcultural involvement than females. One author states, "The social context of homosexuality is more complete and developed for males than for females".<sup>26</sup> In terms of

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25. Erving Goffman, Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1963), p. 137.

26. Robert R. Bell, Social Deviance: A Substantive Analysis (Homewood, Illinois: Dorsey Press, 1971), see Chapter 11, "The Female Homosexual", pp. 285-305; quote from p. 286.

lesbian communities, Hedblom speaks of an iceberg phenomenon which lies behind the surface of society and which insulates itself from the pressures of societal stigmatization. All homosexuals, male and female, must experience the need for other people by the very fact of their existence in society. Therefore, for anyone to say that male homosexuals have a greater need for community than their female counterparts perplexes the informed observer. Perhaps, in some areas of the world where homosexual laws were directed against men more diligently than against women, men had a greater need to organize a form of community existence. However, this statement must not cause one to conclude that lesbian social contexts are not as organized or as developed as male homosexual contexts. Lesbian groups may tend to be less accessible, or less recognizable than gay men's groups (which is a typical social pattern in terms of groupings of women vis-à-vis groupings of men). Yet, as this thesis points out, lesbianism is not only highly organized and developed through lesbian social organization, but also presents to the lesbian a variety of life styles, roles and meanings which are contingent upon her particular form of lesbian social organization.

In society, at present, more lesbians and gay men are challenging the social norms of a heterosexual society by "coming out" (proclaiming their homosexuality). Along with this challenge, various social movements (particularly the gay movement and the women's movement) have emerged and have realized the need for people in society to articulate their position within society as clearly their own. Laud Humphreys states:

Women's liberation offers a revolution in life style, a breaking of the norms constraining and channelling men into those things 'masculine' and women into those things 'feminine'. Gay liberation raises the question of relevance for any role whatsoever. In that sense, perhaps it is the most revolutionary of the modern social movements.<sup>27</sup>

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27. Laud Humphreys, Out of the Closets: The Sociology of Homosexual Liberation (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. 77.

However, Humphrey misinterprets women's liberation. Historically, women's liberation has challenged the utility of sex roles in its analysis.

With this emerging denial of role confinement and strict sexual identity, lesbians as well as many women are finding it necessary to identify themselves as a community of women. This need seems to be accelerating at a fast pace. (One has only to look in various newspapers, magazines ... to see the rise in the number of women's groups, collectives ...) In terms of Simon and Gagnon's stance, therefore, we must refute the idea that women have less of a need for self-articulation within the gay community than men. On the contrary, with the development of the women's movement, all women are faced with a challenge to identify within a community.

Simon and Gagnon discuss the lesbian adjustment in terms of family, role strain and the quest for love and self-acceptance. They rightly point out the variations in the patterns of family adjustments, as well as the explicit sense of role strain (which is characteristic of all women who seek lasting work commitments in the form of a career). For the lesbian, as well as the heterosexual women, love becomes problematic. Since such a premium is placed upon one's emotional life, the lesbian searches for another woman who shares in her attitudes towards herself and society.

Self-acceptance is another factor which Simon and Gagnon point out. In the process of coming to terms with one's lesbianism, it becomes increasingly difficult to deal with conventional morality. How does a lesbian organize and maintain a way of life contrary to social norms? Garfinkel says that, "sexuality as a natural fact of life means therefore

sexuality as a natural and MORAL fact of life".<sup>28</sup> Therefore, we must consider that the lesbian's perceptions of the legal, social, political, and psychological definitions of her way of life are necessarily problematic and that she will organize her life around those definitions.

"The stigmatized are rarely immersed only in their own social worlds. They are members of multiple worlds."<sup>29</sup> The lesbian, therefore, has the task of dealing with these multiple worlds with their contingent pressures and demands. Therefore, sociologists must come to terms with their definition and categorizations of lesbians. The task at hand is not simple, but the demands of the moment are clear. It is the aim of this thesis to meet some of these sociological demands and thus, redefine the position of the lesbian in contemporary society.

#### The 'General' Psychological Orientation - The Individual Approach

This section of my presentation of theories of lesbianism is concerned with psychological explanations. A lengthy chronological overview will be presented with an attempt to focus upon the main features of the particular theory. The emphasis of my description will be primarily etiological, rather than epidemiological, though this latter concern has been articulated by various theorists. A critique of existing theories will be developed with the aim to contrast these respective theories within a similar psychological perspective. This perspective and its relationship to the definition of lesbianism in society will be discussed. A subsequent critique of their basic assumptions and methodology will follow.

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28. Harold Garfinkle, Studies in Ethnomethodology (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1967), p. 124.

29. Paul Rock, Deviant Behaviour (London: Hutchinson Press, 1973), p. 104.



Our starting point of explanation will be the Freudian<sup>30</sup> position which many current theorists have elaborated upon or have levelled criticism against.

Generally, in terms of female sexuality, Freud believed that psychosexual development effected more severe inhibitory responses (reaction formations) against sexuality. This effect, therefore, resulted in a greater passivity of the female's instinctual components in contrast with male sexuality.

In particular, Freud proposed that homosexual activity was indicative of sexual immaturity. As a symptom of deep-seated neurosis, homosexuality represented a retrogression to an earlier stage of sexual development. He believed that these activities were, oftentimes, due to a fixation of one's sexual instincts at that prior stage.

Freud discovered the roots of lesbianism in two elements: the Electra Complex and penis envy. The former element, the Electra complex, represented a strong emotional fixation on one's father along with unconscious incestuous attachment on the part of the daughter. The latter element, penis envy, represented an unconscious wish for a penis and the psychic frustration upon the discovery that she was born with a <sup>out</sup> penis.

Freud's ideas on penis envy developed a firmer theoretical base than his ideas on the Electra complex, which became a mere carry over from his theorizing on the Oedipal complex in men. Freud believed that women with penis envy were unable to experience vaginal orgasm during

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30. This position is found primarily in two of Freud's works. In a general sense, cf. Sigmund Freud, M.D., LL.D., Collected Papers, Vol. V, ed. by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1950), Chapter XXIV, "Female Sexuality" for a development of his ideas on female sexuality. In terms of lesbianism, cf., Sigmund Freud, "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Female Homosexuality", International Journal of Psychoanalysis (1920), Vol. I, No. 2, pp. 125-149.

coitus and, therefore, they rejected their vagina. A distinction is clearly made between the clitoris and the vagina in the female sexual development. This particular theory can be termed, appropriately, the Clitoral-Vaginal Transfer theory.

As a young female child grows through various stages of development less emphasis is placed upon her clitoris, the centre of any masturbatory activity. Gradually, the vagina, the main focus of her adult sexual activity during coitus, receives greater emphasis. However, Freud believed that, for the lesbian, the clitoris, the penis substitute, assumed a dominant role in the various stages of development. This clitoral concentration develops sexually from masturbatory activity with oneself into clitoral activity (mutual masturbation) with other women. Psychologically, this concentration represents a masculinity complex in which a woman prefers to think and behave as men. An implication of this theory is that somewhere a woman's sexual development is arrested or immature and that she has not become an authentic feminine woman. Hence, the term "arrested Heterosexuality" is used to explain lesbianism.

Many contemporary theorists of lesbianism have drawn upon Freudian themes, as we will soon discover. Freud's illuminations were articulate, as well as intellectually challenging for his times.

In 1926, Karen Horney<sup>31</sup> discussed the theory that girls renounce their father as a sex object and simultaneously recoil from the feminine role. In light of this, female genital activity results in increasing guilt and "flight from womanhood". The fantasy of castration replaced the fear of vaginal injury. The lesbian's subsequent guilt secures itself in a fictitious male role, while this respective role becomes an increasing

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31. Karen Horney, "The Flight from Womanhood: The Masculinity Complex in Women as viewed by Men and Women", International Journal of Psychoanalysis (1926), Vol. 7, 324-339.

source of tension for her real role - the female one.

After analyzing five overt cases of female homosexuality, Ernest Jones, in his classic article,<sup>32</sup> concluded that lesbianism stemmed from two main factors: an intense oral eroticism and strong sadistic tendencies. In all cases he found that unconscious attitudes towards both parents were always ambivalent. Infantile fixation in terms of the mother (at the oral stage) was always succeeded by a strong, father fixation, whether temporary or permanent in the consciousness.<sup>33</sup> Jones believed that castration fear was only partial in light of "aphanisis" (the threat of total and permanent extinction of the capacity for sexual enjoyment). Faced with aphanisis which is the result of one's inevitable privation (separation from her father), the young girl must renounce either her sex or her incestual attachment to her father. It clearly becomes an impossibility to renounce both. If the father is retained in the incestual object relationship, the relationship is converted into an identification with the father, or rather in Jones' terms, penis complex.

A young girl may choose lesbianism because it is bound up with dread aphanisis. Jones believes the convergence of the inborn factors of oral eroticism and sadism are the central characteristics of homosexual development in women.

The only monograph written on lesbianism was presented by deSaussure<sup>34</sup> in 1929. For deSaussure, the root of lesbianism was a

32. Ernest Jones, "The early development of female sexuality", International Journal of Psychoanalysis (1927), Vol. 8, 459-472.

33. Ibid., p. 461.

34. R. deSaussure, "Homosexual Factors in Neurotic Women", Rev. Fran. Psychoanalytique (1929), 3:50-91, trans. by Hella Freud Bernays (1961), New York: Psychoanalytic Library.

warped bisexuality which could be traced to the fact that a woman was not able to accept her womanhood. This rejection of femininity was conditioned by castration fear and penis envy. The homosexual woman had various responses. She might project her femininity on to her mother and, in turn, to other women who continued to represent her mother. She might exaggerate her own feminine qualities and see herself mirrored in other highly narcissistic women. She might also refuse herself to men, give herself to women and, therefore, know "how to make men suffer".<sup>35</sup> DeSaussure believes that this refusal of men and subsequent alliance with women facilitates a lesbian's identification with her ideal. Aggression represents the ideal as opposed to the wish to be a male. deSaussure claims never to have seen the latter wish.

In her theory of female sexuality, Helene Deutsch<sup>36</sup> placed constant emphasis upon the psychosomatic interdependence of psychologic and physiologic processes. In her discussion of the psychological determinants of lesbianism, she divided lesbians into two groups: (1) those with masculine traits, and (2) those who exhibit no signs of abnormality and whose bodily constitutions are completely feminine. All women, heterosexual and homosexual, have similar experiences in terms of their initial sexual responses. At each stage of development feminine, passive attitudes with the resultant change of love object from the mother to the father were presented. However, any swing towards activity may spark off the masculinity complex and neurotic consequences may ensue (i.e., lesbianism). Consistently, Deutsch presents adult feminine sexuality

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35. Ibid.

36. Helene Deutch, "On Female Homosexuality" in The Psychoanalytic Reader, Vol. I (New York: International Universities Press (1948), pp. 237-260; or cf. by the same author, "Homosexuality in Women", International Journal of Psychoanalysis, Vol. 14 (1933), 34-56. For a general work which deals with female sexuality, cf. The Psychology of Women: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation (Vol. I and II) (New York: Grune & Stratton, 1944); see Chapter 19, Vol. I, "Homosexuality" for her later ideas on lesbianism.

(heterosexuality) as a uniform development toward the resolution of and mastering of the Oedipal complex.

In 1933, Lampl-de Groot<sup>37</sup> described the possible origin of lesbianism in a young girl's coital fantasy with her mother. This fantasy symbolized a blow directed at her mother and satisfied her narcissistic conceit and vindictiveness. However, the lesbian did not gratify her sensual love. Later in her development this fantasy was eroticized and became the basis for establishing a homosexual attitude.

Also in 1933, Rado<sup>38</sup> theorized that lesbianism has a masochistic element or core which is derived basically from castration anxiety. Men become a source of danger for the masochistic woman, who in her neurosis, defends herself with various mechanisms - flight or combat. The mechanism of flight if extreme will lead to lesbianism. A deep sense of guilt is peculiar to lesbians who live in constant fear of being exposed. Rado believed that this all encompassing guilt which is derived from one's castration fears is the source of the perversion itself.

In 1945, Fenichel<sup>39</sup> wrote that two factors should be considered as primary in a consideration of lesbianism. They were (1) the repulsion from heterosexuality which originates in the castration complex (caused during first sight of the penis), and (2) the attraction to women based upon an early fixation on the mother. Fenichel claimed that both factors appeared to balance one another and aid in the formation of female homosexuality.

37. J. Lampl-de Groot, "Problems of Femininity", Psychoanalytic Quarterly (1933), Vol. 2, 489-518.

38. S. Rado, "The Fear of Castration in Women", Psychoanalytic Quarterly (1933), Vol. 2, 425-475.

39. O. Fenichel, The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis (New York: Norton, 1945).

Smiley Blanton<sup>40</sup> in 1947 described phallic women, or lesbians, as feminine in appearance and attitudes and desirous of appearing as one involved in a heterosexual relationship. He contended that with the resolution of the problem of penis envy and the castration complex, the lesbian is likely to achieve an ideal psychosexual adaptation.

Included in an anthology<sup>41</sup> on homosexuality, an article by Jane McKinnon, a lesbian, described a fourfold typology which she believed to be existing in the homosexual world. Her first two types are the large aggressive type and the small feminine type. McKinnon feels that both types are completely homosexual in designation and want to dominate relationships, as well as to assume a man's role. The third type is not a "real lesbian" and McKinnon describes her as a weak individual who will accept sex from a woman, if and when a man is not available. The fourth type is the woman who frequents clubs and enjoys the "bar life". McKinnon concludes her exposition with a plea for the acceptance of lesbians by the heterosexual world.

Interestingly enough, Charles Berg who edited the respective anthology, commented about McKinnon's article in a manner which seemed to challenge her analysis. He states:

While being grateful to this patient for many firsthand revelations about homosexuality and indeed about sexuality and psychology in general, I think we should realize that she is more than homosexual. She is suffering from a psychoneurosis. Her unconscious phantasy is riddled with morbid guilt feelings. Indeed, this guilt emanating from her Oedipus Complex may be the very factor responsible for the repression of heterosexual patterns and the diversion of the libido into homosexual channels. The guilt is then displaced onto the conscious homosexual tendencies in the familiar manner.<sup>42</sup>

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40. Smiley Blanton, "Phallic Women", Psychoanalytic Quarterly, (1947), Vol. 16:2, 214-224.

41. Charles Berg and A. M. Krich, Homosexuality: A Subjective and Objective Investigation (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958). See "I am a homosexual woman" reported by Jane McKinnon, pp. 63-71.

42. Ibid., p. 71.

In 1951, Ford and Beach<sup>43</sup> put forward a cross-cultural and cross species, as well as an anthropological and psychoanalytic investigation of sexual behaviour. These analysts placed a general discussion of homosexuality within an historical and cultural setting. Forty-nine societies out of seventy-six societies which they studied tolerated homosexuality. They concluded that homosexuality in animals and in humankind is based upon an "innate bisexuality". Further, they proposed that human homosexual tendencies have a definite biological basis and appear to exist in a large majority of both sexes. However, these tendencies may never be recognized and overt homosexual behaviour may never occur.

Wilhelm Reich,<sup>44</sup> a very controversial psychologist, did not develop a well-defined theory of homosexuality within his theory of sex economy. However, in his book, The Sexual Revolution, he did point out some interesting observations. For Reich, homosexuality, whether it was considered congenital or acquired, was an activity which "does nobody any harm".<sup>45</sup> According to Reich, homosexuality is, in the vast majority of cases, a result of a very early inhibition of heterosexual love. He believed that homosexuality could be reduced only by establishing all the necessary prerequisites for a "natural love life among the masses". Lastly, Reich stated, "Until this goal can be achieved it must be considered a mode of sexual gratification alongside the heterosexual one and should (with the exception of seduction of adolescents and children) not be punished".<sup>46</sup> As we see, his views have a certain moralistic

43. Clellan S. Ford and Frank Beach, Patterns of Sexual Behaviour, (London: Methuen, 1965).

44. Wilhelm Reich (trans. by Theodore P. Wolfe), The Sexual Revolution toward a Self-Governing Character Structure (London: Vision Press Ltd., 1951).

45. Ibid., p. 208.

46. Ibid., p. 211.

overtone.

Bergler<sup>47</sup> considered homosexuality a neurotic mental disease which could be cured through psychoanalysis. Female homosexual relationships represented complicated variations of the mother-child relationship. In terms of etiology, Bergler considered the "oral masochistic conflict" of the preoedipal child to be of primary importance. The child retains a deep hatred for its mother and simultaneously possesses a repressive libidinous mechanism which translates the child's hate into a sexual love of the mother. Basically, lesbianism represents one of the many pathological variations of an unresolved masochistic attachment to the mother.

In 1952, Klein et al.<sup>48</sup> discussed female homosexuality as being intricately involved with the primary phases of libidinal development. The pre-oedipal libido of the child goes towards both parents and vacillates (she desires both equally). All libidinous desires are interwoven with oral, anal and urethral fantasies. The oral fixation from early infancy on the breast (particularly the nipple) transfers libidinal interests to the father's penis. Therefore the child identifies with the father, yet she feels sexually attracted to the mother. Under these influences, the girl desires to take the father's place and these resultant masculine reactions may lead to homosexuality. The Kleinian view proposed that "such fixations of the oral phase with all its fantasies and anxieties lead to profound disturbances in the genital functioning".<sup>49</sup> (Homosexuality was an example of this.)

In his book, *Female Homosexuality*,<sup>50</sup> Dr. Frank Caprio describes

47. E. Bergler, Neurotic Counterfeit Sex (New York: Grune & Stratton, 1951).

48. Melanie Klein, P. Hermann, S. Isaacs and J. Reviere, Developments in Psychoanalysis (London: Hogarth Press, 1952).

49. Ibid.

50. Frank Caprio, Female Homosexuality: A Psychodynamic Study of Lesbianism (London: Icon Books, 1966).



lesbianism as a symptom "and not a disease entity". Lesbianism is the result of a deep seated neurosis which involves narcissistic gratifications and sexual immaturity. He then goes on to say, "It also represents a neurotic defense mechanism for feelings of insecurity - a compromise involving one's relationship to one's parents during childhood".<sup>51</sup> Considered by Caprio to be sexually immature, the lesbian falls in love with herself "in love with love".<sup>52</sup>

In 1955, Harold Abrahamson<sup>53</sup> utilized drug therapy in his analysis of a woman who was fearful of her homosexual tendencies. With the aid of a minimal dose of Lysergic Acid Diethylamide, better known as LSD, and in an extended therapeutic session, Abrahamson found that the drug functioned as an ego enhancement and that his patient was able to reconstruct her fear of being a homosexual. The integrative process of the ego became more manifest and the woman was able to lose her fear of becoming a lesbian.

Wittenberg<sup>54</sup> in 1956 proposed a theory that lesbianism was a "transitory solution of a partially split ego". He presented a case history of a twenty-year old married lesbian who experienced intense guilt over her homosexual feelings. He sought to explain lesbianism in relationship to this particular case. For Wittenberg, lesbianism represented a transitory solution to or maintenance of megalomaniac wishes. Lesbianism was always accompanied with partial regression and indicated a certain amount of pathological narcissism.

51. Ibid., p. 129.

52. Ibid., p. 128.

53. Harold A. Abrahamson, "Lysergic Acid Diethylamide (LSD-25) as an Adjunct to Psychotherapy with Elimination of Fear of Homosexuality", Journal of Psychology (January 1955), Vol. 39, 127-155.

54. Rudolph Wittenberg, "Lesbianism as a Transitory Solution of the Ego", Psychoanalytic Review (1956), Vol. 43:3, 348-357.

Also in 1956, Catherine Bacon<sup>55</sup> proposed that lesbianism and masculine identification in females may serve as a protection against anxiety. She discusses the dynamics of homosexuality as being an inherent tendency to reduce triangular relationship (such as mother, father and child) to a two-way relationship (when the girl gives up the father). Lesbianism, therefore, represents a regressive movement from the father to an oedipal relationship with the mother. This respective relationship reflects real love for the young girl. However, when this relationship is broken up by the father, the young girl is unable to go to another man because she is fearful of retaliation from the father.

By utilizing psychological projective techniques (Rorschach and the Figure Drawing List), Armon<sup>56</sup> hypothesized that lesbians would be rated higher than heterosexual women in such characteristics as: (1) dependence, (2) hostile-fearful conception of the feminine role, (3) disparagement of men, (4) hostile-fearful conception of the male role, (5) confusion and conflict in sexual identification, and (6) limited personal social relations. Armon points out that in a majority of cases lesbians cannot be distinguished from heterosexuals on the basis of projective test performances. Therefore, Armon suggests that lesbianism is not a clinical entity. However, characteristic 2 - (hostile-fearful conception of the feminine role) received strong support from the lesbians. Our analyst attributes this finding to the conception of lesbianism as "a defense against hostility, fear and guilt in relationship to women".<sup>57</sup>

55. Catherine Bacon, "A developmental theory of female homosexuality" in S. Lorand (Ed.), Perversions: Psychodynamics and Therapy (New York: Random House, 1956), pp. 131-159.

56. Virginia Armon, "Some personality Variables in overt female homosexuality", Journal of Projective Techniques (1960), Vol. 24, 292-309.

57. Ibid., p. 307.

In 1963, Socarides<sup>58</sup> presented a historical development of lesbianism within various theoretical and clinical perspectives. Initially, however, Socarides posits the fact that the inattention of scientists to a sincere interest in lesbianism is a clear indication of the phall-centric culture in which we live. His summary of contemporary theories on lesbianism is developed under seven categories: (1) constitutional vs. acquired factors; (2) concept of bisexuality; (3) Freud's contribution; (4) developmental factors; (5) contributions from ego psychology; (6) the relationship of female homosexuality to other perversions and psychoses, including nosological considerations, and (7) therapy.<sup>59</sup>

A study which associated lesbians with specific types of family constellations was carried out by Cornelia Wilbur.<sup>60</sup> She found that the most common form of family constellation included "a domineering, hostile and antiheterosexual mother and a weak detached and pallid father".<sup>61</sup> Wilbur believed that the lesbian had an intense oedipal relationship with her father and subsequently adopted lesbianism as a warding off of incestuous desires. Her homosexual relationships were characterized by a great desire for love, ambivalence, hostility and anxiety. Wilbur expressed that the lesbian's unstable transitory relationships did not contribute to her need for stability and love.

In another study with a similar concern (family constellations),

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58. C. W. Socarides, "The Historical Developments of Theoretical and Clinical Concepts of Overt Female Homosexuality", American Psychoanalytic Association Journal (1963), Vol. 9:1, pp. 386-414.

59. Ibid., p. 387.

60. C. B. Wilbur, "Clinical Aspects of Female Homosexuality" in J. Marmor (Ed.), Sexual Inversion: The Multiple Roots of Homosexuality (New York: Basic Books, 1965), pp. 268-281.

61. Ibid., p. 276.

Bene<sup>62</sup> compared a group of thirty-seven lesbians with eighty married women. She discovered that lesbians were generally more hostile towards and afraid of their fathers than married women. Lesbians experienced that their fathers were weak and incompetent. Also, the results showed a "relationship between the parents wish for a son and the homosexuality of their daughter".<sup>63</sup>

In the same year, 1965, Kaye Romm<sup>64</sup> presented some interesting observations about lesbianism. Romm did not consider homosexuality an illness but a deviation from normal psychosexual development or a "psychosexual aberration".<sup>65</sup> In a clinical setting, lesbians seem less disturbed than male homosexual patients and also seek psychiatric help less frequently. Various etiological factors were considered by Romm as partial explanations of lesbianism. He cited castration fears, penis envy, early traumatic sexual experiences, regression to fetal tie with one's mother, oedipal problems, and cultural factors as all causing feelings of inferiority about one's sex.

In 1967, Kaye et al.<sup>66</sup> made a comparative study of twenty-four female homosexual patients in psychoanalysis and twenty-four female non-homosexual patients. Five conclusions were stated:

1. "Homosexuality in women rather than conscious volitional preference is a massive adaptational response to a crippling inhibition of normal heterosexual development."<sup>67</sup>
2. Lesbians tend to be affected by their parent's discouragement of feminine developmental attitudes. The fear of pregnancy may develop within these circumstances.

62. Eva Bene, "On the Genesis of Female Homosexuality", British Journal of Psychiatry (1965), Vol. 3, pp. 815-821.

63. Ibid., p. 821.

64. Kaye Romm, "Sexuality and Homosexuality in Women" in Judd Marmor (Ed.), Sexual Inversion: The Multiple Roots of Homosexuality (New York: Basic Books, 1965), pp. 282-301.

65. Ibid., p. 298.

66. H. E. Kaye, S. Berl, J. Clare, M. Eleston, B. Gershwin, P. Gershwin, L. Kogan, C. Torda and C. Wilbur, "Homosexuality in Women", Arch. Gen. Psych. (1967), Vol. 17, pp. 626-634.

67. Ibid., p. 633.

3. There are usually "early prodromata of potential homosexual adaptation which should alert parents and family physicians".<sup>68</sup>  
(At this point, the authors outline these traits which can vary from being too aggressive in childhood to developing crushes on women during puberty.)
4. The fathers of lesbians tended to be more puritanical exploitative and feared by their daughters as well as overly possessive. The fathers also discouraged their daughters development as an adult.
5. In terms of therapy, there is a five per cent probability of significant improvements in women with this syndrome who present themselves for treatment and remain in it.<sup>69</sup>

In 1971, Kaye<sup>70</sup> studied non-patient lesbians and proposed that in terms of etiology, a close-binding father is to lesbianism as a close-binding mother is to male homosexuality. As implied in his previous study, this author found that clinically, the lesbian is capable of significant improvement and she can be redirected towards heterosexuality.

In a series of four related articles, Kenyon compared one hundred and twenty-three lesbians with the same number of heterosexual women in terms of psychological test results,<sup>71</sup> physique and physical health,<sup>72</sup> social and psychiatric differences,<sup>73</sup> and sexual development, attitudes and experiences.<sup>74</sup>

68. Ibid.

69. Ibid.

70. H. E. Kaye, "Lesbian Relations", Sexual Behavior (April 1971), pp. 80-87.

71. F. E. Kenyon, "Studies in Female Homosexuality: Psychological Test Results", Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology (1968), Vol. 32, pp. 510-513.

72. F. E. Kenyon, "Physique and Physical Health of Female Homosexuals", Journal of Neurology and Neurosurgery and Psychiatry (1968), Vol. 31:5, pp. 487-489.

73. F. E. Kenyon, "Studies in Female Homosexuality. IV: Social and Psychiatric Aspects", British Journal of Psychiatry (1968), Vol. 114, pp. 1337-1350.

74. F. E. Kenyon, "Studies in Female Homosexuality: Sexual Development, Attitudes and Experience", British Journal of Psychiatry (1968), Vol. 114, pp. 1337-1350.

After examining psychological test results (from the Cornell Medical Index Health Questionnaire and the Maudsley Personality Inventory), Kenyon established the fact that lesbians rated much higher in neuroticism than their heterosexual counterparts. However, Kenyon does suggest the need for further investigation into this area to determine whether lesbianism is indicative of general emotional instability or a secondary emotional reaction.

Physically, lesbians were found to be heavier, to have bigger busts, waists and hips. However, lesbians were recorded to be shorter than the heterosexuals. Medically, their histories were similar. However, Kenyon does point out that lesbians tended to experience more premenstrual tension and more resentment of menstruation.

Kenyon's social and psychiatric data showed that more lesbians had a university education, while at the same time they had a poor work record. Lesbians tended to reject religion more than the control group. More lesbians had been in the Armed Forces or Police and fewer were members of a "Women's Institute". In terms of family constellations, lesbians had poor relationships with their mothers than with their fathers. In light of these findings, more mothers of lesbians had had a positive psychiatric record. Kenyon found that fewer lesbians had related any experience of a happy childhood. In terms of the entire group studied, Kenyon found positive psychiatric histories for nineteen per cent of the lesbians and six per cent for the control group. The most common complaint among the lesbians was depression.

In the final report of Kenyon's comprehensive study, comparisons were made between the exclusively homosexual group (EHG), the predominantly Homosexual Group (PHG) and the controls. Kenyon found the EHG to be generally more stable than the PHG. The EHG was found to have been

less neurotic, had better physical health, had happier childhoods, had better relationships with their mothers, had experienced fewer guilt feelings, and had less religious conflicts than the PHG. As a result of his findings, Kenyon suggests that the EHG seemed to have stabilized themselves as homosexuals and therefore, made an adequate adjustment to their state. However, Kenyon also points out that, all in all, there did appear to be significant differences between the heterosexual controls and the lesbian group as a whole.

In her discussion of the lesbian personality, Hopkins<sup>75</sup> gathered data from a group of twenty-four lesbians and twenty-four heterosexual women, matched for age, intelligence and professional or educational background. She concludes, through an analysis of her findings, that the neurotic label is not necessarily applicable to the lesbian personality. She suggests the following terms as appropriate descriptions of this respective personality (in comparison with the female heterosexual): more independent, more resilient, more reserved, more dominant, more bohemian, more self-sufficient and more composed.

In 1969, Saghir and Robins<sup>76</sup> interviewed fifty-seven self-admitted lesbians and the same number of controls with a view to investigate developmental, behavioural, psychiatric and sociological aspects. By analyzing the emotional attachments (both homosexual and heterosexual) and the "cognitive rehearsals" (of these attachments), Saghir and Robins found lesbians to be relatively stable. Because of the presence of psychologic homosexual responses in the sample, the authors suggested a

75. June H. Hopkins, "The Lesbian Personality", British Journal of Psychiatry (1969), Vol. 115, pp. 1433-1436.

76. Marcel T. Saghir and Eli Robins, "Homosexuality. I: Sexual Behavior of the Female Homosexual", Arch. Gen. Psy. (February 1969), Vol. 20, pp. 192-201.

modification of the Kinsey scale that would include the use of both the psychologic responses and overt experiences as criteria. Neither should be used alone.

Again, in 1971, Saghir and Robins<sup>77</sup> studied fifty-seven homosexual non-patients with matched controls and discovered that there were no significant differences in the prevalence of neurotic disorders between the two groups. In their study lesbians were found to be more susceptible to depressions, suicide and alcohol abuse than the controls. However, they concluded that lesbians generally "functioned adequately and were productive with no significant disabilities".<sup>78</sup>

An interesting study by Kremer and Rifkin<sup>79</sup> was conducted in order to test for the reversed oedipal formulation. This would appear as a family constellation which included a close-binding father and a dominant, puritanical mother. Interviews were carried out with twenty-five lesbian girls between the ages of twelve and seventeen. They had not sought treatment and were attending school from a predominantly lower socioeconomic area. The reversed oedipal formulation was not found. Rather, the girl's "fathers were hostile, exploitative, detached and absent, while the mothers were overburdened and hardly adequate for their responsibilities".<sup>80</sup> In conclusion, Kremer and Rifkin suggest that "homosexuality may be a final common behavioral pathway rather than a single

77. Marcel T. Saghir and Eli Robins, "Male and Female Homosexuals: Natural History", Compr. Psychiatry (1971), Vol. 12, pp. 503-510.

78. Ibid., p. 510.

79. Malvina Kremer and Alfred H. Rifkin, "The Early Development of Homosexuality: A Study of Adolescent Lesbians", American Journal of Psychiatry (1969), Vol. 126, pp. 91-96.

80. Ibid., p. 133.



entity with a single etiology".<sup>81</sup>

Thompson et al.<sup>82</sup> used the Adjective Check List and the Semantic Differential Test in their study of 84 non-patient lesbians. No significant differences were found between the lesbians and the controls, with one exception. The lesbians were found to rate higher in the A.C.L. scale that measures self-confidence.

In 1972 Charlotte Wolff, an Austrian-born psychiatrist, presented an authoritative account of lesbianism in her book, Love Between Women.<sup>83</sup> Dr. Wolff believes that the search for a theory is an intuitive process which can be extended into the biological, psychological and social realms. Dr. Wolff begins with the idea that the lesbian possesses a labile gender identity.<sup>84</sup> This identity might be interpreted as a sign of immaturity or arrested development. However, Dr. Wolff does not share in this view. On the contrary, she states: "The retention of the capacity to change feminine into masculine feelings and attitudes and vice versa is one of the assets of female homosexuality because it makes for variety and richness in personal relationships."<sup>85</sup>

Emotional incest with one's mother is for Dr. Wolff the essence of lesbianism. In light of this, while the lesbian is considered mature in her desire for independence in face of male superiority, she may also be considered immature in her desire to re-establish "a lost paradise, the

81. Ibid., p. 134.

82. N. D. Thompson, B. R. McCandless and B. R. Strickland, "Personal Adjustment of Male and Female Homosexual and Heterosexuals", Journal of Abnormal Psychology (1971), Vol. 78, pp. 237-240.

83. Charlotte Wolff, Love Between Women (London: Duckworth) 1971.

84. Dr. Wolff posits no fixed gender identity (qualities assigned with either sex). Taking a Freudian position, Wolff also posits a bisexual foundation for all people. Particularly for the woman, her sex organs retain a masculine part, the clitoris which affects the whole of her sexual life. As a result, she retains a disposition to bisexuality and "therefore homosexuality is built into every woman by nature". (p. 60)

85. Ibid., p. 46.

the union with her mother".<sup>86</sup>

Dr. Wolff proceeds to analyze personality traits between lesbians and comparable controls. Aggressiveness, the key to the lesbian personality is reflected in both the negative (violent behaviour) and positive (sense of freedom, emotional curiosity ...) sides of this characteristic trait. Socially, lesbians were found to be shy and awkward in their relations at work and with friends. Wolff then goes on to describe lesbians as a minority group which is subjected to social criticism and abuse. In conclusion, various lesbian biographies are presented and Dr. Wolff comments on them.

In 1972 Siegleman<sup>87</sup> studied eight-four non-patient lesbians and compared them with heterosexual women. Lesbians had higher scores on tendermindedness and lower scores on depression, submission and anxiety. Siegleman failed to find lesbians more neurotic than female heterosexuals.

A small sample of lesbians and heterosexual controls were analyzed by Loney<sup>88</sup> in 1972. She found lesbians to be "married" to other women or involved in healthy continuing interpersonal relationships. Loney felt that this finding could further the belief that lesbians are less neurotic and more socialized than homosexual men.<sup>89</sup>

In Lesbianism: A Study of Female Homosexuality,<sup>90</sup> David Rosen presents lesbianism as a valid way of life rather than as a psychiatric disorder. Implicit in his theory is the belief that mental health

86. Ibid., p. 60.

87. M. Siegleman, "Adjustment of Homosexual and Heterosexual Women", British Journal of Psychiatry (1972), Vol. 120, pp. 477-481.

88. J. Loney, "Background Factors, Sex Experience and Attitudes toward Treatment in two 'Normal' Homosexual Samples", Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology (1972), Vol. 38, pp. 57-65.

89. Ibid., p. 62.

90. David H. Rosen, Lesbianism: A Study of Female Homosexuality, (Springfield, Illinois, Charles C. Thomas, 1974).

professions should discontinue their stigmatization of lesbians and thus contribute to the social and psychological welfare of the persons involved.

From analyses of twenty-five lesbian case studies and of profiles from the Adjective Check List, Rosen concludes that lesbians have a fearful conception of the feminine role. In a majority of his subjects, Rosen found lesbianism to be "a defense against hostility, fear and guilt in relation to early significant, but rejecting maternal objects".<sup>91</sup> The only difference between the lesbians and the heterosexual women was the choice of the love object. Rosen concludes that the majority of lesbians are mentally healthy and do not desire to be heterosexual.

This final section, concerning psychological theories, has been exceedingly long and involved. As a result, you may ask the question, "Why is a detailed presentation of psychological theories necessary if the basic orientation of this thesis is sociological?" I believe that it is of critical importance that both the interested observer and the sociologist understand and be aware of these respective theories.

Therefore, let us direct ourselves to three major areas of concern:

1. Psychological theories in terms of etiology, contrasting beliefs and methodology.
2. Psychological theories and their resultant effects upon the lesbian in society and related basic assumptions.
3. Psychological conceptions of sex roles.

Generally, most psychological theories of homosexuality,<sup>92</sup> particularly of lesbianism, have been concerned with etiology and observable

91. Ibid., p. 71.

92. Male homosexuality has received a more extensive coverage in both psychological and sociological literature than lesbianism has received. For proof of this fact, cf. Martin Weinberg and Alan P. Bell, Homosexuality: An Annotated Bibliography (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

behavioural patterns. Within a different perspective, sociologists involve themselves in an investigation of sexual conduct, "behavior which expresses a norm or an evaluation of behavior as prescribed or evaluated by the group".<sup>93</sup>

Past psychological theorists<sup>94</sup> of sexuality focused upon the individual role in the reproductive process and the resultant sexual development.

In light of this view, explications of the roots and causes of homosexuality, a deviation from this normal developmental process, became the order of the day. To posit sexual behaviour was to posit heterosexuality and to deny the validity of homosexuality. Particular theories of lesbianism grew out of these articulations of sexual deviation. Yet within this frame of reference psychologists arrived at their conclusions in myriad ways. As we have just seen, various etiological considerations do oftentimes contradict one another. For example, for Jones, oral eroticism and sadism were primary in the development of lesbianism. However, Rado believed that lesbianism had masochistic roots. Fenichel saw the lesbian as recoiling from her female role, while Bergler considered an aggressive hatred of her mother as primary. In terms of family constellations, Wilbur discovered a hostile, domineering mother and a weak detached father as important factors in the development of lesbianism. On the other hand, Kaye saw a close-binding father at the root of a homosexual adaptation. Recently Rosen articulated the view that lesbianism

93. Ernest W. Burgess, "The Sociologic Theory of Psychosexual Behavior" in Paul Hoch and Joseph Zubin (Eds.), Psychosexual Development in Health and Disease (New York: Grune & Stratton, 1949), 227-243. Here Burgess in an article, still relevant, spins out the conception of sexual behaviour as human conduct defined by society and other contingent social factors.

94. Cf., for example, Havelock Ellis, Psychology of Sex (London: Heinemann, 1944), Chapter II, "Biology of Sex", pp. 7-69). Also, Sander Rado, "An Adaptational View of Sexual Behavior" in Hoch and Zubin, op. cit., pp. 159-189.

is a way of life. Caprio understood lesbianism to be a deep seated neurosis. The contradictions do exist, but as Freud said, "It is not for psychoanalysis to solve the problem of homosexuality".<sup>95</sup>

After considering etiology and various contrasting views, we must examine the types of methodology which psychologists have utilized. Obviously the types vary. However, if we consider the subjects of their research, we soon discover that there are two existing categories of lesbians who are analyzed, non-patient and patient. After looking at case histories, patient reports .. psychologists have derived theories from these observations. However, one problem does exist. How do these samples reflect the attitudes, feelings, development of those lesbians who never seek psychological or psychiatric help and who are capable of presenting themselves as normal members of society?

If we look at the non-patient studies, similar problems do occur. In various studies (Wolff, Bene, Hopkins) samples were taken from various organizations which allow their members to be analyzed and tested with the aim to better understand their respective members, their problems .. However, from my own observations in this area, these groups are themselves varied in organization, roles, identities, and may not be representative of the lesbian non-patient population. In fact, as this thesis will point out, it is very difficult to speak in terms of a "typical lesbian". The groups within which a lesbian may identify with and socialize in differ considerably in terms of age, class, ideology, roles and social organization.

It is important to be aware that many lesbians, in searching for an understanding of themselves, have sought out various psychological theories, whether in their original form or popularized versions. Soon they discover that they are "the medical psychiatric scapegoat" and that

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95. Freud, op. cit., (1948), p. 230.

"every homosexual act is the symptom of mental disease".<sup>96</sup> Gradually, the lesbian may accept these definitions, as a given, and attempt to find a meaningful life for herself in a hostile society. Psychological theories more than any other explanations have effected the illness category of lesbianism in modern society.

The phenomenon of lesbianism has been glossed over in view of these psychological theorists whose main goal has been the rooting out of homosexuality from contemporary social life. Defined and redefined by psychologists, the phenomenon of lesbianism has posed the question, "Why the Deviation?" and not "Why the necessity of such well defined sex roles which, oftentimes, become exaggerated and socially constraining for some?" I do not suggest that certain conceptions of roles are not based upon obvious biological constraints. I will suggest, however, that social conceptions of "male" and "female" are not arbitrary, if one considers the interplay between biology and culture and its effects upon the behavioural, emotional, and social development of men and women.<sup>97</sup>

In their search for various root <sup>U</sup><sub>A</sub> cases of lesbianism, psychologists have posited a paradigm of sexual relationships, heterosexual love. They do not consider lesbianism as a valid, or normal, way of life in contemporary society. At times, as two authors suggested,<sup>98</sup> lesbianism may become a political stance from which one articulates the absurdity of sex role polarities (which many psychologists perpetuate to a greater or lesser degree). The lesbian stance does dovetail with <sup>the role</sup> changing of all women in Western societies. The following thesis points out this fact. However,

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96. Thomas S. Szasz, The Manufacture of Madness (St. Albans, Paladin, 1971), p. 272.

97. See Betty Youburg, Sexual Identity: Sex Roles and Social Change (London: John Wiley & Sons, 1974) for an interesting discussion of these effects.

98. Abbot and Love, op. cit., p. 16.

it is the contention of this thesis to show the lesbian as a woman who has various social and psychological needs, who has the potential for meaningful social relationships as a social individual, and who is living a viable lifestyle with contingent social responsibilities.

**PART II. THE RESEARCH PROCESS: METHODOLOGY AND**  
**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

**Chapter 3      Methods: The Sociologist as Data  
Collector, the Lesbian Role versus  
The Research Role**



### CHAPTER 3

#### METHODS: THE SOCIOLOGIST AS DATA COLLECTOR, THE LESBIAN ROLE VERSUS THE RESEARCH ROLE

As I stated previously, when I began this "sociological work", as Becker terms it, I was aware that the sociology of lesbianism was an open area of research, because it had received scant attention from sociologists. There may be many factors which contribute to this lack of adequate sociological research into lesbianism. I would suggest that there are two major issues which are sociologically, as well as methodologically significant.

Firstly, any sociological research, which relates to women, has traditionally centred upon analysing women's role within a relational context, either in terms of men, or society, in general (i.e., within the family, sex role theory, socialization of children, etc., ...). However, recently some sociologists have become actively involved in redefining this context and extending an analysis beyond the original "male-defined" conceptualizations.<sup>1</sup> However, in light of this current redefinition of women's role, lesbianism has been excluded from the analysis. This exclusion is not surprising because lesbianism has been viewed by society and sociologists as being contrary to the traditional female role. As a result, an analysis of lesbianism has usually emerged from the sociology of deviant behaviour. Yet, in both areas of sociology it has remained outside of the bounds of 'meaningful' sociological investigation, in terms of both quantitative and qualitative research. It is the aim of this research, not only to redefine lesbianism in contemporary terms, but also,

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1. Cf. Joan Huber, (Ed.), Changing Women in a Changing Society, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), especially article where Acker addresses this problem in more detail. By Joan Acker, "Women and Social Stratification: A Case of Intellectual Sexism", pp. 174-183.

to analyze it as it relates to both women's role and deviant behaviour.

A second issue, as I see it, is that the changing position of women (i.e., through legal reform, education, employment and various social movements, especially the women's movement) has effected a direct challenge to, not only, the role of women but also, any subsequent analysis of this role. With the influx of 'feminist' researchers along with their initial and brief interpretations of lesbianism, sociologists, it seems, have left the task of analyzing lesbianism to them. Perhaps, to the informed sociologists, the recent feminist theories which have hints of their 'social scientific' or 'academic style' established the roots of a contemporary sociological analysis of women. However, I ask the following questions: Where does one go from here? Do we continue to develop our analyses along the traditional sociological categories? Or do we accept and face the current challenge and answer the questions which confront us at this time in the history of sociology?

As a result of this historical situation, I viewed a contemporary analysis of lesbianism as a sociological problem as well as a methodological one. The research process itself was problematic. These general questions informed the process and as I asked them, the phenomenon unfolded and became sociologically 'meaningful'. How does one view lesbianism in terms of the objective social structure? How does one get information? Where? From whom? I felt an incredible responsibility to be sociologically accurate in my approach. Therefore, I 'took seriously' the methodological imperative - to be clear and objective.

My study has taken four years to complete from September 1973 until June 1977. During that time, I have discovered much about the sociology of lesbianism. It has been a learning process, as well as a sociological task. I have met, communicated with, and established many acquaintances

and friendships with my informants. From a methodological viewpoint, it has been a worthwhile study.

In terms of my perspective as a sociologist, I have come to realize the difficulties, limitations and specific problems which are peculiar to this type of research. In terms of my particular role as a woman, I have gradually changed, developed, and transformed my ideas. Therefore, as a woman sociologist, I have attempted, what I would term, a sociological approach to lesbianism from the viewpoint of a woman.

During the research process, I became exposed to various ideas about the role of women in society. There were two areas of interest which I found sociologically relevant for this study. They were the radical feminist analysis of women's role and the socialist feminist analysis of women's role.

Radical feminism<sup>2</sup> implies a 'radical' critique of patriarchy (male domination of women in society) and the structures, attitudes and ideologies which exist in society. Radical feminism emerged from a particular social movement (the women's movement in the United States) and developed theoretically in the late 1960's and early 1970's. These women reformulated the traditional sociological concept, class, and developed, within a distinct socio-historical context, a theory which proposed that women were oppressed as a class. In other words, for radical feminists, sex becomes the basis of all oppression and divides society into two classes, men and women.

Socialist feminism<sup>3</sup> as a contemporary analysis of women in society

2. Cf. an anthology of radical feminist writings, Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine and Anita Rapone (Eds.), Radical Feminism (New York, Quadrangle Books, 1973); see also, Shulamith Firestone, The Dialectic of Sex (New York: Bantam Books, 1970) which provides a theoretical base for radical feminism.
3. Juliet Mitchell, Women's Estate (Harmondsworth: Penguin Press, 1966) and Sheila Rowbotham, Woman's Consciousness, Man's World (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1973).

developed from another social movement, the socialist movement whose primary concern is the critique of capitalism. Socialist feminists, therefore, examine the position of women vis-à-vis capitalism. They are concerned with analyzing historically the development of women's role in terms of her position in the work force (access to means of production), her labour power (reproduction of labour power), her particular form of wage or wageless labour (domestic versus productive labour) - all of which expose her relationship to capital as being unique in terms of men.

My knowledge of and exposure To these theoretical positions on women's role in society enabled me to present a clearer analysis of lesbianism vis-à-vis the changing position of women.

Although, as we can see from the above, there has been a general theoretical interest in the reasons for the subordination of women, there has been evidenced minimal concern with the phenomenon of lesbianism. Thus far, lesbianism has not been adequately analyzed as it relates to the position of women in society, women's role, any ideological movement, an ideological movement in itself, and the effects of current ideologies upon a current definition of lesbianism. My research is concerned with certain aspects of the above. For example, I ask questions throughout the course of my research. How is the lesbian role related to the role of women? How does it relate to ideological movements which are concerned with re-defining women's role? How does lesbianism relate to feminism? (for lesbians). Do lesbians consider their particular lesbian ideology as the basis of an ideological movement? If so, why and how? If not, why? How do current ideologies of lesbianism affect the lesbian role for individual lesbians? In this context, I must point out that this research is not primarily concerned with major processes of social change which I view as macro level sociology.

By the very fact that this research is concerned with the key concepts of lesbian identity, lesbian role and lesbian social organization, it is micro level research. Therefore, it is limited in its theoretical scope, as well as methodological stance. Primarily, my study has been an attempt to examine and reveal why lesbians do what they do. More specifically, my research has developed on the basis of a "motivational study of lesbians". The search for motivations became the key to my uncovering the social context of lesbianism.

In whatever ways this thesis is methodologically bound and theoretically limited, it nevertheless, lays the initial groundwork for further research into the area. The potential roots and possible direction for any macro level research or analysis are suggested later on in the thesis (Part II, Chapter 4, "Laying the Groundwork for a Sociological Perspective").

The direction of this particular research and the primary methodological concern - examining a well-defined area of lesbian social activity do, however, not lose sight of important macro level concerns which include the social structuring of sexual relationships, the interplay of power in terms of these relationships, etc.

My awareness of these above concerns, along with my knowledge of the various, subtle changes not only in the position of women in society, but also, in the analyses of these changes, aided me in the collection of crucial data which might otherwise have remained unnoticed. Throughout the research process, I was viewed as a sympathetic sociologist and trusted 'friend' by my informants. As my own understanding of important historical factors changed, so also did my access to the hidden world of the lesbian.

### The Dynamics of the Research

This particular research is a case study of the lesbian community in a large metropolitan area, London.<sup>4</sup> The purpose of this study is to present an analytical and descriptive account of lesbianism within the sociology of female sexuality and the sociology of deviant behaviour. As I have stated previously, this task has not been performed within the field of contemporary sociology.

I had two major goals in mind when I began this study:

Firstly, I wanted to engage in sociological field research in which I would gather valuable, 'qualitative' information by participating in the daily life of the observed. Through this observational technique, I was better able to describe the lesbian role as a unique female sex role and to distinguish between the various types of lesbian identities, roles and forms of lesbian social organization.

Secondly, I wanted to further the sociological understanding of micro-level research by providing a systematic analysis of the limitations which are inherent in this type of approach. Therefore, as a conscientious researcher, I tried to be continually conscious of the sociological problems of the nature of sociological explanation, order, change, and meaning.

### Limitations of Research

This case study by its very nature has been an attempt at a comprehensive understanding of the nature of the social group under investigation. It has also been a process of discovering and developing more general theoretical statements concerning the lesbian's motivational patterns.

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4. It is important to note here that this study was primarily a London based study. However, I estimated from the questionnaires that were returned to me by post that approximately 60% of the total respondents were living in London at that time. All of the interviews and my observations were done in London.

the structure of lesbian social relationships and the nature of lesbian collective reaction (which I term, lesbian social organization).

However, as Becker tells us, "Since the case study aims to understand all of the group's behavior, it cannot be designed single-mindedly to test general propositions".<sup>5</sup> Therefore, as stated previously, certain theoretical limitations are inherent in a study of this type. Through my role as participant-observer, I was able to uncover many interesting facts. However, these facts became a part of my general naturalistic account<sup>6</sup> and only at that moment in the research process did they achieve theoretical relevance.

My study was also limited geographically. Initially, I found myself confronted with studying the phenomenon of lesbianism. At that time, I had no idea that there existed certain regional differences (i.e., degrees of isolation, social organization) if one were to look at the phenomenon throughout Great Britain. In time, when this became evident, I gradually narrowed my study to looking at the London lesbian scene. I soon discovered that this was an immense task in itself.

At one point, I thought that following from what Kinsey had predicted, if the population of London was  $7\frac{1}{2}$  million, then there were 150,000 homosexuals (and possibly 75,000 lesbians) in London. I knew that I would never reach all of them. (However, during the course of my research, I

5. Howard Becker, Sociological Work (London: Allen & Lane, 1970), esp. Chapter 5, "Social Observation and Social Case Studies", pp. 75-86.
6. Cf. Severyn T. Bruyn, The Human Perspective in Sociology (Englewood Cliffs, 1966), pp. 23-28 where Bruyn describes the development of a humanistic stances in which the social scientist carries the naturalistic tradition into the study of man (in this case, woman). Bruyn tells us that this humanistic scientific perspective has been emerging and is showing signs of becoming a dominant theme in the social sciences. He believes that the methodology of the participant observer is in part another step, in completing this picture. He says, "It adds more of the human perspective to sociocultural theory and further, adds principles of method which make it more possible to study society in light of the added perspective. A theoretical element that gains in this perspective is culture".

estimate that I had spoken with at least 500 lesbians.) I proceeded to narrow my study even further.

From my readings and initial contacts with the lesbian scene in London, I began to realize that lesbians did come together and organize in varied social contexts and for varying political or non-political purposes. Through my observations, I soon became aware that lesbian social organization was the attempt of a 'deviant subculture' to collectively react against a society which defined them as 'deviant'. I wanted to look at the areas where lesbianism became an 'institutionalized' phenomenon within a deviant context and how, and why, this was so.

These initial awarenesses and realizations did obviously affect the direction of my research. Firstly, I became more concerned with those lesbians who had somewhat 'come out', that is, those lesbians who acknowledge their lesbianism in 'society' whether in a limited lesbian context (with other lesbians at bars, clubs, discos ...), or in a wider social context (at work, with friends, with family). Therefore, this study does not address itself to the problem of analyzing the world of the totally closeted or isolated lesbian. I realize that there must be hundreds of lesbians who never meet another lesbian in their lives except their lesbian partner, if they have one. Because I seldom mention totally closeted lesbians, the reader should not assume that I am unaware or even disinterested in their social lives. On the contrary, I am interested in their lives, but I have consciously chosen to place certain limitations upon my study and these limitations have obviously excluded them from my analysis. I am concerned only with observing and analyzing those lesbians who have established a "social - gay or lesbian identity" which I term "the lesbian experience". (See Glossary) Secondly, I began to organize my research around three key concepts: lesbian identity, lesbian role, and lesbian social organization. This conscious organization of my research task



made me focus upon what I thought were certain key issues which would aid me in my analysis of the "lesbian ghetto" (see Glossary). Therefore, by the very nature of my conceptual concerns and the resultant questions which followed, my research had taken a specific direction. However, I was aware of this fact and tried to be as open as possible to the information which I received, as well as the observations which I made.

### Data

The data for my study was accumulated from four major areas:

1. Lesbian documents - books by or about lesbians, gay magazines, gay newspapers, lesbian journals, lesbian magazines from Great Britain and the States, academic articles by or about lesbians, and correspondence (letters ...) with lesbians whom I met in the research process.
2. Participant observation - in December 1973 the researcher began a systematic process of entering, organizing, watching, listening, recording, analyzing and communicating to various lesbians within the lesbian ghetto. This field work lasted throughout the four years of the research process. My valuable data was recorded in field notes which I kept in notebooks and on tapes. Observational research requires a great deal of detailed description. The field notes proved useful in terms of keeping track of my detailed observation and were relevant to me in maintaining my main research concerns.
3. Questionnaires - In January 1976, after two years in the field, I constructed a questionnaire, and in February and March of that same year, I distributed it to 650 lesbians. The first set of questionnaires which were distributed randomly numbered 400 and I circulated them at the National Lesbian Conference which was held in Bristol and which was attended by approximately 600 women. 101 questionnaires were returned to me from the Bristol Lesbian Conference. The second set (300) were distributed randomly, as well, to subscribers to a well-known British Lesbian Magazine, Sappho, in March 1976. I received 100 questionnaires from the lesbian subscribers. (See Appendix for sample questionnaire.)
4. Interviews - Between March 1976 and December 1976 I conducted throughout London a series of formal and informal interviews with 60 lesbians. Twenty interviews were taped and formal. (I used an interview schedule.) While the remaining forty were not taped, I did not follow an interview schedule. The information from my informal interviews were recorded in my field notes (For the method of recording these interviews,

see Footnote 12 of this chapter, and for a sample interview schedule, see Appendix.)

### Data Accumulation: an Historical Account

#### Initial Steps (September 1973 - June 1974)

When I first began my study of lesbianism, I found it necessary to spend an entire year on a perusal of all of the research which pertained to my specific area of interest. In effect, I read sociological, psychological, social-psychological, psychiatric and literary sources which concerned lesbianism. (For the sociological and 'general' psychological sources, see Part I, Chapter 2, "Lesbianism: A Review of Literature.") My basic assumption was that these sources did, in fact, inform the knowledge which lesbians had about themselves, as well as the knowledge which society had about lesbians. By acquiring a general idea of the 'natural properties' of my field, I gradually laid the groundwork for my inevitable role of field researcher.<sup>7</sup>

Schatzman and Strauss<sup>8</sup> view the field researcher as a strategist who should develop a systematic process of entering, organizing, watching, listening, recording, analyzing and communicating as concrete methodological issues related to the collection of valuable data in the field. I realized the importance of this complex process and found it necessary to develop my strategies for entering the field.

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7. Cf. Barney G. Glaser and Anselm Strauss, The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1967), especially pp. 161-183, Chapter 7, "New Sources for Qualitative Data", where the authors establish the valuable usage of documentary data. Basically, they point out that this type of data helps the researcher in the early stages of research to understand the substantial area that one has to study and to form early hypotheses.

8. Leonard Schatzman and Anselm Strauss, Field Research: Strategies for a Natural Sociology (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973).

June 1974 - June 1975

In order to gain credible entry into the lesbian world as a researcher, I wrote to various groups and began a long process of negotiation. The groups which I considered were:

1. Gay Organizations
2. Lesbian Organizations
3. Organizations which were interested in helping 'homosexuals'
4. Names of lesbians who were referred to me by members of the lesbian and gay community.

I wrote letters to the above groups. These letters were similar to the one below:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am currently doing a Ph.D. thesis on lesbianism at the London School of Economics. I am quite interested in looking at how lesbians organize their social lives. Could you please send to me the names of any gay or lesbian groups which you know, as well as any information which concerns gay women?

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Betsy Ettorre

Gradually during the next four months that followed, I did receive some feedback from my letters. I was able to meet with various women and talk about particular lesbian groups and the purposes of their organizations. One woman who ultimately became an important informant throughout the research, volunteered to take me to a weekly meeting of a lesbian group and to introduce me to its organizer. The initiation into this lesbian group occurred in December 1974. This contact with a local lesbian group and its organizer proved to be one of the most crucial ones in my field research. It was at these weekly meetings that I soon

became admitted into the lesbian context. I went along regularly to these meetings for a period of three years during the course of my research. It was through this particular lesbian organization that I was able to distribute half of my questionnaires. I became known as a 'resident sociologist' and many women became eager to talk with me about my work.

The social context of the group was varied. However, one factor seemed to be consistent throughout the group. Namely, these weekly meetings afforded members a 'sociable' atmosphere in which a lesbian could relax in the presence of other lesbians within a bar context (drinks, light conversation ...). Sometimes, part of the meeting was taken up with speakers or discussion groups. However, socializing seemed to be its main function. Some lesbians told me that because of various reasons (work, fear, school ...) these gatherings were the only place and time when, in the course of a week, they could relax and be themselves in a totally lesbian context. As I said earlier, the group varied. There were age differences from about 18 - 60 (average age about late 20's, early thirties), ideological differences from lesbian activists, political lesbians who tended to be in a minority, to non-political lesbians who tended to dominate the scene, and various levels of outness from almost totally closeted lesbian to the open lesbian. The number of lesbians varied from about 30 - 60 members each week.

The wealth of information which I gathered at these weekly meetings was invaluable. I was able to establish relationships of trust with many of the women with whom I came in contact. Gradually, most members came to know me as a sociologist who was interested in lesbian social organization and as a friend with whom they could discuss their lives and their participation in the lesbian experience. In order to build up relationships of mutual trust and understanding, I would periodically give some of these women my written work to read. Usually, they read my work with

enthusiasm and oftentimes, they provided pages of their own criticisms, which proved useful in sharpening my own analysis of the lesbian social scene.<sup>9</sup>

In January 1975, after a year in the field, I soon began to realize that my role of field researcher (participant-observer) was a continual process. By the very nature of this role, I had to be 'promoted' by new members of the group, as well as valued for my integrity of position by regular members of the lesbian community. In other words, a certain amount of negotiation within the context of reciprocity was always present. It was necessary not only to form a series of relationships with my 'informants' so that they were both respondents and informants,<sup>10</sup> but also to establish a flexible research role in which observation, as well as participation, became evident within the natural setting of the observed.

Along with these regular meetings I went regularly to bars, clubs, and discos which were either all-lesbian or mixed gay (gay men and lesbians). Also, I attended various women's groups which were either all lesbian or women (lesbian and straight). The women's groups usually had a lesbian caucus which formed a working section of the organization or group. The groups, organizations, or conferences, of which I was a member numbered about fourteen and my membership within these groups began primarily in 1974 (September).

Membership in these groups, conferences, and organizations, enabled me to come in contact with many different lesbians all of whom had various identities and roles, as well as participation in lesbian social organization.

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9. Towards the end of my research in May 1977, I gave a lecture to this Tuesday evening group and talked with them about some of the research findings. This sharing of information enabled me to receive valuable feedback from the discussions which followed.
  10. Norman Denzin, The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods (London: Butterworth, 1970), especially an important chapter, Chapter 9, "Participant Observer: Varieties and Strategies of Field Method".

June 1975 - June 1976

During this year I collected the major bulk of my research data through my own field research, questionnaires and interviews. Since I had already become a trusted member of the lesbian community, my contact with other lesbians expanded into social contexts outside of my initial weekly meetings. Frequently, I was invited to lunches, dinners, parties, social gatherings. Also, as I stated previously, I went to gay bars, gay clubs, lesbian bars, lesbian clubs, discos ... regularly. My amount of contact with the lesbian scene grew as my research progressed. A 'promotion process' through the lesbian ghetto gave to me acceptability in the ghetto, as well as validity in terms of my research role. It seemed to me that my analysis of the lesbian scene was becoming clearer and crystallized on a conceptual level. This period of my research could be characterized by three necessary, related stages.

1. The actual role-taking process - the researcher takes upon herself a lesbian role and learns and develops a universe of meanings which goes along with the particular role.
2. The accumulation of information from lesbians in the lesbian ghetto. The researcher compares what she hears and sees to what she has been told.
3. The development of a definite conceptual framework.

The researcher develops relevant concepts. In this case, I centred my research around an analysis of lesbian identity, lesbian role and lesbian social organization. At this time, I also perceived differences between what I would term, political lesbians and non-political lesbians. I then developed a spectrum of lesbian social roles ranging from 'straight-gay', self-defined gay movement, women's movement, 'political', radical, separatist, bisexual, celibate, and mother. This typology formed the basis of my analysis of the differences between the two distinct forms of lesbian social organization (political and non-political).

At this particular time in my research, I wanted to test out my research concepts and in early 1976 I distributed 650 questionnaires. In February 1976, I attended a National Lesbian Conference which I had assumed would be attended predominantly by political lesbians. I distributed 400 questionnaires at this time. 100 were returned to me by post.

A month later (March) I distributed 250 questionnaires to lesbian magazine subscribers who were affiliated either directly (actually attended some of the meetings) or marginally (knew about the meetings) with my Tuesday evening group which had the same name as the lesbian magazine. 101 were returned to me.

In early February 1977, a year later, I was able to carefully analyze my research findings from the questionnaires. It was at that time that I constructed a computer programme, Lestudy, in connection with the University of London computer terminal which was located at the London School of Economics computer centre. After coding my questionnaires, I set up a computer programme which followed from a particular system of computer programmes, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).<sup>11</sup> This particular system provided a variety of statistical procedures which proved quite useful to me in the analysis of my data. (Most of the charts which represent the data were constructed from this programme and facilitate our understanding of the research findings.) See Appendix for "Rationale for Sampling Procedures" which describes the particular reasons for and uses of particular sampling techniques which were used in the analysis of the survey.

In March 1976 I began to conduct a series of interviews (both formal and informal) from which I collected valuable qualitative data for my research. They were carried out from March 1976 until December 1976. The lesbians I spoke with and interviewed were involved in all sorts of social activity (from non-political-political), ranged in ages from 18 to 54 and differed in terms of important social factors which were related to the fact that they were lesbians.

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11. For an explanation of this particular programme, see Norman H. Nie, et al., Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Second Edition, 1975, where the general overview of the operation of SPSS is outlined and explained.

Basically, through my interviews, I was attempting to answer the following questions. What is lesbianism? Why does a woman become a lesbian or is she 'born' a lesbian? What is the nature of lesbian social organization? What is a non-political lesbian? What is a political lesbian? What are the roles which are peculiar to each type of lesbian? Does the lesbian role relate to the role of women in society? How? My findings are described in my thesis and remain a major contribution to my thesis material. After conducting this four-year study, I will say to the reader that the research task was sometimes enjoyable and oftentimes, frustrating, but always stimulating and methodologically challenging. I see the research task as a collective task in which I was able to communicate a view of lesbianism only in and through the lesbian community with the help of lesbians and others whom I met during this period of time. Oftentimes, my interviews became a collective task because I realized that many lesbians had much to contribute to a sociological understanding of lesbianism.

These interviews usually took place in peoples homes, my flat, place of employment, or at school. They lasted from between 30 minutes to two and a half hours. The average time was 45 minutes. I preceded my taped interviews with a discussion of what I was doing, the guaranteed confidence of the information and a general rundown of why I thought it was important for a sociological discussion of lesbianism to be developed. My formal interviews (20) were taped and followed a definite interview schedule, as I stated earlier. However, oftentimes, I asked other lead questions which followed along with the main questions of the research. My untaped<sup>12</sup>

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12. Initially, I planned on taping all 60 interviews. However, I soon realized that the reticence with which my respondents reacted to taping would affect the interview immensely. As a result I decided to tape only 20 interviews and use another method of recording data from the other 40 interviews. It was a method which I devised when after an interview I would go home or into a room by myself and just



interviews (40) usually centred around one or two lead questions (i.e., What is lesbianism? Why do you think you are a lesbian? ...)

### Participation in the Lesbian Scene

Participant Observation as a Technique of Collecting Data - "Guidelines of Action".

As a participant observer in the lesbian community I engaged in numerous activities which were a crucial part of the daily life of a lesbian. In a sense, my technique of gathering data was a complex reflexive process which was put into effect by three major principles. Initially, I set up these principles as, what I referred to, my "guidelines of action" in the role-taking experience. These principles reflect the inherent tension within the research process itself and expose the necessity for flexibility and adaptability as a participant observer. My guidelines of action were as follows:

1. As a participant observer, the researcher shares in lesbian social organization or the life activities of lesbians as the observed. Lesbian social organization is the group response or collective reaction of lesbians to society. The researcher learns to understand the lesbian 'universe of meanings', which form the basis for living a successful lesbian life-style. By participating in the daily life of the lesbian, I am able to identify, recognize and categorize current lesbian ideologies which ultimately provide legitimations of a particular lesbian life, and concretize a sense of group commitment, in this case, to a 'deviant' way

### 12. Continued from p. 64:

write - non-stop - what I remembered had been said in the course of the interview. I knew that vital information may have been lost in this process. However, in this case, I felt that a situation of informality and a relaxed atmosphere took priority over the collection of explicit detail. Also, oftentimes, I felt as if I did recall the major bulk of the interviews, including important data.

of life. However, this participation in the life of lesbians implies, on the one hand, a certain amount of objective detachment and, on the other hand, subjective encounter. Here, the need for flexibility and adaptability of the research role becomes most evident.

2. The participant observer becomes an active and 'natural' part of the culture and life of the lesbian. A researcher, in order to look at this life more closely, becomes actively involved in the lesbian social scene and becomes an acceptable member of this respective social scene through a promotion process. The successful taking of a lesbian role enables the data to become more accessible in the research activity. However, the participant observer must always keep in mind that at certain stages in the research process an overt research role becomes evident to the observed. As a result, the researcher does alter the environment to such an extent that the lesbian setting may no longer be 'natural'. In order to rectify this effect, the researcher recognizes the scientific role of the participant observer while accepting a role (in this case a lesbian role)<sup>13</sup> which is a 'real' role in the life of the observed.

3. The role of participant observer reflects the active nature of 'reflective behaviour' which is a unique social process as well as an integral part of being an individual in society (in this case a lesbian).

George Herbert Mead tells us:

Reflection or reflective behaviour arises only under the conditions of self-consciousness, and makes possible the purposive control and organization by the individual organism of its conduct, with reference to its social and physical environment, i.e., with reference to the various social and physical situations in which it becomes involved and to which it reacts. The organization of the self is simply the organization, by the individual organism, of the set of attitudes towards its social environment - and toward itself from the

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13. This will be discussed later in this chapter in the section entitled, "Observing the Lesbian Scene".

standpoint of that environment, or as a functioning element in the process of social experience and behaviour constituting that environment - which it is able to take. <sup>14</sup>

In light of the above statement and with the realization that the participant observer does in fact become a self-conscious member of the lesbian community, the researcher must organize her set of attitudes towards her particular research environment in a reflexive manner. Reflexivity in this research experience provides the necessary link between the role of participant and the role of the observed. Therefore, the researcher becomes more conscious of the lesbian role as she becomes more conscious of her research role within the particular lesbian context.

These three major principles formed the basis of my research techniques. I accepted a lesbian role within the lesbian ghetto and gradually defined my position as participant observer. At this point in a description of my methodology, it is necessary to show the reader relevant areas from which my observations were drawn.

### Observing in the Lesbian Scene

Basically, my observations were organized around the lesbian scene with a view to analyse and describe lesbians in the respective scene (as participants), the setting, the purpose, the social behaviour of lesbians and the frequency and duration of lesbian social organization.

### The Participants

I found that I was looking for various characteristics of lesbians in my observations: age, social class,<sup>15</sup> function in groups, particular

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14. George Herbert Meade, Mind, Self and Society (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1934), p. 91.

15. It is important to note here that a major drawback of my thesis is the lack of any definite analysis of lesbianism and its relationship to economic stratification or, more specifically, social class. As of yet, there has not been any development along these lines on

lesbian ideology, type of lesbian activity which one is involved in (non-political, political) and degrees of coming out (from almost closeted to open lesbian). I was also interested in how lesbians became involved in their particular lesbian group as well as the degrees of isolation which certain lesbians experienced. This interest demanded that I acquire a certain amount of biographical knowledge on a personal level with my respondents and historical knowledge of particular groups on a general level. Also, I was concerned with looking at structures or groupings which existed in a specific lesbian social context (i.e., leaders, 'stars', cliques ...) and I wanted to see how these groupings could be identified spatially and through patterns of interaction.

#### Setting, Purpose and Behaviour

After being in the field for a short while, I soon realized that various lesbian groups developed fronts between each other. As Goffman tells us, "a front is that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance".<sup>16</sup>

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#### 15. Continued from p. 67:

a theoretical level. A major drawback of the thesis is that it has a middle-class bias. As you will discover, most of the lesbians with whom I talked with during the course of my four-year study were middle-class. I do not mean to imply that there are no working-class lesbians. On the contrary, working-class lesbians do exist and even form social organizations around their class similarities. However, this study concerns itself with that area of lesbian social organization which appeals more to the middle-class lesbian (i.e., those who can 'afford' to go to bars, discos, clubs, which are often quite 'dear'). In two particular cases, I had attempted to discuss in detail my research with working-class lesbians. However, my attempts were thwarted, primarily because of the lack of interest in "bourgeoise" sociology.

16. See, Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959), especially section, "Front", pp.32-40. Also Dorothy D. Douglas, "Managing Fronts in Observing Deviance" in Jack D. Douglas, Research on Deviance (New York: Random House, 1972), pp. 93-115, where she goes into a discussion of the management offronts in the research process which is relevant to this study.

After I was able to define and recognize the respective 'lesbian fronts', I gained access into the various groups by taking upon myself a role which defined a particular ideology (i.e., self-defined lesbian, 'political lesbian', etc. ...) The 'facade' which had been erected between the observer and the observed broke down with the assumption of my particular lesbian role. In effect, what appeared to me as generalizable fronts (which were managed by the lesbian world in its confrontation with deviancy in a heterosexual world) lost primary significance for me when I observed the management of fronts between various lesbian groups. For example, the lesbian ideology and concomitant front production of the political lesbian differed markedly from those of the non-political lesbian.

As a field researcher, I entered into a particular lesbian front on two distinct yet related levels - in general as an observer and in particular as a member of and participant in a lesbian group. My intrusion on this level proved to have interesting implications for the research process. It enabled me to elicit certain contextual data which otherwise might have remained unnoticed. In other words, I became more aware of the distinctions between the spectrum of lesbian ideologies as well as lesbian social activities.

Basically, the social behaviour and purpose which brings lesbians together vary from social setting to social setting. A lesbian may go to a particular lesbian social setting (bar, disco, club) with a specific purpose in mind (i.e., to have a chat with other lesbians, for support, for a 'bop', to see friends, for a quick drink ...). The reasons and purpose for these encounters or social interactions differ depending upon the peculiar lesbian ideology of the individual lesbian concerned, as well as the general ideology of the lesbian social organization which dominates the social setting. For example, a lesbian social organization at a

political meeting may differ in purpose, social context, ideology and membership from lesbian social organization at a club, bar or disco. Furthermore, a lesbian feminist political meeting may differ from a gay political meeting which is frequented by lesbians and gay men. The former meeting may accentuate the organizing principle of "women only" and seek to work out political practice independent of men. Explicit in the latter meeting is the presence of gay men, as well as the organising principle of 'gay rights' or 'homosexual reform'.

My research has demonstrated that variations within the lesbian ghetto among lesbians are probably more pronounced than is ever imagined by the uninformed lay person and even the trained sociologist. There exists a great deal of differences not only in terms of ideology, politics, and front production, but also in terms of style of dress, argot and self-presentation. Typical language, "uniforms", and self-images may characterize each particular group and become evident in a particular social setting. For example, I attended a lesbian club which tended to be frequented by well-dressed (in the conventional 'female role' sense) lesbians who considered appearance an important factor in the establishment of social relationships. Here, one can perceive a certain consistency in language, dress and self-presentation. Some lesbians in an attempt to break down traditional views of the female role (both within and outside of the lesbian scene) dress, carry themselves and speak in a manner which could be considered 'male'. However, for some lesbians the choice of this type of role is a conscious choice which becomes a direct attack against what they call "the typical male-defined woman". In terms of their apparel, I have discovered that it becomes a choice for freedom of movement as well as the use of male dress. As one woman told me (dressed in a Harris tweed), "It's so much better for me to wear men's clothes because I enjoy the freedom of

movement and a loose fit when I work ...".

Lesbian argot (language) differs from social setting to social setting within the lesbian ghetto. (See Glossary of terms). In fact, words like 'nora', 'dora' or 'priscilla' which originate in a particular lesbian bar scene may never be recognized as part of lesbian language by those women who do not frequent those settings within the lesbian ghetto. On the other hand, words like, 'r.fs', 'wanker', 'dyke' may never be recognized in the context of the bar scene.

### Frequency and Duration

During the course of my research, I have also observed that variations in the frequency with which lesbians participate in the lesbian social scene does occur. The reasons for the amount of contact within the lesbian scene may vary on a personal level for different reasons - work situation, living situation, fear, interest, break up with previous lover, amount of involvement in a particular form of lesbian social organization at a particular point in time.

The degrees to which lesbians participate in the lesbian ghetto vary from all of the time (as in the case of the lesbian separatists), most of the time, some of the time, and none of the time (as in the case of the totally closeted lesbian with whom this study is not directly concerned). It is always important to see how long the social encounter or interactions last. Usually the duration of these interactions are dependent upon the purpose at hand within the lesbian social setting.

### Conclusion

It is hoped that this chapter on methodology has been helpful to the reader and has provided an understanding of the complex ways, techniques, strategies and roles which have been useful for my research into

lesbianism. This chapter has laid the groundwork for what is to follow by setting up the necessary framework from which an analysis of the data will result. The aims of this initial chapter have been to initiate its reader into an understanding of the sociology of lesbianism as well as the methodological difficulties with which this understanding is described, analyzed and communicated on the research level.



PART II:

THE RESEARCH PROCESS:  
METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Chapter 4

Laying the groundwork for a Sociological  
Perspective: Sexuality, Female Sexuality  
and Deviance

## CHAPTER 4

### LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE: SEXUALITY, FEMALE SEXUALITY AND DEVIANCE

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline significant issues which relate to an understanding of the sociology of lesbianism. By raising these relevant issues, I lay the foundation for a theoretical perspective and preface the presentation of the empirical data with an explanation of its sociological origins.

The main bulk of my research has been within the area of female sexuality, more specifically, unapproved female sexuality - lesbianism. I have chosen deliberately to use the term 'unapproved sexuality'<sup>1</sup> as a way of placing my particular area of inquiry into the realm of social meanings and the social construction of those meanings rather than a specific 'sexual deviance' perspective. However, my basic sociological approach is within the interactionist perspective from which much of the study of deviant behaviour has emerged.<sup>2</sup> One perplexed sociologist, contemplating the problems which are peculiar to the sociology of deviant behaviour, aptly stated:

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1. Cf. John W. Petras, Sexuality in Society (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1973), especially Chapter 6, "Unapproved Sexuality and Society", pp. 90-105, where he presents his rationale for using this respective term. It is his contention that terms like sexual deviance have pejorative implications and basically emerge from and are related to a vocabulary, that was originally defined by anti-sexual ideologies. It follows from this view, therefore, that the terms we use as sociologists do in fact direct ourselves and others in perceiving social phenomena (in our case lesbianism) in a particular way. Deviance or sexual deviance conjures up negative images even in light of a sympathetic approach.
  2. This approach is generally known as labelling theory and will be discussed in Section 4 of this chapter, "Unapproved Sexuality, Deviance and Lesbianism".

The deviant has been humanized, the moralistic tone is no longer ever present (although it still lurks underneath the explicit disavowals); and theoretical perspectives have not been developed. Nevertheless, all is not well with the field of "deviance". Close examination reveals that writers of this field still do not try to relate the phenomena of "deviance" to large social, historical, political and economic contexts. The emphasis is still on the "deviant" and the "problems" he presents to himself and others, not on the society within which he emerges and operates.<sup>3</sup>

In light of this criticism, we can see more clearly the necessity for developing a systematic theoretical framework from which basic sociological statements should be drawn and articulated. It is a primary contention of this thesis that lesbianism should be understood as a complex, distinct,<sup>4</sup> social phenomenon in light of not only the sociology of deviant behaviour, but also the sociology of sexuality, particularly, female sexuality. The juxtaposition of these two areas as a means of the sociological analysis of lesbianism has effected novel implications.

On the one hand, lesbianism<sup>5</sup> is analyzed as female social behaviour

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3. Alexander Liazos, "The Poverty of the Sociology of Deviance; Nuts, Sluts and Perverts" in Social Problems (1972), 20, pp. 103-119.
  4. Distinct in this context refers to lesbianism as being analytically distinct and sociologically different from other "related" phenomenon and in an immediate conceptual sense from male homosexuality.
  5. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 1, "Lesbianism: A Review of Literature". Most sociological studies of lesbianism have concentrated on viewing lesbianism as deviant sexual behaviour, Cf. David A. Ward and Gene G. Kassebaum, Women's Prison: Sex and Social Structure (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1965); same authors, "Homosexuality: A Mode of Adaptation in a Prison for Women", Social Problems (1964), 12, pp. 159-177; same authors, "Lesbian Liaisons" in The Sexual Scene ed. by John Gagnon and William Simon (Aldine Publishing Co., 1970), pp. 125-136; Cf. also Rose Giallombardo, "Social Roles in a Prison for Women", Social Problems (1966), 13, pp. 268-289; same author, Society of Women: A Study of a Women's Prison (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1966); same author, The Social World of Imprisoned Girls (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1974).

Simon and Gagnon come closest to an explanation of lesbianism within the context of female sexuality - in terms of female socialization and sex roles. See, for example, John H. Gagnon and William Simon, The Social Sources of Human Sexuality (London: Hutchinson, 1973), especially Chapter 6, "A Conformity Greater than Deviance ..."

and is, consequently, removed from the "social problems" perspective. On the other hand, lesbianism is considered as unapproved sexual behaviour is placed within the area of deviant behaviour as a "social construct".<sup>6</sup> The utility of this type of approach will hopefully become evident as links will be established between the lesbian's perception of herself as a woman and as a woman who is living and defining herself in an area of unapproved sexual activity. I propose that the 'dual' conception which is implicit in the social construction of femal sexuality (and whatever the implications they do have in society for women) and of unapproved sexuality (with the resultant 'deviant' labelling process) interact and present the unravelling of a complex, problematic process for the lesbian. This process permeates her lifestyle, her attitudes, her behaviour and her meanings of herself. The lesbian emerges from her social life with the individual and social sense that, unlike most women, she directs her life primarily around women. She also becomes aware that her experience of many social situations is directly related to the fact that she is a woman.

It is the aim of this chapter to place lesbianism within the context of society, as well as to focus upon the social processes which construct this phenomenon.

The chapter is divided into four sections: (1) Sexuality and Social Change; (2) The Social Construction of Sexuality; (3) The Social Construction of Female Sexuality, and (4) Unapproved Sexuality, Deviance and Lesbianism.

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6. Paul Rock, Deviant Behaviour (London: Hutchinson, 1973), p. 19. Rock's definition of social constructs are the interpretations which men/women "collaboratively give to the objects and events around them. They are more than interpretations, however, because they are also the social phenomenon which men create through their activities and as a result of these interpretations".

# 1. Sexuality and Social Change

Traditionally, society has considered sexual behaviour as being sui generis in terms of social behaviour. Sexual behaviour was conceptually separated from the rest of human social life. As a result, the important and necessary links were rarely made between social life and sexual behaviour. Furthermore, anything which related to sex or the sexual was characterized by distrust or scepticism.

Therefore, as a somewhat ambiguous area of human life, sexuality emerged as a form of human behaviour which was privatized,<sup>7</sup> engendered fear,<sup>8</sup> was capable of being a destructive<sup>9</sup> element of 'human nature' which needed control.<sup>10</sup>

7. Cf. an interesting thesis proposed about the privatized nature of sexuality is presented by Sasha R. Weitman, "Intimacies: Notes towards a Theory of Social Inclusion and Exclusion" in Archives Europeennes de Sociologie (1970), XI, 348-367, where Weitman contends that privatized sexuality arises out of a deep inarticulate recognition that one of the unmistakable meanings of intimacies to those who witness them (but who are not privileged to partake in them) is that they are excluded from the bond of affection being cultivated in their presence.

Also, Cf. John H. Gagnon, "Sexuality and Sexual Learning in the Child" in John Gagnon and William Simon (Eds.), Sexual Deviance (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), pp. 15-42, where they say "sexual knowledge is marked by the exchange of cues and gestures rather than direct experimentation".

8. Gerth and Mills propose that this fear of sex was a part of the socialization process where a child experiences a "verbal lag" with his/her parents. "Fears which the child experiences with reference to sex may be taboo in conversation and hence remain unverbalized, unanalyzed and subject to the constructions and modifications of legitimation". Cf. Hans Gerth and C. W. Mills, Character and Social Structure: The Psychology of Social Institutions (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954), p.155.
9. See, for example, Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilization; A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud (New York: Vintage Books, 1955). Marcuse contends that the free gratification of sex (which is an instinctual drive) is not realizable in contemporary society. He states: "The methodical sacrifice of libido, its rigidly enforced deflection to socially useful activities and expression is culture" (p.3). However, this view of culture denudes the concept of sexuality from the level of subjective experience and symbolic meaning and thrusts it totally within the context of its "instinctual nature" as a formative force in the historical organization of human existence.
10. See George Peter Murdock, "The Social Regulation of Sexual Behavior"

During the last decade, Western society has been experiencing changing attitudes towards sexual behaviour. Whether it has been as a result of legal reform, changes in the family structure, chemical and medical services or social movements which are related to sexuality, a transformation in social images on sexuality has occurred. Some sociologists contend that sexuality has become "humanized" or "secularized".<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, they speak in terms of "sexualization"<sup>12</sup> of society.

Whether or not we agree with the above, we should examine some implications of these comments. Sexual pluralists,<sup>13</sup> as Singer calls them, propose that through the modernization process and technological development in society, changes in attitudes and images about sexuality have occurred. These changes have affected the orientation of man's/woman's social life; the socialization process has been influenced. Although the basic forms of socialization (family, education) have remained relatively stable, the content of socialization has been greatly affected by modern advancements.

10. Continued from p. 76:

- in Paul H. Hock, M.D. and Joseph Zubin (Eds.), Psychosexual Development in Health and Disease (New York: Grune & Stratton, 1949), pp. 256-266. He says: "The imperious drive of sex, no less than aggression is capable of impelling individuals towards behavior disruptive of social relationships. Indiscriminate competition over sexual favors, resulting inevitably in frustrations and jealousies could impose dangerous strains upon the fabrics of interpersonal adjustments. Society therefore cannot remain indifferent to sex, but must bring it under control". (Emphasis his own)
11. J. H. Gagnon and William Simon, Sexual Conduct: The Social Sources of Human Sexuality (London: 1973). They believe that at the same time society was being secularized, sex was as well.
12. John Petras, Sexuality in Society (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1973) and Gagnon and Simon, op. cit.
13. Cf. Irving Singer, The Goals of Human Sexuality (London: Wildwood House, 1973), p.15 where Singer makes a distinction between essentialist and pluralist theories of sexuality. The former refers to theories based upon the assumption that in terms of sexuality there is a basic uniform pattern ordained by nature itself, while pluralism rejects this view and opts for a more sociological interpretation of sexual behaviour with its social configurations. Gagnon implicitly refers to essentialism as a belief in the "biological knowingness" of sex or in the wisdom of nature in explaining sexual behavior and development; op. cit., p. 7.

Sexual Pluralists propose that contemporary images of sexuality emerge as a new sexuality, a new morality, sexual revolution and liberation, a sexual wilderness, and so on ... They posit an ideology<sup>14</sup> of a sexuality which is "part and parcel" of everyday life. While sexuality is becoming more social and socialization more sexual, sexual behaviour is no longer being relegated to the realm of the secretive, forbidden, or anti-social.

If sexual social images of sexuality are changing, let us examine four processes which may have contributed to social change:

1. secularization and the demise of moral and legal control;
2. the "eroticization" of society (sexual images are less private);
3. the growth of the birth control movement;
4. the emergence of social movements related to sexuality.

#### Secularization and the Demise of Moral and Legal Control

The modern Western world is experiencing what some sociologists term, "global secularization"<sup>15</sup> which implies not only a change in the structural manifestations of secularization, but also a transformation in the realm of consciousness. A corollary of this fact is the demise of religiosity or the decline of religious belief. This demise has effected a breakdown in "moral standards" or what Max Lerner calls a "moral interregnum". He states: "As the shift from formal to operative codes took place

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14. Throughout the thesis "ideology" will be utilized in a very broad sense as "an historical construct which represents any theoretically articulated proposition about social reality". From Peter L. Berger, Brigitte Berger and Hansfried Kellner, The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness (Harmondsworth: 1973), p. 143.
  15. Peter Berger, The Social Reality of Religion (Harmondsworth; Penguin, 1967), p. 114.

the force of the mores in American life became stronger than the force of morals".<sup>16</sup> Religion may no longer be a decisive element in determining the sexual activity of young people. Schofield, in his study of the sexual behaviour of young people, revealed that most of these young people were not at all interested in religion.<sup>17</sup>

In effect, a new moral temper has developed in which freer social relations, particularly in sexual matters, have become evident. In his analysis of religious "transvaluation"<sup>18</sup> in the sixties, Daniel Bell contends that spontaneity as opposed to moral authority became the emphasis in terms of sexual relationships. Authenticity, fulfilment and love were highly regarded and sought after in these relationships.

For Bell, as well as for others, the new technopolitical man is both pragmatic and profane. He (technopolitical man) shuns institutionalized religion and its explicit moral authority and turns his attention to the perfection of human nature and the potential of social progress.

In an article, "Sexual Behavior, Morality and the Law", James K. Feibleman defines morality as a "matter of constructing an ideal from

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- 16. As quoted in Marx Lerner, "The Moral Interegnum" in Sex in America edited by Henry Anatole Greenwald (London: Corgi Books, 1965), pp. 66-91.
  - 17. Michael Schofield in collaboration with John Bynner, Patricia Lewis and Peter Massir, The Sexual Behaviour of Young People (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 101.
  - 18. Cf. Daniel Bell, "Religion in the Sixties", Social Research (Autumn 1971), 38, pp. 447-497. The main emphasis of this article is on the demise of religion in terms of its institutional framework and moral authority and how it has accommodated this criticism. Bell, however, says, "What is new today and what portends so much for the future of religion, is the legitimation of heresy by the culture. The cultural response is no longer, as it was in the nineteenth century, to view religion as an enemy or to seek to eliminate it as an atavism, but to use it both as a means of attacking the institutional order, and as a mode of creating new primordial forms of community and symbolic experience which become substitutes not only for traditional religion, but for society as well. And this is the extraordinary transformation - the transvaluation of religion - in the last third of the twentieth century."



extended ethical speculations or of examining actual conditions in light of an established morality handed down by religion, custom, or by some other authority or convention".<sup>19</sup> Within society, established morality, which is reflected in the social organization of laws, attempts at the imposition of controls and restrictive regulations in terms of social and individual sexual activity (as well as other forms of social activity). Implicit in this social process (the construction of a protective<sup>20</sup> social order which reflects established morality) is the acceptance of an a priori definition of sexuality. This definition posits sexuality as a powerful instinctual drive which, at times, colludes with another power drive,<sup>21</sup> aggression and ultimately becomes destructive. Resultantly, the legal system reflects a complex configuration of social controls which impose sanctions upon various forms of sexual activity. This control is maintained by a system of informal or formal enforcement mechanisms which emerge in an imposed spectrum of response from forms of moral abrogation and the imposition of stigma to penal servitude, the ultimate form of captivity for the sexual offender.<sup>22</sup>

Basically, society "approves of the sexual instinct if it takes a heterosexual form in adult marriage".<sup>23</sup> Thus, there exist specific

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19. James K. Feibleman, "Sexual Behavior, Morality and the Law" in Sexual Behavior and the Law ed. by Ralph Slovenko (Springfield, Illinois: Charles B. Thomas, 1965), pp. 171-190.
  20. Cf. Ralph Slovenko, "A Panoramic View", Ibid., pp. 5-144, where he states, "The law must protect society from the dangerous and aggressive individual and it must protect children and adolescents from sexual assault and suasion". p. 116.
  21. Feibleman, op. cit., states, "The power drives, specifically those of the generic drive of aggression and the sex drive are not entirely amenable to cortical control". p. 175.
  22. Cf. Kingsley Davis, "Sexual Behavior" in Contemporary Social Problems, eds. Robert Merton and Robert Nisbet (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Jovanovich, 1961), 3rd edition, pp. 313-360.
  23. Slovenko, op. cit., p. 11.

laws concerning non-marital coitus, oral intercourse, divorce, adultery, incest, cohabitation, rape, exhibitionism, voyeurism, abortion, contraception and homosexuality. The plethora of social controls which extend beyond the realm of potentially destructive behaviour (which in fact is legally defined as destructive) has existed as repressive to some individuals, i.e., homosexuals, divorced persons ... However, society vis-à-vis the shift from old standards of morality and normality to the emergence of new values is experiencing a rising scepticism<sup>24</sup> concerning these respective sexual controls. Along with this scepticism has come an increasing dissolution of the socio-cultural meanings which represent the supportive base for these traditional values. The mechanisms of control (informal and formal) are gradually collapsing and with it the demise of meanings of sexuality as sin, evil, and in need of control.

#### "Eroticization" of Society

In order to adequately conceptualize the above phenomenon it will be necessary to consider three related social factors which have converged in society and have effected the "sexualization" process. Therefore, we will consider the media as a social mechanism which promotes this process, the demystification of sex through increased "sex talk" and the emergence of a pedagogy of sex.

Firstly, mass media representations of sexuality have gone further than any other social image-constructing mechanism to further the eroticization of society. Everywhere modern man/woman is being bombarded with images of the sexual. Consumer society has produced consumer sex. Sex has become a means by which advertisers sell their products by giving them added "sex appeal". This sexual bombardment appears to the culturally

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24. Davis, op. cit., p. 11.

sophisticated and to the culturally "unaware" alike. The presentation of erotic art, whether in the form of object d'art, erotic ballet, or erotic dance; the current ethos of some radio, television and cinema producers; the constant buying and selling of glossy magazines as well as sexual stimulators (actual objects which facilitate one in stimulating one's sexual partner or oneself); and current graffiti such as "Make Love Not War", or "Sex Power" all reflect the emergence of the sexual into the social.

Since the first publication of the Kinsey volumes on male sexual behaviour in 1948, there has existed an increased frequency by which sexuality has become a topic of social conversation. The mass publication of these volumes and other works seems to legitimate this process. Although some social scientists feel that discussions of a sexual nature might be a substitute form<sup>25</sup> of sexual behaviour, the fact that public talk concerning sex does occur rather frequently says something about the process of making sexuality less private.<sup>26</sup> However, Gagnon clearly

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25. Cf. John Gagnon and William Simon, "Prospects for Change in American Sex Patterns", Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality (January 1970) 4, pp. 100-117.

26. Ibid. Gagnon and Simon's basic thesis (that very little has changed in American sexual patterns over the past four decades) does explicitly deny this process as being enacted in society. They believe that there exists a type of pluralistic ignorance about sexuality. In other words people talk about a sexual change, or better yet, a sexual revolution, but in fact traditional values prevail and sexual standards remain the same. The "revolutionary mythology" of the sexual revolution has been perpetuated (for these authors) by two main opposing ideological positions - the sexual yeasayers and the sexual neasayers. Through their interesting dialectic "private fantasies and public talk are transformed into collective myths and opposing ideologies".

The main thrust of their argument is that yes, society seems to have superficially experienced a change in terms of sexuality as becoming more open. Yet, if sexuality is learned and is learned in a process of socialization, then these sex changes (in order to have an impact) must affect the socialization process itself. In other words, the creation of an environment in which a change in the basic structure of the sex learning process is provided for is the only means by which sexuality could be linked to other aspects of the social life (and our authors do not believe that this has occurred). Only with

maintains the absence of an a priori structure to situations in which one discusses sexual behaviour. On the one hand, Gagnon opts for the position that most "sex talk" is situation specific. Objective analysis, actual empirical validation, or observed systematization of sexual discussions which filter through interactional settings in a particular community is naught to impossible. On the other hand, in light of subjective analysis, Gagnon recognizes that the search for a motivational rationale for sexual responses in the form of discussions will surely reveal convoluted meanings and complex sources.

In an attempt to bring an appreciation of the sexual into the public sphere and to de-mystify sex and resultant conceptualizations of sexuality, some analysts have attributed sex with various meanings - sex as magic,<sup>27</sup> sex as evasion,<sup>28</sup> sex as work,<sup>29</sup> sex as play,<sup>30</sup> sex as politics,<sup>31</sup> sex as interpersonal relationship,<sup>32</sup> sex as non-verbal communication<sup>33</sup>, and sex as power.<sup>34</sup> Along with the demystification of sex on

26. Continued from p. 82:

this creation can one expect any social change in terms of sexuality. Therefore, our authors feel that we have been deluded and that the area of sexuality has been suffering from societal overkill.

Yes, we can agree with Gagnon and Simon and with other social scientists that overt sexual practices have not changed significantly in the past forty years. However, implicit in our discussion of the eroticization of society and the deprivitization of sexuality is the general fact that society is experiencing a constant gradual change in sexual meanings which will, in turn filter down to particular behaviour patterns and, in turn, effect various structural patterns (family life, marriage ...) in a variety of ways.

27. Robert Boyers, "Attitudes Towards Sex in American High Culture", Annals, Ibd., pp. 36-52.

28. Ibid.

29. Lionel S. Lewis, "Sex as Work: A Study of Avocational Counselling", Social Problems (Summer 1967), pp. 8-18.

30. Nelson Foote, "Sex as Play" in Social Problems (April 1954), 1, pp. 159-163.

31. Kate Millet, Sexual Politics (New York: Avon Books, 1969).

32. Lester Kirkendall and Rodger W. Libby, "Interpersonal Relationships-Crux of the Sexual Renaissance", Journal of Social Issues (1966), XXII (22), pp. 45-59.

an academic level there has been an over-riding concern with sexual identity in terms of the popular culture.

Let us look briefly at two areas of importance which have been developed in a pedagogy of sex, a pedagogy concerned primarily with sexual identity. The first area, the adult level, is primarily concerned with a pleasing, sexually-satisfying life for all married and even non-married adults. Performance, sensitivity and pleasure are the mottos of this ethos which emphasizes sexual techniques for the optimal pleasure of one's partner. It is no wonder that Comfort's, *The Joy of Sex*<sup>35</sup> was on the best seller list for non-fiction books for 56 weeks during 1972-1973. Sex manuals have become the mainstay for those who advocate that sex is just another facet of the human person which should be expressed. Sexual identity becomes subsumed under the general conception of self-identity<sup>36</sup> and yet, ironically enough, it (sexual identity) maintains its own ramifications (as in the case of lesbianism when in the social sexual arena a lesbian takes on an identity contrary to societal expectations).

The second area of importance which has been concerned with sexual identity within this pedagogy of sex is that of childhood sexuality.

33. Continued from p. 83:

Nancy Henley, "Power, Sex and Non-verbal Communication" in Berkeley Journal of Sociology, (1973-74), XVII, pp. 1-26. Henley points out the relationship of non-verbal communication to the exercise of power and how it affects respective relationships, maintains situations or establishes relationships. However, the exercise of power as Henley points out may necessarily take on sexual connotations or become sexualized or sexually potent when used by the "wrong" sex (i.e., women). According to Henley the sex is wrong because woman is denied power outside of a context which is explicitly sexual. Therefore, she remains powerless in a political sense.

34. Ibid.

35. Alex Comfort (Ed.), The Joy of Sex: A Gourmet Guide to Lovemaking (London: Quartet, 1972).

36. A more extensive discussion of identity will follow in the next section.

Freud's discovery of the sexual implications of early human social life had monumental effects upon the development of a social concern for youth. For some social thinkers, if everything has a sexual implication then we must control what stimulations the younger generation experience.<sup>37</sup> The modern translation of this phenomenon, the explicit control of children's sexual behaviour, can be seen within the context of sex education for children. Upon closer analysis, the basic rationale for sex education is anticipated by the basic rationale for education in general. For example, as one sex-educator has said: "The more educated a person is the better is he able to make a reasonable and informed choice between possible courses of behaviour. The more aware he is of these possibilities the more freedom he has in the way he conducts his life."<sup>38</sup>

It follows that the maximization of knowledge and understanding in the area of sexual behaviour effects a more sexually educated, more responsible and freer child. For many educators, the increasing evidence of the worth of sexual knowledge in childhood has accelerated the growth of sex education as "inevitable and desirable"<sup>39</sup> within the educational system itself as well as within the immediate family structure.

#### The Growth of the Birth Control Movement

The birth control movement has effected an increasing emergence of the study of sexuality into the social arena. Education, medicine,

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37. Cf. Steven Marcus, The Other Victorians (London: Corgi Books, 1966); see especially Marcus' discussion of Acton, "Normal Functions of Childhood".

38. Alan Harris, "What does Sex Education Mean?" in Sex Education: Rationale and Reason edited by Rex Rodgers (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 18-23.

39. Cf. Rex Rodgers, "Conclusions", Ibid., pp. 272-274.

biology, sociology, psychology and economics are some of the disciplines which have been developing an increasing interest in birth control. Clinics have been set up in urban areas to educate men and women about the importance of birth control. Numerous texts have been written. Pamphlets have been distributed. All of these factors reflect the growth of this movement, whose main issues are reproduction and its control in the midst of the dramatic population inflation.<sup>40</sup> The distribution of the pill (oral contraceptive) to vast amounts of women has become a primary effect of the movement. It is now the case that a woman, married or not, is able to consider having a sexual relationship with a man without the fear of unwanted pregnancy.<sup>41</sup> In other words, the process of transforming the sexual experience into a unique human social experience per se<sup>42</sup> and the separation of this social experience from its seemingly functional reproductive equivalent have potentially<sup>ly</sup> revolutionary consequences. In light of these statements, we are led to believe that the birth control movement with its emphasis on contraception has contributed a decisive influence upon the molding of new, possibly more humanistic, sexual mores<sup>43</sup> and has helped to initiate what we have termed the sexual-

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40. Cf. Elizabeth Draper, Birth Control in Modern World (Penguin, 1972) for an historical perspective. Also, Shulamith Firestone, The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for the Feminist Revolution (New York: Bantam Books, 1970) especially Chapter 10, "Feminism in the Age of Ecology" where Firestone parallels the current trends in ecology and feminism. Both movements for Firestone have been deeply involved (in an historical context) with the control of the human body as well as with the appeasement of the population explosion. pp. 191-202.
41. Juliet Mitchell, Women's Estate (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 108.
42. Cf. Jetse Sprey, "On the Institutionalization of Sexuality" in Journal of Marriage and Family (August 1969), 31, pp. 432-440, for an interesting presentation where Sprey argues that sex is becoming an autonomous and distinct realm of social interaction. It will increasingly generate its own rules (in terms of reciprocity and exchange) and will become institutionally autonomous (i.e., distinct from reproduction).
43. Cf. Dorothy D. Bromley and Florence Britten, "The Sex Lives of College Students" in The American Sexual Dilemma, ed. by William O'Neill (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1972), pp. 54-62.

ization of society.

### Emergence of Social Movements Related to Sexual Identity

A corollary of the societal emphasis on sexual identity (which has been previously discussed) is the fact that certain movements have emerged which relate directly to this notion of sexual identity. My presentation will deal with two main cultural movements: Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation. As Petras has stated concerning these movements: "In a sense these social processes, in view of their impact upon sexuality, has forced the individual to re-evaluate the sexual meanings he or she had previously assumed for themselves and others."<sup>44</sup>

### Women's Liberation

Oppression is not an abstract moral condition but a social and historical experience. Its forms and expressions change as the mode of production and the relationships between men and women, women and women change in society.<sup>45</sup>

Since the turn of the century, the historical and social reality of oppression has presented itself to some women as a major social problem which must be dealt with as a serious affront to her unique social life. In her analysis<sup>46</sup> of woman's situation and the conditions of her social life, Juliet Mitchell outlines four elements of a specific structure which she believes to be common to women in all societies: Production, Reproduction, Sexuality and Socialization of Children. It is within these four

44. Petras, op. cit., p. 18.

45. Sheila Rowbotham, Woman's Consciousness, Man's World (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), p. xiii.

46. Op. cit., pp. 100-122. However, these concepts were initially developed in an article, "Women: The Longest Revolution" in The New Left Review (December 1966), No. 40.



areas that woman develops in close interaction with people (nature) and society (culture). It is Mitchell's contention that a women's liberation movement should be concerned with the development of each structure and the respective weaknesses which exist in the unity between women's work, her role as mother, her involvement in the socialization process, and her sexual status.<sup>47</sup> In her analysis, Mitchell, believes that the major structure which at present is in "rapid" evolution is sexuality.<sup>48</sup> Although Mitchell asserts that the combination of these complex structures in concrete social reality effect the "complex unity" of women's social position, she does posit that each unique structure may have attained a

47. Mitchell, op. cit.

48. In light of this analysis, it is my contention that in order to look at the women's movement as a unique social phenomenon with its all-pervasive social implications, one must view this movement as being equally concerned with each of the four structures. Therefore, the basic ideology of such a movement rests upon the perpetuation of a political, economic, social and sexual critique of the existent society. I would hence disagree with Petras, op. cit., (p. 18) who proposes that the Women's movement has been extended from a mainly political and economic movement into an area of sex-role definition. I would always argue that the women's movement has historically been concerned with the area of sex role distinctions and its affect upon the political and economic role of women. Most feminists, as Mitchell has demonstrated, would see the basic conflicts between the various areas which affect women's roles but would not make a clear distinction (as Petras has) in terms of where the true "revolution" is taking place (in terms of sex roles). And yet Petras later on in his discussion talks about how sex role distinctions have provided the basis for most other relationships that take place in the everyday world.

In light of these inconsistencies one wonders if Petras has confused extension with the notion of emphasis in terms of the strategy of the current wave of feminism. His view reflects a basic problem in the current women's movement - the problem of looking at woman's role in its economic, political, social and sexual contexts and seeing the linkup between these different areas and the social definition of woman. For some, in terms of the existing social structures and their relationship to women, this view does not necessitate a Marxist critique or even a socialist critique of society. However, it does consider a critique of the existing social order in light of political, social, economic factors which have effected a social conception of women as the second sex.

different mode of development at any given historical moment.<sup>49</sup> Thus, her presentation is an attempt at an analytical understanding of how these structures coalesce and produce the unique role of woman and what the factors which account for the variant development of each structure are.

Interestingly enough, this type of analysis does hit upon the main thrust of women's liberation movement in contemporary society.<sup>50</sup> Basically, as a distinct social phenomenon the women's movement exerts pressure upon society to reconsider the social position of women in relationship to the social contexts (political, economic and social) of social reality. Confrontation with the movement presents one immediately with a challenging view of women in contrast to existent social values. However, it is the hope of the proponents of this view that the extension of the women's movement into the awareness of the general social

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49. A criticism which has been directed to Mitchell is that her analysis is ahistorical. In other words, as Roberta Salper in "The Development of an American Women's Liberation Movement 1967-1971" in Female Liberation: History and Current Politics (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972) has said, "The belief that women's condition has its own structure composed of four elements - elements that are constants throughout history (although the substance of these constants forms may differ) negates the idea of historical progress, indeed it is ahistorical".

On the contrary, Mitchell would present her argument within an historical framework and develop her argument with a sensitivity to historical development. Mitchell couches her analysis not on an abstract level (as Salper contends), but with close reference to historical explanation which for Mitchell is much "more dialectical than any liberal account presents itself". History illuminates the position of women in terms of Production, Reproduction, socialization and Sexuality, and Mitchell takes pains to clarify her position through an historical explanation of these elements.

50. Cf. basic works of the women's movement, i.e., Robin Morgan (Ed.) Sisterhood is Powerful (New York: Random House, 1970); Judith Hole and Ellen Levine, Rebirth of Feminism (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1971); Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine and Anita Rapone, Radical Feminism (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973); Roberta Salper, Ibid.; Kate Millet, op. cit.; Leslie B. Tanner (Ed.), Voices from Women's Liberation (New York: Signet, 1970); Michelene Wandor, The Body Politic (London: Stage I, 1972); Mitchell, op. cit., and Sheila Rowbotham, op. cit.

sector will transform these respective values and recreate a potentially 'liberated' society. Implicit in this expectation is the transformation of the meanings which are attributed to the relationships between the sexes, the social processes by which these meanings are attained and the structures which perpetuate (for most feminists)<sup>51</sup> extreme sex role stereotypes. In other words, at the core of the feminist critique is the notion that a woman's identity and role in society should not be dependent upon her relationship with a man but should be defined in terms of her identity as a human person who is distinct from a man. (Distinct in this sense refers to an individual social being, i.e., woman who lives in a society populated by both men and women - who, in turn, are themselves social individuals - unique and different.) This critique brings about what I would term the "reconstitution of women's role" in society and ultimately the restructuralization of the role-producing processes for both sexes.

It is the current belief of some social scientists<sup>52</sup> that the recent spate of literature which reflects this type of perspective has filtered through the general social scene and has in turn effected a gradual reconceptualization<sup>53</sup> of woman's role. Ultimately, this reconceptualization (in terms of meanings) and the reconstitution (in terms of the actual role producing or socialization process) has helped to establish

51. Cf. Firestone, op. cit.

52. Cf. Petras, op. cit., p.18; Gagnon and Simon, op. cit. (1973), pp. 289-90, where they discuss the emergence of specific sexual social movements; also Joan Huber (Ed.), Changing Women in a Changing Society (London: University of Chicago, 1973), a text compiled by the American Sociological Association and full of interesting and illuminating articles written mostly by women sociologists.

53. Petras, op. cit., p.19. He says that in order to reconceptualize one's thinking in terms of traditional sex role distinctions requires radical changes in the social and mental structures of society. I would extend his analysis to the areas of meaning and social process (reconceptualization having to do with mental structures) and reconstitution (having to do with social structures, such as socialization within the family, marriage ...).

a sensitivity to the relationship between sexuality and society. Man/woman begins to have an increased awareness that sexuality has been historically utilized as a determinant factor in social relationships. This awareness brings into focus the current trend toward the sexualization of society and the impending social commitment to the transformation of social (and sexual) roles of men and women.

### Gay Liberation

Another social movement which calls into question the traditional allocation of social roles is the gay liberation movement. In effect, however, this particular movement operates as a unique social pressure group to challenge the existing heterosexual sex role domination which is prevalent in contemporary society. Their ultimate goal is the social affirmation<sup>54</sup> of the homosexual sex role and the obliteration of the general negativistic attitudes which society has perpetuated in relationship to this "erotic minority".

In his brief discussion on social movements, Laud Humphreys cites two preconditions of a social movement: the oppressive sense of intolerable reality and the vision of conceivable change. For the homosexual involved in the gay liberation movement these preconditions exist in the very daily existence of one's social life. On the one hand, he/she experiences the pervasive social syndrome of homophobia<sup>55</sup> which defines

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54. Simon and Gagnon, op. cit. refer to this concept in terms of legitimation which includes a twofold aspect of legalization and normalization. I use the term social affirmation which extends beyond the legal processes to the area of social construction of meanings of sex which ultimately affects interactions on individual levels and feeds back into the legal process for justification or legitimation. Homosexuality may be legal (as is the case in England - between consenting adults in private), however, normalization (which allows a homosexual as much freedom as a heterosexual) has far from occurred. Cf. Dennis Altman, Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation (London: Allen Lane, 1971), pp. 129-130.
55. Cf. Dr. George Weinberg, Society and the Healthy Homosexual (London: Colin Smythe Gerrards Cross, 1975), esp. Ch. 1, "Homophobia", pp.1-21.

the individual homosexual in relationship to society in terms of concepts such as evil, sinful, neurotic, sick and diseased.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, he/she lives in the constant hope that society's fear will be dispelled and that society itself will begin to realize the potential richness of social roles which currently are socially unapproved.

## 2. The Social Construction of Sexuality

In order to understand the social processes which define, construct and institutionalize sexuality in society, we should analyze three related concepts: Identity, Role, and Institution. Within society, these are essential factors which correspond to the formation of individuals, social relationships and ultimately society. Our discussion is rooted in the premise that sexuality is one of many facets of social behaviour. It manifests itself as an emergent social process which is effected by the cultural construction of and the social classification into gender roles (masculine and feminine) along with the biological given - sex. However, one must note that the end product of this process implies cultural as well as individual variations. A 'determinant' principle that will be drawn from this type of behavioural analysis is that sexuality is viewed as the end product of a series of symbolic and non-symbolic interactions<sup>57</sup>

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56. Cf. Thomas Szasz, The Manufacture of Madness (London: Paladin, 1973) especially chapter entitled, "The Product Conversion - From Heresy to Illness" where Szasz discusses the changes in the conception of homosexuality from a religious and moral conception to a social and medical conception.

57. See Blumer's explanation of these two terms in Herbert Blumer, Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 1968), p.8. For Blumer non-symbolic interaction is a direct non-interpretative response to social action while symbolic interaction implies the interpretation of social action. Basically, Blumer's analysis is derived from George Herbert Mead who speaks of symbolic interaction in terms of conversation of gestures which indicate a basic social process whereby a certain attitude of one individual calls out a response in the other, or another individual who in turn appropriates a different attitude and response. Cf. George Herbert Mead, Mind, Self and Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934) edited and with an introduction by Charles W. Morris, p.14 and p. 253.

which arise between individuals, and society at large.

### Identity

Identity is a key concept in the formation of a clear sociological understanding of sexuality in society. To begin with, identity is analyzed as the all-pervasive self-image - the emergent self-awareness or self-consciousness which confronts an individual in interaction with others. This conception of identity extends beyond the mere question, "Who am I?" and considers a more contingent question, "Who am I to Become?". Implicit in this meaning of identity is the notion that one's total self-image deeply involves one's relationship to others and their attitudes towards him/her. As Gerth and Mills have said, "The self image develops and changes as the person through his social experience becomes aware of the expectations and appraisals of others".<sup>58</sup>

Before moving on to a discussion of sexual identity,<sup>59</sup> we should look to the spectrum of meaning from which an understanding of the concept, identity, is developed. Four conceptualizations come to mind: (1) identity as situational; (2) identity, at times, as socially imputed and potentially malleable; (3) identity as negotiable, and (4) identity as contiguous.

Firstly, identity locates an individual as 'socially situated'. This concept brings into focus an analysis of the individual as a social being interacting with other social beings. Social reality becomes

58. Gerth and Mills, op. cit., p. 84.

59. In fact, before we move on to a discussion of sexual identity, sexual role and the institutionalization of sexuality, we should clarify these respective terms by initially describing identity, role and institution in a general sense. The beginning pages in this section will supply a descriptive and analytical presentation of these basic terms.

apparent to him/her in his/her social life as both solitary and shared (individual vis-à-vis society). Therefore, identity is set within this context of awareness of self through the awareness of others. Identity becomes relevant only as one becomes aware of who he/she is in relationship to others.

Sociologists from the Frankfurt School have poignantly illustrated this:

Human life is essentially, and not merely accidentally social life. But once this is recognized the conception of the individual as ultimate social entity becomes questionable. If fundamentally man exists in terms of and because of others who stand in reciprocal relationship with him then he is not ultimately determined by his primary indivisibility and singularity, but by the necessity of partaking of and communing with others.<sup>60</sup>

If we accept that the individual<sup>61</sup> exists not as the ultimate social reality but as essentially relational, then we accept identity not as a static essence<sup>62</sup> or inherent quality but as a social phenomenon which is intrinsically linked to the social process.

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60. The Frankfurt School for Social Research, Aspects of Sociology with a preface by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, and translated by John Viertel (London: Heinemann, 1973), pp. 39-40.

61. Mead discusses this point of approach as dealing with experiences from the standpoint of society as being essential to an analysis of the social order. Mead says, "Social psychology is especially interested in the effect which the social group has in the determination of experience and conduct of the individual member". Also, Mead says, "If we abandon the conception of a substantive soul endowed with the self of the individual at birth then we may recognize the development of the individual's self and of his self consciousness within the field of his experience." I would add that we must consider the existent society from which an individual has emerged and we must look at the various structures which have affected his consciousness.) For Mead's social psychology, "the whole (society) is prior to the part (the individual) not the part prior to the whole in terms of the part or the parts". Mead, op. cit., p.1.

62. Cf. Jack Katz, "Essences as Moral Identities: Verifiability and Responsibility in Imputations of Deviance" in American Journal of Sociology (May 1965) 80, pp. 1369-90, where he discusses the implications of analyzing essences as unobservable present and inherent states of being and as moral identity in which one imputes a moral status.

Identity involves the imputation or assignment of meanings to the self. This process of identification necessitates an individual's presentation of self with the announcement<sup>63</sup> of his/her interpersonal and structural location.

In a sense identity is assigned to an individual, but this assignment process is contingent upon the announced self with its resultant social roles, the experience of the assigner with his biographical knowledge concerning the assignee, and the particular situational meanings which arise in the interactional context and which are situation<sup>64</sup> specific to both parties. When these complex social processes coincide in the social matrix, identity is established.

63. Cf. Gregory Stone, "Appearance and the Self" in Human Behavior and the Social Process edited by Arnold Rose (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), pp. 86-117. Stone says that one's identity is established "when others place him as a social object by assigning him the same words of identity that he appropriates for himself or announces".

Cf. also Arthur Brittan, Meanings and Situations (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973) where in his discussion of Stone's article, Brittan tells us that an individual's identity becomes apparent when he declares it on the "open market". However, he makes claim to his own identity and in order for it to be established, others must accept this respective announcement. At this point, Brittan makes a distinction between announcement and discursive identity which he links up with Mead's explanation of the self. (For example, Mead, op. cit., p. 189 emphasizes that given a socialization process ("which continues on in order that there may be individuals"), "there is a possibility of human intelligence when this process, in terms of the conversation of gestures, is taken over into the conduct of the individual - and then there arises, of course, a different individual in terms of the responses now possible").

Brittan makes this point to show us that to take the role of the other one must be able to identify the other.

64. This particular conceptualization of the situation is related to a consideration of the social environment of the individual. However, in this thesis the term will refer more to the phenomenological status that differentiates it from the physicalistic conceptualization than the physicalistic one. As Tiryakian says, "The situation transforms the physical site. A person is situated and situates himself in the world. The situation does not exist abstractly as an abstract location. The site is a physical locale of potentiality but the situation is the actualization of the locale as the result of the meaning the person finds in it." From E. Tiryakian, "The Existential Self and the Person" in The Self in Social Interaction edited by Chad Gordon & Kenneth Gergen (New York, John Wiley, 1968), pp. 75-85.



Concerning the problematic notion of identity, Donald Ball has said, "We present our audience with a self, which is acknowledged by them in the making of an assignment of identity; one can ratify and confirm or deny and disconfirm the other".<sup>65</sup>

Let us consider another interesting feature of identity, namely, its malleability or potential for transformation.<sup>66</sup> In the empirical social world, identities do change and this change suggests that an individual seems to have become something other than he/she once was. A transformation has occurred, a new stance is taken and, possibly, a new alignment in one's social activity is effected. Yet, all these processes may indicate a turning point in one's conception of oneself and resultantly, other's conceptions of this "self". Transformation may necessitate the assumption of a social stance in which previous primary commitments may be related to one's present social world. However, these prior commitments may also be relegated to a secondary or even to a minimal status. Brittan in his discussion of identity points out that transformation of identity does not necessarily imply a full assumption of a new identity, but rather an alternation of identity. In other words, an individual may assume two identities and alternate between them. In this context, Brittan says:

Men are exposed to different symbolic and behavioral situations at an increasingly accelerated rate and this involves the individual in committing himself to alternative identity projections. Yet, these projections are not necessarily

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65. Donald Ball, "Self and Identity in the Context of Deviance", the case of the criminal abortion in Theoretical Perspectives on Deviancy, edited by Jack Douglas (New York: Basic Books, 1972), pp. 158-186.

66. Cf. Anselm Strauss, "Transformation of Identity" in Rose, op. cit., pp. 63-85, where Strauss replaces the term development with the term transformation and therapy implies the consideration of a change in the basic form of identity (p.66).

permanent, nor do they imply a complete reinterpretation of the social world, except in extreme cases.<sup>67</sup>

In other words, one may alternate identities without being fully committed to both or either identity at one point in time.

Let us examine identity as a continual negotiation process between what one thinks, feels and expects oneself to be and what others believe one to be. Negotiation is contingent upon the interactional setting. Previously, we discussed the notion of alternation in which different aspects of the self are mobilized and presented, varying upon the social context. Alternation together with negotiation reflect the tension that is peculiar to the identification process - apposition vs. opposition. The implication of this tension is that identity "is intrinsically associated with all the joinings and departures of social life".<sup>68</sup> Identity operates therefore as a differentiation process which can ultimately set one apart from other social beings. Brittan describes this process of differentiation as "fragmentation" and he proposes that "it may be the 'normal' way in which men relate to one another".<sup>69</sup>

Central to a discussion of identity within a negotiation process is the consideration of what I would term, "the situational preconditions". These preconditions arise in the form of symbols (in the Meadian sense) which structure our responses to others, their expectations about us and their response to us.<sup>70</sup> I do not mean to imply that an individual's group

67. Brittan, op. cit., p. 155.

68. Stone, op. cit., p. 94.

69. Brittan, op. cit., p. 156.

70. Let us consider the social emergence of the self as Mead has proposed in his social behaviorism and recognize that the self is very much bound up within the interactional setting which necessarily implies a responsive situation.

Mead's conception of the self is composed of the "I" and the "me". The "me" as distinct from the "I" must be analyzed in terms of the "I" which, as Mead says, is the response of the organism to the attitudes of others. The "me" is the organized set of attitudes of others which one assumes and "the taking of all those organized sets

affiliation which affects his/her identity such as sex, class, or ethnic affiliation are not somewhat influential in this process. They are. The initial context of negotiation is set within a 'general' interactional framework. However, this does not rule out prior knowledge of one's social location (i.e., as in the case of sex or race).

Our final conceptualization of identity is recognizing it as being capable of maintaining personal continuity<sup>71</sup> in the midst of change. In immediate social experiences, one perceives that current symbolic meanings, which are related to a present identity supply one with a sense of continuity. This is so because current symbolic meanings are predicted on prior self-conceptions. They may or may not evidence a radical departure from prior self conceptions. However, the important factor here is that continuity is set within the context of the present, contingent self-orientation of the person. Reconciliations of certain past identities to the present interactional framework may appear to challenge a sense of continuity and perhaps, one's present, optimal interpretation of oneself. However, the whole range and diversities of past identities may be interpreted as uniform. As Strauss proposes, "The awareness of constancy in identity is in the eye of the beholder rather than in the

70. Continued from p. 97:

of attitudes gives him his "me" or her her "me", that is, the self he or she is aware of. However, one must note at this point that it is the presence of those organized sets of attitudes that constitute that "me" to which she/he as an "I" is responding. Albeit the response of the "I" may be uncertain and, therefore, leaves room for innovation, freedom even social deviance, it is always something different from what the situation calls for. That the "I" responds in a way that is congruent with the organized set of attitudes ("me") may impinge upon the individual consciousness as a moral necessity (as Mead says) but not a mechanical necessity. If the "I" always is something different from what the situation calls for, it is the individualized response to the social other or, "the generalized other".

71. Anselm Strauss, *Mirrors and Masks: The Search for Identity* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1959), p. 144.

behavior itself".<sup>72</sup> In other words, a certain amount of flexibility channels "the self" into considering possible action which may be consistent, as well as innovative. Identity implies a "processual phenomenon" which illustrates constancy and direction in the fashioning of the self, while indicating a certain amount of flexibility and change. In a similar light, Natanson speaks of the self as a social structure. He says,

It [self] is at once the unified history of its past performances the agency which gives valence to immediate action. In one direction then, the self is continuous, memorially directed and indexed with clues and keys to past action; in another direction, it is a force which moves action at any time. On the one side: the organized accumulation of what happened to the individual; on the other: the present moment which may either call some aspect of the past into question or ignore it ... The stability, continuity and general reliability of the individual presuppose traditional action and a seasoned performer, whereas at each moment of experience, action can also be given a new and perhaps different interpretation. The solidity of tradition is paired with the spontaneity of decision.<sup>73</sup>

### Role

After looking at the identification process and the related conceptualizations, we will analyze how this process is socially articulated or expressed in the form of a role.

In the midst of the self typification process (in the form of identity), an individual is presented with various shared perceptions and interpretations of social reality. These perceptions and interpretations emerge in the construction of the social experiential world - the interaction process. In a contextual sense, personal identity (an individual's unique self conception) comes to be expressed as social identity (broad social categories which are self expressed). Social identity therefore

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72. Ibid., p. 147.

73. Maurice Natanson, The Journeying Self: A Study in Philosophy and Social Role (Reading, Mass.: Addison Wesley Pub. Co., 1970), pp.17-18.

comes to be portrated as "the combination of a number of categorical meanings designating socially recognizable types".<sup>74</sup> Social identity emerges on the social sphere as the individual's major role, or socio-self typification. The contrivances of action (roles) present themselves to an individual as a plan of interaction. These "plans" are not only manifested in a particular social role but also affect and are affected by the symbolic meanings in one's social experience. Here we have a two-fold process: the perceiving of a role and the taking of a role.<sup>75</sup> Natanson says concerning the nature of role:

The other is both known and experienced by the self through role itself; that is the self comes into awareness of the Other by taking his role; assuming the standpoint of the other.<sup>76</sup>

Similarly, he says:

The Other presents himself as a nexus of role-possibilities co-joined with my own lines of action. Becoming aware of the other is then becoming aware of my own points of access to the social world.<sup>77</sup>

The self, which at times has converging and conflicting social and personal awarenesses, recognizes the possible lines of social action which present themselves in a plethora of roles. The self absorbed within the social context of reality does necessarily share in the perspectives of

74. Cf. Chad Gordon, "Self Conceptions: Configurations of Content" in Gordon and Gergen, op. cit., pp. 115-136, where Gordon proposes a comprehensive view of self conception which includes both social identity and personal identity (attributes which distinguish himself/herself from others). Social identity refers to a noun like social categories. Gordon proposes that this dualistic conception offers a more comprehensive view of the self. In terms of lesbianism, the dualistic sense of self is the lesbian identity and the lesbian experience (social identity).

75. Cf. Ralf Turn, "Role Taking: Process versus Conformity" in Rose, op. cit., pp. 20-40, where Turner brings out the notions of the role taking process and the role making process. Turner extends the concept of role to include the process in which one modifies roles as well as assume roles. He, therefore, implies possible alternatives concerning social behaviour.

76. Natanson, op. cit., p. 33.

77. Ibid., p. 34.

other's social worlds. For the self, there exists an underlying belief in a shared social world. (Is not the notion of 'shared' implied by the very nature of society?) The Meadian conjunction of the self as a social process within a social process seems to substantiate the nature of a shared social world. For Mead the signification process from which the self arises is a social process which implies interaction with others. Furthermore, group attitudes are brought within the range of the individual's field of experience and become a part of the self. The self becomes unified in the face of the organization, community or group which, as a formalized social process, enter into the experience of the individual member. The particular referent which characterizes this social process is termed "the generalized other". This concept is set within the context of the universe of discourse which Mead tells us is simply "a system of common or social meaning".<sup>78</sup> Thus, our analysis of role is as a somewhat regularized, yet responsive and emergent process. It is capable of being enacted by a variety of individuals in different ways, while evidencing "typicality". (Role "is a type of actor rather than a type of person".)<sup>79</sup>

Individuals may exhibit a number of roles in various social situations. However, we must consider: the particular requirements of a situation, the biographical knowledge communicated by the interactants, the ability to mobilize this knowledge into effective activity and the symbolic meanings which generate such mobilizations. The primacy of co-operative social activity is implicit. A characteristic, problematic response of an individual is the adjustment and re-adjustment of one's social behaviour to diverse situations. In this light, social interaction unfolds as a somewhat tenuous, fluid, indeterminate social phenomenon in which negotiation, compromise and adaptation become evident. New roles are consistently being

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78. Mead, op. cit., p. 90.

79. Turner, op. cit., p. 24.

effected and affected, while old patterns of activity are refashioned or abandoned in light of changing situations. A problematic confrontation with the social environment is usually resolved in terms of one's ability to exercise control over one's response. In a 'co-operative' process, such as the role-taking process, control of the self's social activity does occur. If the self is able to take the role of the other, it not only responds to the other but also controls the self's response. In taking the role of the other one assumes a self critical stance and is able to exercise a form of social control.<sup>80</sup> This subsequent stance enables one to reflect the other's role upon oneself and to channel the self's communicative activity. Thus, a certain amount of interpersonal reciprocity exists and emerges as one interacts. Mead tells us:

The complex co-operative processes and activities and institutional functionings of organized human society are also possible only insofar as every individual involved in them or belonging to that society can take the general attitudes of all other such individuals with reference to these processes and activities and institutional functionings and to the organized social whole of experimental relations and interactions thereby constituted and - can direct his own behavior accordingly.<sup>81</sup>

### Institution

At this point in our analysis we ask "How does one explain the

80. At present I would like to make it clear that the lack of clarification in interactionist theories concerning social control is a definite theoretical as well as methodological problem which confronts the researcher. The emphasis upon the notion of interpersonal reciprocity seems to ignore the notion of power and control in terms of their structural sources and comes near to the point of what some sociologists have termed "astructural bias". Cf. Janice Reynolds and Larry T. Reynolds, "Interactionism, Complicity and the Astructural Bias" in Catalyst (Winter 1973), 7, pp. 76-85.

81. George Herbert Mead, "Play the Game: The Generalized Other" in Alfred Lindesmith and Anselm Strauss, Readings in Social Psychology (New York: Holt Rinehart & Winston, 1969), pp. 206-214.

creation, emergence, maintenance and transmission of the social order in light of what has been previously stated?" This social order exists 'normatively' or as institutionalized behaviour in the form of shared and patterned activities. It effects the recognition of social reality in the form of shared perspectives. "Roles", as Berger says, "represent institutions".<sup>82</sup> Therefore, roles make it possible for institutions to exist. This buttressing affect of roles will become evident as we look at the development of human activity. (Human activity in this context refers conceptually to activity which is almost pre-social.)

All human activity involves the process of routinization (habitualization). Individuals create routines and habits into which the normal experience of human activity flows. Habitualization is reflected in the entire spectrum of human activity and, in turn, the human act is subjected to a routinization process. On the one hand, habitualization makes complexity a fact of life, while providing the direction and specialization necessary to structure and stabilize social activity. On the other hand, habitualization provides a meaningful form of human activity in which freedom is possible.<sup>83</sup>

Institutions arise "whenever there is a reciprocal typification of habitualized actions by types of actors".<sup>84</sup> Therefore, institutions

82. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman, The Social Construction of Reality (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p. 93. The authors make the point that institutions are represented in other ways (language - in form of word symbols, and physical objects ...). However, they remain lifeless unless they are resurrected through human conduct. Therefore, "the representation of and institution in and by roles is thus the representation par excellence on which all other representations are dependent".

83. Ibid., p. 76. Freedom in this sense implies that by providing a stable background for human activity, as well as a minimum of decision making, man becomes freer to make decisions which may be made in the context of innovation and deliberation.

84. Ibid., p. 72.



exist in a seminal form in every social situation. Institutions typify individual actions as well as individual actors. Implicit in the nature of institution are the notions of historicity and control. Institutions are created, emerge, exist, are maintained and are transmitted in the context of history and require an understanding of this respective historical process. Along with the notion of historicity, the process of social control emerges. It is recognized as an institutional prerequisite which directs human activity into almost "predefined" patterns of activity. This directive nature which is inherent in institutional control channels human activity into acceptable activity. Otherwise human activity remains undefined or is unacceptable vis-à-vis the institutional order.

An institutional world exists as an external reality in terms of individual comprehension. It is experienced as an objective reality because it is objectivated human activity.<sup>85</sup> For an individual bound to the social process and thereby caught up with<sup>in</sup> the internalization process, the institutional world impinges upon his/her consciousness as the objective reality. Yet it is recognized as an externalized product in terms of his/her own subjective reality. Therefore the appropriation of social knowledge becomes a process of "dual realization". It requires an understanding or realization of the products of social action (in form of institutional reality), while actually producing and realizing this external, objective reality. Berger believes this process of the social construction of reality to be a paradox which is implicit in all human

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85. In other words, it is an objective process by which externalized products of human activity (in this case the institution) attain the character of objectivity. At this point in his analysis, Berger distinguishes between external, objectivation and internalization (process by which objectivated social world is retrojected into consciousness in the course of socialization) as moments in a continuing dialectical process. For example, institution as a product of human activity, institution as an objective reality and individual man/woman as a social product and producer .. and a cycle goes on.

social activity. He tells us:

Despite the objectivity that marks the social world in human experience, it does not thereby acquire ontological status apart from the human activity that produced it ... Man is capable of producing a world that he experiences as something other than a human product.<sup>86</sup>

The social construction of knowledge involves intrinsically the transmission of expanding legitimations which exist as explanations and justifications of the institutional world. Therefore, a prerequisite for the transmission of this knowledge is to account for various meanings through a series of plausible explanations, legitimations. This interpretive process, presentation of legitimations, effects social activity and informs this activity with meaning. Simply stated, legitimation makes sense out of the institutional order. It imputes meaning and historicity to one's social world. Thus, the "ontogenetic" process of socialization emerges concurrently with the unfolding of the legitimation process. Membership in society requires that one simultaneously externalize his/her being in the social world and internalize his/her own being and the social world as objective reality.

Identity, Role, and Institution, are bound up within the complex process of reality construction - the construction of society in terms of both objective and subjective reality.

#### Sexual Identity, Sex Roles and the Institutionalization of Sexuality

An analysis of sexuality in society relates to identity, roles and institutions. While recognizing the interplay between identity, role, institution and the social configurations which emerge as sexual, we begin to understand the social sources of human sexuality. Let us examine the

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86. Ibid., p. 78.

'nature' of sexuality, as well as the complex social matrix and behavioural processes from which one emerges, chooses and organizes a 'sexual' stance. Various factors in society affect emergent sexualities and have momentous implications for the living out of sex roles. This analysis (interactionist<sup>87</sup>) views sexuality as socially constructed behaviour - that is, behaviour perceived, learned, transmitted and carried out in an atmosphere of interaction.

### Sexuality and Society

Sexuality as a natural<sup>88</sup> fact of social life is extended into society as a "natural and moral fact of life".<sup>89</sup> The existence of the two sexes in society carries with it the idea and belief that it is 'natural',

87. Cf. Blumer, op. cit., for a general theoretical and methodological explanation of interactionism; also Bernard N. Metlzer, John W. Petras and Larry T. Reynolds, Symbolic Interactionism: Genesis, Varieties and Criticism (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975) for a brief but synthetic approach to interactionism in general; for interactionist accounts on sexuality, see Gagnon and Simon, op. cit. as well as Petras, op. cit.; for a comprehensive account of "sexual stigma", see Kenneth Plummer, Sexual Stigma: An Interactionist Account (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), see especially pp. 29-41.

88. Cf. Berger and Luckmann, op. cit., p. 67, where the authors say, "While it is possible to say that man has a nature it is more significant to say that man constructs his own nature, or more simply, that man produces himself". In a similar manner I have used natural as a descriptive term in relation to sexuality. Berger and Luckmann posit the existence of mammalian sexual drives in man; however, they qualify their position by characterizing these drives as being unspecified and undirected as well as being highly pliable in their extension into the social world. Likewise, I too would deny the existence of sexual drives per se, yet I would posit the notion of sexual need which arises necessarily within a social context. (In this sense, even masturbation is seen within a social context.) This position maintains that sexuality arises only in a context which is social and is seen as a definite social product. However, firmly embedded in this social development and construction process are biological constraints and social constraints which interplay and relatively affect directional objects as well as modalities of expression.

89. Harold Garfinkel, Studies in Ethnomethodology (New Jersey: Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1967), p. 124.

therefore, morally proper that society be this way. A corollary of this view of the natural "matter of factness" of sexuality is (as Garfinkel proposes) the belief that "there are only natural males and natural females".<sup>90</sup> In other words, society imbued with moral propriety is composed of members who are only naturally male or naturally female. These social beliefs perpetuate the idea that sexuality and, furthermore, sexual behaviour is decided by nature, constant, invariant and unchanging in its extension into any aspect of social life. Resultantly, there is a basic prohibition in society of any deliberate or varying movement from one sex status to another - whether on a physical level or emotional level (i.e., transexuality, homosexuality). We can see how sexuality while being socially constructed and organized, is directed into various forms of activity which are socially recognized as normal, proper, appropriate to one's biological sex. Anthropological evidence<sup>91</sup> refutes the invariability of sexuality and, therefore, the perpetuation of sex roles along pre-fixed lines of activity. Another intervening factor which challenges the complex structuring of sexuality and sex roles is the notion of social change, as it becomes more evident in highly industrialized

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90. Ibid., p. 123.

91. Two classic examples are:

Cf.1: C. S. Ford and F. A. Beach, *Patterns of Sexual Behaviour* (London: Methuen, 1952) where these authors collect empirical data on people living in 190 different societies and then compare their data with primates (which resemble man in terms of evolutionary order). They conclude that human sex life is profoundly effected by social channelization and personal experience and, therefore, take different forms under different social conditions.

Cf.2: Margaret Mead, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1935) where Mead discusses and compares three small societies in New Guinea: Arapesh, Mundugumor, and Tchambuli (located 200 miles radius from one another). Mead illustrates the 'flexibility' of human biology and exposes that each culture had distinctive sex roles (in terms of male and female roles) and varying behavioural expectations as well as temperaments within its particular society.

societies.<sup>92</sup> Therefore, we should consider the variability of sexuality. It is set within a social milieu where the majority of the populace still continue to uphold a basic commitment to traditional, culturally defined, sex-typed roles which are universal in the ideals of masculinity and femininity.<sup>93</sup> These are cultural constants and are bolstered up and perpetuated by these commitments.

### Sexual Identity, Sex Roles and Institutionalization of Sexuality

In light of the universality of ideals and social beliefs about the 'nature' of sexuality, sexual identity emerges as a self-typification process which is the direct result of the presentation of the male and female roles as they are perceived, experienced and transmitted to individuals in a variety of ways and throughout various societies. Some social scientists<sup>94</sup> make a distinction between sex as a biological constant that differentiates between males and females and gender, the cultural construction of and social classification into masculine and feminine. The crucial distinction has been made in order to acknowledge the constancy of sex while acknowledging the variability of gender.<sup>95</sup> The interplay

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92. Cf. Betty Yorburg, Sexual Identity: Sex Roles and Social Change (New York: John Wiley, 1964), p.3 for an interesting explanation of the historical conception of the meaning of identity from its "non-existence" in traditional societies (group type, identity bestowed at birth) to highly industrialized societies where identity becomes unstable, debatable and where roles become more negotiable. Roles emerge more on the basis of individual preference than social dictums.

93. Ibid.

94. Yorburg, op. cit.; Jessie Bernard, The Sex Game (London: Leslie Frewin, 1968); Ann Oakley, Sex, Gender and Society (London: Temple, Smith, 1972).

N.B. My continual use of the word sexuality does, in fact, imply these two concepts in my analysis. Therefore, I see sex and gender as two parts in one's conceptualization of sexuality. They appear to be conceptually distinct phenomenon in terms of their singular use, yet they are analytically related within the total notion of "sexuality". I view them as closely intertwined in the socio-sexual sphere. Sexuality becomes an interplay between sex and gender.

95. Oakley, Ibid., p. 19.

between both components of human sexuality in the socialization process may function as a stabilizing mechanism or in some cases as a conflicting system.<sup>96</sup>

A basic social assumption is that sexual identity should form a symmetrical balance between one's socio-sexual identity (assigned as a result of biological given) and one's subjective identity (identity which one feels most closely linked to or identifies as one's own). In the sexual sphere, society imposes upon individuals how one ought to behave, as well as how one ought to feel. Social expectations in the area of sexual conduct<sup>97</sup> become a primary factor in the socio-cultural definition of sex roles. However, these expectations are based upon a prior universal consensus that men and women differ from each other in terms of their respective biologies - anatomically, morphologically, hormonally, chromosomally and genetically. Consequently, we must not overlook this definitive social recognition process. These biological foundations of the sex

96. I prefer to speak in terms of counter institutions as does H. T. Buckner, cf. his text, Deviance, Reality and Change (New York: Random House, 1971). In my discussion of lesbianism as unapproved sexuality, I imply that this phenomenon is a form of counter-institutional activity. The lesbian who experiences a conflict between social reality and her individual experience (reality flaw) may become involved in an alternate reality, the counter-institution which does not fit into the legitimated institutional order of the wider society and which is seen as "illogical, unnecessary and wrong". The counter institution (in this case lesbianism) may provide the lesbian with a high level of integration on a personal level as well as a powerful force of legitimation of her own reality.
97. Cf. Ernest Burgess, "The Sociologic Theory of Psycho-Sexual Development" in Hoch and Zubin, op. cit., pp. 227-243. Burgess makes the distinction between behaviour and conduct. He states, "conduct is behavior prescribed or evaluated by the group. It is not simply external, observable behavior, but behavior which expresses a norm or violation". The institutionalization of sexuality which results in the interplay of sexual activity vis-à-vis regulatory rules illustrates the perennial problem of the societal direction and control of sexual conduct. Within the abstract public eye, as we have said earlier, marital coitus is the only acceptable form of prolonged sexual activity (although in contemporary society this conception may be changing). In reality, there exist many sexual variations within society.

differences have maintained a determinate function in social beliefs about the 'nature' of sexuality and have remained a determinant factor in the allocation of sexual identity and furthermore, of sex roles.

The relationship between these biologic foundations and social activity in the light of the creation of identity, sexual behaviour in the form of roles and structured relationships, and social conceptions of these roles (masculine vis-à-vis feminine and vice versa) is a confusing one and open to varying opinions.

However, on the basis of these biological differences (in terms of average size, strength, ratio of muscle to fat and reproductive capacities), sexual behaviour and activity have been directed from two main sources: acceptable sexual conduct (between sexes) and respective collectivities - male and female. As a result, sex roles become standardized in relationship to these "biologic" references. These sources become a basis for the structuring of socio-sexual relationships in the form of heterosexuality (sex between these two collectivities) and patriarchy<sup>98</sup> (differentiation of who has the power). In other words, as objective social realities,

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98. Throughout the context of this thesis the term patriarchy is used. It refers to the structuring of social relationships (primarily through the socialization process and resultant ideologies) which develop cultural values and roles based on male dominance and female subordination.

Cf. Janet Salzman Chafetz, Masculine/Feminine or Human: An Overview of the Sociology of Sex Roles (Illinois: F. E. Peacock Publishers, Inc., 1974) where she defines patriarchy "as caste". She says, "Patriarchy implies the superiority of one group of individuals - males - over another - females. Moreover, gender is an ascribed and, except for very few individuals, unchangeable characteristic. Patriarchy is probably the oldest form of exploitation and subjugation of one part of a population by another". (p. 109)

Ultimately, patriarchy is based upon the biological distinctions between men and women. Simply, men and women are different physiologically. Millet views patriarchy as a "social constant so deeply entrenched as to run through all other political, social and economic forms (institutions) whether of caste or class, feudality or bureaucracy, just as it pervades all major religions, it also exhibits great variety in history and locale." Kate Millet, Sexual Politics (New York: Avon Books, 1969), p. 46.

these two forms of the social construction of sexual behaviour between men and women have over-riding influence in not only determining social beliefs and sexual images, but also defining sexual identities and sex roles. The belief that men and women have different and unequal sex drives permeates social reality. Heterosexuality and patriarchy uphold this reality, inform the social construction of sexual knowledge, and confirm the social assumption that sex should be the equivalent to gender. As legitimate sexual indicators, they interact and emerge in society which recognizes and further institutionalizes their meanings. Ultimately, they make sense out of sexuality and dominate sexual ideologies in society (beliefs about 'nature' of sexuality).

As we have seen from the above, biology does affect images and definitions of sexuality. However, should it emerge as a determinant factor in terms of human sexuality? As I have stated earlier, sexuality which is emergent in the society through the social process is effected by a unique interplay between sex and gender. Yet, biology is a "prerequisite" to sexuality but only in so far as it sets up the physical parameters for the social expression of sexuality. Let us examine this social expression closely.

From the initial moment of one's contact with society, an individual is thrust into an interactional process. Whether it be characterized by an awareness of environmental conditions, an individual consciousness, a consciousness of the presence of others or their consciousness and directed response, the contact is always interactional. An individual is constantly reacting to the self and to others, as well as being reacted upon.

For an adequate understanding of the developing nature of sexuality we must be aware of the various self-indicators which emerge in the forefront of one's social world. Blumer says that "self-indication is a moving communicative process in which the self notes things, assesses them, gives



them meaning and acts on the basis of their meaning".<sup>99</sup> An individual, therefore, organizes his/her behaviour in terms of situations which are ordered around various sets of interpretive symbols. On this level, significant sexual symbols are being created, reacted to, and responded to as an individual becomes a social, sexual being. As a result, sexuality becomes a symbolic reality which one conforms to, rejects, or attempts to negotiate. Yet, in terms of objective social reality, as I have implied earlier, there exists little room for negotiation in the sexual sphere. Socio-sexual reality presupposes a sexual role as being either conforming (natural), or non-conforming (unnatural). Social definitions leave little room for individual choice on the level of marginal sexual status. Gagnon and Simon point out that the emergence of individual sexuality into the domain of the socio-sexual sphere may be considered as problematic.

At this time let us consider briefly the response of significant others to an individual's sexuality. A child's sexual development emerges within the context of the adult sexual value system (parents) as well as within the dominant value system. Because of the existence of sexual privatization and parental reticence concerning sexual activity, one may be left to his/her own defences. Yet a social individual gradually appropriates sexual meanings and discovers, through implicit cues, the parameters which are set out for him/her.

The impact of human sexuality is revealed within an historical context.<sup>100</sup> "Human sexuality is socially controlled by its institutional-

99. Cf. Blumer, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

100. Cf. Yorburg, *op. cit.*, where she maintains that variations in sexual identity can be explained if we understand how economic, political, familial, educational, and recreational activities have varied in non-literate societies, agricultural societies and industrialized societies. She further proposes that agricultural development and the Industrial Revolution had profound effects upon the relationship between the sexes. With an understanding of what Yorburg would term,

ization in the course of the particular history in question."<sup>101</sup> Therefore, various typifications (i.e., heterosexual roles and patriarchal roles) of habitualized sexual actions exist and define for its performers the acceptable and non-acceptable areas of sexual conduct at a particular point in time. When we examine closely societal response to sexuality, we notice that it is characterized by two inter-related factors: sexual activity and sexual regulation. Sexual activity includes that private area of one's life in which he/she articulates a definitive response in terms of one's gender role (approved of or unapproved of). Sexual activity also implies social activity in the social construction of images, ideologies ... which define sexuality within a particular context. While on the individual level, one may respond to societal expectations concerning his/her gender role, there is another simultaneous response which is being effected on the level of social control of sexuality. In a real sense, sexual activities are organized and integrated into larger social arrangements<sup>102</sup> in which meaning and sexual activity merge to create sexual conduct.

100. Continued from p. 112:

material changes, we can begin to trace various ideational changes whose paths are not as orderly or patterned.

101. Berger and Luckmann, op. cit., p. 73.

102. Simon and Gagnon, op. cit. (1973) refer to sexual behaviour as scripted or non-spontaneous behaviour which is learned within an atmosphere of interaction. These sexual scripts occur in the process of learning the meaning of internal states and exist as "mechanisms by which and through which biological events can be potentiated" (p. 19). Scripting involves, "organizing the sequences of specifically sexual acts, decoding novel situations, setting the limits on sexual responses and linking meanings from non-sexual aspects of life to specifically, sexual experience" (p. 19).

This interpretation of sexual behaviour becomes a reflection of a deterministic element of the social process both culturally cumulative and learned. Scripting becomes an explanation and a form of social determinism - "Social anatomy is destiny".

It is important to note that the institutionalization process takes place in any area of relevant collective activity at any one point in time. In other words, it is clearly possible to assume that in this process of institutionalization, the allocation of sex-typifications (roles) coincides and exists concurrently with the allocation of roles based upon one's ability to perform a given task (as in the case of patriarchy - male dominant role, feminine passive role). These areas of the institutionalization process do not presume an integrated or cohesive process. As Berger brings out:

They [these processes] can continue to co-exist on the basis of segregated performances. But while performances can be segregated, meanings tend towards at least minimal consistency. As the individual reflects about successive moments of his experiences he tries to fit their meanings into a consistent biographical framework. This tendency increases as the individual shares with others his meanings and their biographical integration.<sup>103</sup>

Meanings become fused in time and are perpetuated as "meaningful" in terms of their utility in the social interaction process which produced them initially. Therefore, if we extend our analysis, the social construction of sexual knowledge in and through the process of institutionalization and habitualization creates a certain amount of consistent symbolic meanings which are built up in an atmosphere of reciprocal interaction. Such social knowledge of sexuality defines, constructs, and organizes sex roles in order that they may be appropriated in the institutionalized world as meaningful action. Any departure from this knowledge which is seen ultimately as a controlling factor in terms of one's sexuality is perceived as deviance<sup>104</sup> or unapproved sexuality.

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103. Berger and Luckmann, op. cit., p. 82.

104. This notion of "deviance" will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

Our analysis of the institutionalization of sexuality along with the further implications of historicity and control reveal the social fabric of sexual relationships as co-existing, as well as maintaining, and possibly upholding (in an ideological sense) other "post habitualized" or institutionalized processes (i.e., organization of political activity and distribution of power,<sup>105</sup> or organization of economic activity<sup>106</sup> in terms of the division of labour). These varying yet supportive integrated<sup>107</sup> institutions are riddled with the notion of gender. This 'genderization' of the institutionalization processes forms a distinctive basis for assigning rights and obligations within society as well as "defining" the

105. Cf. especially Frederick Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (trans. Eleanor Burke Leacock. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1942), p. 121, where Engels speaks of the overthrow of mother right as "the historical defeat of the female sex". For Engels, man took command in the home also and "the establishment of the exclusive supremacy of the man shows its effect first in the patriarchal family which now emerges as an immediate form". (N.B.: Political activity in this sense refers to the mobilization of power between and among the sexes in a patriarchal society.)

106. Cf. Juliet Mitchell, op. cit., p. 101, where she posits "that the biological differentiation of the sexes into male and female and the division of labor that is based on this have seemed throughout history, an interlocked necessity. Women became a less useful member of the work force".

Cf. also Simone de Beauvoir, op. cit., p. 49, where de Beauvoir cites that the continuation of woman's oppression (subjected to an inferior work role) is linked up to the establishment of private property founded upon the emergence of the patriarchal family. "In this type of family woman is subjugated" ... "It is this economic oppression (domestic servitude) that gives rise to the social oppression to which she is subjugated."

Cf. August Bebel, Woman under Socialism, Introduction by Lewis Coser (New York: Schocken Paperback, 1971), p.4. "The mass of the female sex suffers in two respects: on the one hand woman suffers from economic and social dependence upon man. True enough this dependence may be alleviated by formally placing upon her an equality before the law and in points of rights, but this dependence is not removed. On the other side, woman suffers from the economic dependence that women, in general, the working woman in particular finds herself in, along with the working man."

107. Integrated refers to institutions which have been legitimated into the social process. However, this notion does not preclude the social phenomenon of conflict which in effect may contribute an integrative function between and among the legitimation process.

division of labour. Masculinity and femininity therefore exist in varying degrees within various institutionalized processes; their meanings have been cojointly institutionalized with the typification of roles. However, in order to adequately understand the construction of sexual knowledge and, in turn, socialized sexuality, we must never lose sight of the micro-social forces (in terms of the acquisition of knowledge through cognition, perception and understanding). These processes are created in the social typification process and radically effect and affect the sexual meanings which are expressed in society. The emergence of the sexual must be understood as a complex social configuration in which the processes of sexual identity, typification and institutionalization of sexuality converge, channel and direct individual behaviour into various modes of activity and modalities of expression. Endemic to social life, however, is the notion that individual meanings, as micro-social forces, "inform" the structuring or effect the restructuring of sexual activity.

### 3. The Social Construction of Female Sexuality

The following discussion will serve as an introduction to an understanding of female sexuality. It will be a presentation of the social construction of female sexuality with special reference to ideological and structural considerations.<sup>108</sup> After this discussion, the proceeding

#### 107. Continued from p. 115:

Cf. Georg Simmel, Conflict and the Web of Group-Affiliations, (trans. Kurt Wolff and Reinhard Bendix. New York: Free Press, 1955), pp. 13-55, "The Sociological Nature of Conflict". Cf. also, Lewis Coser, The Functions of Social Conflict (New York: Free Press, 1956).

108. The social construction of female sexuality involves intrinsically the transmission of expanding legitimations which are explanations and justifications for the institutionalized 'sexual' world as it exists. (For example, acceptable sexual behaviour and beliefs about sexuality should correspond to patriarchal and heterosexual definitions about sexuality.) Knowledge of the female role or what it is to be a woman in society accounts for the structuring of this

section will analyze unapproved sexuality as it is set within the context of unapproved social behaviour, in general, and marginality, in particular. An underlying theme of these two sections is the awareness that lesbianism is a social phenomenon which oftentimes has been misunderstood by the participants in social reality, and which in light of my present dualistic analysis requires sociological clarification.

### Feminine Identity and Female Roles

At the centre of any society there lay various intricate webs of social interactions which are built upon particular social typifications allocated according to sex, age, kinship, residence ...<sup>109</sup> Social reality consists of social roles performed by individuals within their respective social situations. They are validated and legitimated within the social interaction process.

As we have seen, sexual processes and expressions are not only related to biological factors, but are psychologically, socially and culturally organized and directed. As a young girl develops and emerges as a social person, her social activities are transformed into those which are deemed necessary and appropriate to her particular sex. For her, the reality of sexual differentiation becomes sexual individuation and

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#### 108. Continued from p. 116:

respective role in this institutionalization process. It also implies a certain amount of interpretation of objective reality (ideologies) and subjective experience (perception of ideologies).

In the discussion of female sexuality, we are dealing with social ideas about female sexuality. These ideas co-exist as well as maintain an expansive or dominant social ideology. This ideology represents roles, or "post-habitualized" activities, or forms of female sexual behaviour which exist in society vis-à-vis women.

109. Cf. Michael Banton, Roles: An Introduction to the Study of Social Relations (London: Tavistock Publications, 1965), for a systematic introduction to roles and their varying social consequences.

vice versa. The socialization process covers a wide span of her interactional plane and, as a result, the transmission of sex values occurs in direct relation to the social institutionalization process.

Not only is she, as social participant, constructing meanings and reality (as she responds to significant others), but also she is building up meanings (in response to herself). Sexual meaning becomes for her an interpretation of these objective and subjective realities which are recurring realities of her everyday life. As Margaret Mead<sup>110</sup> suggests, it is not enough for a child to decide simply and fully that it belongs to its own sex! Emergent social individuals are faced with another problematic situation to consider: How female or male am I? In other words, one tries to discover how accurately she or he responds to their respective sex role or socially constructed typifications which are appropriate to their sex. Mead also proposes that sex capacities and functioning can be translated into many diverse patterns and each person shows their own version of this pattern.<sup>111</sup> As Mead clearly points out, in most cultures, no one is wholly male or female. Everyone is a blend of the masculine and feminine in different proportions. Prescribed roles may not be congenial with or feasible to everyone despite their biological sex (major criteria for sex classification).<sup>112</sup>

Let us consider the feminine sex role which follows a rough pattern

110. Margaret Mead, Male and Female (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), p.132.

111. I would prefer to use the term, activity, in place of pattern, in order to emphasize choice and transformation and to de-emphasize development.

112. Most societies have recognized this fact. However, only a few societies have attempted to institutionalize this phenomenon into socially acceptable roles. For example, one can cite the Mohave Indians in the United States (Southwest) who have accepted the berdache (male transvestite) who dresses as a woman and lives as a woman among his people. Cf. George Devereux, "Institutionalized Homosexuality of the Mohave Indians" in Human Biology (a) (1937), pp. 498-527.

(channelled activity) from childhood, young girl, sexual initiation, womanhood, married woman, mother and possibly widow. Basically, a woman's role is established upon her relationship to male members of society. As a vestige from the mythology of the past, society requires that a woman be a "real woman", that is a lover of man and therefore a passive recipient.<sup>113</sup> It is no surprise that from childhood a young girl is socialized to be man's companion and the bearer of his children.

### Female Sexuality and the Ideology of Female Sexuality

This brief descriptive analysis of the female role impels us to examine more closely various social forces which have affected individual values vis-à-vis society. As I have stated previously, institutional worlds imply historicity and social control, while requiring sufficient legitimation for their persistence in this temporal sphere. Our present analysis considers the historical reality of female sexuality, as socially created, emergent, transmitted and controlled in a variety of ways through the stages of the socialization process. This consistent process has been embedded in basic structural changes (i.e., as in the case of industrialized capitalism as the existent economic system in which the present situation of women as housewives has arisen).<sup>114</sup> These changes have become evident with the emergence of our highly technological society. Generalized images (based upon myth)<sup>115</sup> and the conceptualization of the "feminine"

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113. Cf. de Beauvoir, op. cit., especially Chapter XI, "Myth and Reality" for a detailed analysis of the developing notions of women and resultant social myths, as well as a systematic de-mythologizing of these historical examinations.

114. Cf. Ann Oakley, Housewife (London: Allen Lane, 1974), p. 156, where Oakley speaks of these changes as forces which are maintaining the "home interestedness" of women as well as perpetuating various myths.

115. Cf. de Beauvoir, op. cit., and also Elizabeth Gould Davis, The First Sex (Baltimore, Penguin Books, 1971), especially pp. 316-326, where Davis analyzes in detail various myths which have developed about women.



merge into various ideological systems and generate as well as propagate an over-riding ideology of female sexuality.<sup>116</sup> This ideology in turn, affects various institutionalized or structural processes (social, political economic) which effectively filter down to micro-social processes (individuation, habitualization) and become rooted in the value systems of the majority of members of society. The perpetuation of this ideology, therefore, begins anew ... Through this complex process (institutionalization of the ideology of female sexuality) society has come to equate femininity with passivity and domesticity, and has furthered a form of sexual hierarchy based upon sexual differences (i.e., patriarchy). The institutionalization of sexuality effects the institutionalization of an ideology of female sexuality.

Let us consider some concurrent social processes in a developmental sense, while never losing sight of the fact that these processes continually interact, intermingle, and do affect the eventual emergence and articulation of each particular process. For example, when we talk about the institutionalized methods which serve in the transmission and continuation of social knowledge, we should always relate these methods explicitly or implicitly to the structural processes (political, social, economic and cultural) around which these respective methods are organized and from which they emerge. Our discussion concerning the various means

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116. Similarly, Juliet Mitchell speaks of an ideology of women. It is interesting to note at this time that an ideology of women is assumed to be a universal conception in that women are thought to be alike the world over. (Cf., Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 100) However, as an hypothesized entity this ideology seems to have developed as an historical reality which is closely bound up with the heritage of patrimony (due to the loss of mother right) and with the subsequent power of patriarchy. The notion of woman is still canoped with this heritage and subsumed under this domain. However, as we shall see, it has been clothed in new forms in contemporary society with the subtle awareness of a women's liberation movement. This movement attempts to redefine the basis of this ideology and to restructure its modes of operation (defining reality in male terms). For an interesting example of this demythologizing process, see Leslie B. Tanner (Ed.), Voices From Women's Liberation (New York: Signet Books, 1970).

by which the institutionalization of female sexuality has come about focuses more upon, what I have termed, institutionalized methods (socialization, role identification and affirmation ...) rather than upon existent structural processes<sup>117</sup> (in terms of social, political, economic cultural forms of organization). These latter structural processes form the supportive base of the institutionalized methods and perpetuate their ideological systems. However, implicit in my analysis is a recognition of the importance of and inter-relationship between micro- and macro-social organization. Therefore, an analysis of these respective institutionalized methods, involving an affective relationship between the individual and micro-social forces, will be explained. However, it will be theoretically transposed upon a background of changing structural processes. My analysis centres around two related areas<sup>118</sup> of social activity which are considered to be institutionalized methods in the affirmation of an ideology of female sexuality. Firstly, there are the ideology promotion mechanisms which affect present ideologies and cause new ones to emerge. Secondly, there are the existing ideologies which affect the social conception of woman and her unique social role.

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117. However, I will discuss briefly the economic role of women in society today. The reason for this discussion is that women's economic role has been closely bound up with the family and domesticity - her "true social place". However, with increased technology these ideas are changing.

I would contend that the changing role of women in society on this structural level is affecting institutionalized methods (i.e., socialization). For example, how does a working mother cope with raising children?

118. This division is utilized primarily as an heuristic device because I am fully aware of the close relationship between these two social phenomena. For example, when I talk of the media as an ideological promotion mechanism, I also recognize the fact that there exists an implicit prevailing ideology of the media. Cf. Jock Young and Stan Cohen, The Manufacture of News: Social Problems, Deviance and the Media (London: Constable, 1973), where various authors point out that the manufacture of news is a highly selective process in which news is processed and reprocessed depending upon the particular are of social life and the over-riding ideological base.

Media<sup>119</sup> and Socialization<sup>120</sup> as Ideology Promotion Mechanisms

The Media

The images of woman which are created and presented by the media are based upon certain assumptions about society, sexuality and woman. Simply, society is divided sexually into two distinct categories (classes),<sup>121</sup> male and female. Corresponding roles in the form of ideal typifications of masculine and feminine have become routinized and institutionalized through the legitimation process as a 'natural' way of life. In light of this, a clarification should be made concerning the nature of the media. The media through advertising,<sup>122</sup> the presentation of images, the stylization

119. One can also look to art and literature as a similar social form or mechanism which has perpetuated an ideology of female sexuality. (In these particular cases the ideology of female sexuality is a denial of her creativity.) However, for a closer analysis of the exclusion of women from the artistic world, cf. Linda Nochlin, "Why are there no great Women Artists?" in Woman in a Sexist Society: Studies in Powerlessness and Power edited by Vivian Gornick and Barbara Moran (New York: Signet Books, 1971), pp. 480-510. See also, the following article for an exposé of the problem of women writers in the face of male critics, Elaine Showalter, "Women Writers and the Female Experience" in Radical Feminism, ed. Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine, Anita Rapone (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973), pp. 391-406; also author as above, "Women Writers and the Double Standard" in Gornick and Moran, op. cit., pp. 452-479. For an interesting twist, cf. Kate Millet, Sexual Politics (New York: Avon Books, 1969) where she discusses great men writers and their images of women.

120. My discussion of socialization will be concerned mainly with secondary socialization. Primary socialization, in contrast to secondary socialization, implies the internalization of the world of significant others as the world. (Therefore, the notion of choice is not involved, there exist no problems of identity and the world exists for one already.) Secondary socialization is the internalization of institutions or institutionally based sub-worlds. Therefore, the notion of significant others in this case emerges through a process of subjective identification with the institutional world.

121. Some social scientists in order to accentuate the sexual division in society talk in terms of the social division of sex roles as a sexual caste system (in the sense that caste best conveys how social roles are determined by birth rather than by achievement). Therefore, one is viewed as being socialized on the basis of sex. Cf. Carol Andreas, Sex and Caste in America (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1971). Also, Firestone, op. cit., pp. 1-14 where she talks about men and women as two opposing "sex classes".

122. Cf. Lucy Komisar, "The Image of Women in Advertising", in Gornick and Moran, op. cit., pp. 304-317.

of values ... does not necessarily create the sex role stereotypes of woman. It may only reflect existing identities, roles and institutions. As an ideology promotion mechanism, the media operates from pre-existing social processes which are perceived as not only possible but realizable ways of relating in society (i.e., in terms of sex roles). The media crystallizes existing social relationships and, thereby, helps to promote and legitimate the institutionalization process. Implicit in the media is the cultural theme of equality or, to relate this theme to women, we can speak of an ideology of equality. With the inclusion of women into the labour force<sup>123</sup> as a technological necessity and the recognition of the importance of the emancipation of owmen, we talk in terms of an overriding social and cultural concern with equality. As one social scientist has already stated:

No doubt men and women have been grated the right to equality in general terms, as a vague human right. However, for women the translation of that identity into practice has been imperfect and unenthusiastic. Despite this comparative failure, the ideology (of equality) has had considerable effect in giving women confidence in their right to select an occupation and life style associated with it.<sup>124</sup>

The media mirrors other social values such as achievement, and success through economic gain-values which are exposed to all members of society. However, these values are socially and culturally shared but

123. Cf. Alva Myrdal and Viola Klien, Woman's Two Roles: Home and Work (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956) where these social scientists propose that one of society's claims on woman is that women's co-operation in the labour force is necessary for economic progress.

124. Cynthia Fuchs Epstein, Woman's Place: Options and Limits in Professional Careers (Berkely: University of California, 1971). See especially, pp. 33-36 where Epstein discusses the effect of the cultural theme of equality on woman as well as the cultural values of success and achievement and their implications for women.

socially defined, delineated, distributed in terms of sex, age, ethnic affiliation ... In effect, the sex "dichotomy" cuts across all classes or strata and social groups which exist in society.

### Socialization<sup>125</sup>

The ideology of female sexuality<sup>126</sup> is based upon existing female stereotypes<sup>127</sup> and is maintained throughout society in sex-role socialization - a process as we have seen which begins to operate for both sexes from the moment of birth.<sup>128</sup> This social induction process imposes upon women the equation: femaleness = domesticity. This identification process, therefore, upholds the female sex role in terms of a dual role: Wife<sup>129</sup> and mother.<sup>130</sup>

125. Cf. Joan Acker, "Woman and Social Stratification", op. cit., ed. Acker, pp. 174-183, where she considers six basic assumptions which are made about women in sociology and links them up to the socialization process as well as other processes.
126. Cf. Juliet Mitchell, op. cit., "The Position of Women: I", pp. 99-122, where she equates the ideology of woman with the ideology of oppression and she tells us, "We have to see why women have always been oppressed, how they are oppressed now and how differently elsewhere ... The situation of women is different from that of any other social group: they are half of the human species" (p.100).
127. For an interesting view of female stereotypes, see Mary Ellman, Thinking About Women (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1966). She relates feminine stereotypes to conceptions of Formlessness, Passivity, Instability, Confinement, Piety, Materiality, Spirit, Irrationality and Compliancy.
128. Oftentimes in their analysis of the "oppressive nature" of the female sex role, feminists tend to disregard the fact of the oppressive nature of the masculine stereotype and the resultant pressures one has in order to perpetuate this role. Basically, I view this entire process of sex role socialization as the tyranny of sex role socialization for both sexes. This present analysis gives more emphasis to the female sex role in terms of socialized sexuality. However, it implies an acknowledgment of the above.
129. Cf. Hannah Gavron, The Captive Wife, Conflicts of Housebound Mothers (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966); also, Helen Znaniecki Lopata, Occupation Housewife (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).
130. Ann Oakley, op. cit., (1974). It is interesting to note at this time that Oakley makes an added distinction between the housewife role and the wife role. The former characterizes a woman's home care role while the latter characterizes her husband care role

In the first instance, that of wife, socialization relegates women to the occupational role of housewife, which is the domestic role within the family. Ann Oakley, in Housewife, points out that the division of labour by sex presumes that "women are naturally housewives in all societies and that women need to assume this role in order for society to survive".<sup>131</sup> In other words, housewifery is socially conceived and perpetuated as natural, universal, and necessary. Socialization in light of this assumption serves as a long period of apprenticeship for housework for a young woman.<sup>132</sup>

In the second case (that of motherhood), we are able to view the socialization of women as forming an emergent pattern from generation to generation of women. This pattern becomes evident in the socialization process which triangulates this arrangement: all women need to be mothers, all mothers need their children, all children need their mothers.<sup>133</sup>

The ideas of motherhood and housewifery fuse conceptually in our minds and materialize in objective reality through the existence of the nuclear family. Another important point to consider is the effect of educational activity within this structure as well as formalized education. It is in this latter area where young women and girls do not hold high

130. Continued from p. 124:

within the domestic situation; see especially Chapter 4 "Situation of Women Today", pp. 60-90. N.B.: I recognize the distinction between both terms and yet I use the term wife in a general sense to characterize both notions of domestic care.

131. Ibid.; see especially Chapter 7, "Myth of Woman's Place" (I: The Division of Labour by Sex), pp. 156-185. Oakley outlines the three disciplines of Ethnology, Anthropology and Sociology as some of the main social perpetrators of the myth of the division of labour by sex.

132. Cf. Ann Oakley, The Sociology of Housework (London: Martin Robertson & Co., 1974). However, Oakley makes an important clarification in light of my statement. The female's induction into the domestic role, unlike other occupations lacks a formal structure and consequently is rarely seen as an occupational apprenticeship. A main reason for this fact is that preparation for housewifery is intermingled with socialization for the feminine gender role in a wider sense. Neither in theory nor in practice is one process distinguished from the other. p.113.

133. Oakley, op. cit., (1974a), p. 186.

aspirations<sup>134</sup> and tend to accept the social definitions imputed to them and which culminate in the marriage, wife, mother, family syndrome. Even in those cases where women chose to go to university, they usually underestimate their career potential. Ultimately, as Ferdinand Tönnies brings out in his discussion on Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, women who seek labour outside of the home must compete on the labour market with their breadwinner. And interestingly enough, he goes on to say, parenthetically, that from an economic point of view the family is nothing but a co-operative society for the consumption of consumer goods and the reproduction of labour.<sup>135</sup>

### Ideologies

Let us now consider briefly some of the existing ideologies which are powerful in our society and serve an interpretive function in defining the role of woman. These dominant ideologies have a perpetuating force in the creation of an ideology of female sexuality. We will be analyzing three ideologies and their social implication in the formation of existing notions of women. They are the ideologies of the spiritual (Judeo-Christian thought and the science of psychology and psychiatry), romantic love, marriage and the family and productive work. Implicit in this presentation is the assumption that all of these ideologies have emerged from an historical context and that their elements (albeit some are vestigial) perform an illuminating function in the understanding of the role of women in contemporary society.

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134. Cf. Cynthia Fuchs Epstein, op. cit., especially "The Socialization Process and its Consequences: Roads to Careers and Dead Ends", pp. 50-85, for an interesting and insightful explanation of this phenomenon.

135. Ferdinand Tönnies, Community and Association (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1955), p. 190.

Ideology of the "Spiritual" (Judeo-Christian Thought and the Science of Psychology and Psychiatry)

An analysis of the Judeo-Christian heritage exposes a definite strain of anti-feminism in light of women.<sup>136</sup> As Mary Daly, a Catholic theologian aptly states, "Exclusively masculine symbolism for God, for the notion of divine incarnation in human nature and for the human relationship to God reinforce sexual hierarchy".<sup>137</sup> In effect, the entire theological and ethical systems of this heritage were developed in an atmosphere which denied equal status to women. Correlatively, this development affected man's/woman's total "reaction upon life",<sup>138</sup> especially when we consider that Judeo-Christian universe was upheld by many Western societies in their developmental stages and their elements have filtered down to present society. This burgeoning heritage tended to serve the interests of a society primarily concerned with interpreting meanings and organizing modes of being and acting in male categories.

It is believed by some social scientists<sup>139</sup> that the role of religion as an institutional force in proping up the dominant ethical systems (with an implicit male orientated stance) has been replaced and transferred to the sciences of psychology and psychiatry as the main legitimating systems.

136. Cf. Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973); author as above, The Church and the Second Sex (New York: Harper & Row, 1968); Elizabeth Gould Davis, The First Sex (New York: G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1971); Rosemary Radford Reuther (Ed.), Religion and the Second Sex: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Tradition (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973).

137. Daly, op. cit., p. 4.

138. This description is one of William James' definitions of religion in a general sense (that is even if the context is a belief in "no-god"). Cf. William James, Varieties of Religious Experiences (New York; Mentor Books, 1953).

139. Cf. Daly, op. cit.; also Thomas S. Szasz, The Manufacture of Madness (St. Albans; Paladin, 1973), especially Chapter 4, "The Defence of the Dominant Ethic", pp. 85-95. Here he examines the social service function of institutionalized Christianity in the form of the Inquisition and offers a comparison to what he calls Institutional



This displacement of religion by the science of psychology and institutionalized psychiatry has effected a peculiar brand of intimidation for women. In effect, "millions [women] who might smile at being labelled 'heretic' or 'sinful' for refusing to conform to the norms of 'sexist' society can be cowed and kept in line by the labels 'sick', 'neurotic' or 'unfeminine'".<sup>140</sup>

In her recent book on women and madness,<sup>141</sup> Phyllis Chesler makes some interesting claims as to why it is that now women more than ever before are seeking psychiatric help and being hospitalized in the process. Women she believes are denied cultural supremacy, humanity and "renewal" based on their identity. In face of this process of denial, some women become 'mad' in their search for equal power with men. This search involves oftentimes the emergence of traits (aggression, delusions of grandeur, sexuality, emotionality) - all of which are feared and punished in patriarchal asylums.

139. Continued from p. 127:

Psychiatry. He says: "Both provide an intellectually meaningful, morally uplifting and socially well-organized system for the ritualized affirmation of the benevolence, glory and power of society's dominant ethic. From without or to the critical observer, these institutions might appear harsh and oppressive; but from within, or to the true believer, they are beautiful and merciful, flattering at once the masses and their masters. This is the secret of their success" (p.86). And may I add that the masters (who are usually men) of both ideologies created their own belief systems, priesthoods, rituals, spiritual counselling, norms, values, deviancies and language which have reflected predominantly male orientated structures.

Cf. also, Phillip Rieff, Triumph of the Therapeutic (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966), especially "Introduction: Toward a Theory of Culture", pp. 1-27, for an interesting comparison of these two spiritual systems. Rieff believes that the dissolution of the unitary system of Christianity and the contemporary dissolution of the personality has effected the rise of several systems of beliefs which attempt at a re-organizing of "spirituality".

140. Daly, op. cit., p. 4.

141. Phyllis Chesler, Woman and Madness (New York: Avon Books, 1972).

Ideology of Romantic Love,<sup>142</sup> Marriage and the Family

Modern Western societies have seen the development of love relationships (particularly heterosexual love relationships) within the context of what I would term the 'romantic love ethos'. In terms of this love ethos, the idea of falling in love became highly desirable and sought after as a basis of marriage. In other words, the social preoccupation with notions of romance in the 'love complex'<sup>143</sup> virtually led to its ultimate institutionalization in marriage. In effect, individuals are culturally propelled and psychologically motivated to become supportive participants in this romantic love ethos which has a pervasive influence throughout society. Ultimately it provides legitimation for one's sexual status.

142. For a variety of sources on romantic love and love, Cf. G. Rattray Taylor, Sex in History (London: Panther, 1965), Chapter X, "The Romantic Quest", pp. 192-201 for an interesting historical interpretation of the "romantic movement"; Shilamuth Firestone, op. cit. for a feminist account of romance.

However, for interesting sociological approaches, Cf. Ira Reiss, "Toward a Sociology of Heterosexual Love Relationships" in Journal of Marriage and the Family (May 1960) 22, pp. 139-145, for a discussion of the wheel theory of love which is typified in married love when two people with complementary backgrounds fulfil their personal needs by feeling rapport and revealing themselves to one another in the context of dependence.

Cf. also, Nelson Foote, "Love", Psychiatry 16 (August 1963), pp. 245-251, where love is seen as being based on commitment rather than romance and is that "relationship between one person and another which is most conducive to optimal development of both".

Cf. also, N. Dennis, "Relations: 2" in The Sociology of Modern Britain David Weir and Eric Butterworth (Eds.) (London: Fontana, 1975), pp. 46-48 where Dennis cites marriage as an elaboration of a social institution which has become the only place in which an individual can demand and expect esteem and love.

Cf. also, K. Little, "The Basis of Marriage" in Weir and Butterworth, op. cit., pp. 49-51, where Western marriage in the context of romantic love is seen as an emotional solution and performs a rationalizing function in this social solution.

143. Cf. Talcott Parsons, "Kinship Systems of Contemporary United States" in Essays in Sociological Theory (New York: Free Press, 1954), pp. 177-196. This romantic love complex is closely bound up in an open system with freedom and choice, Parsons tells<sup>us</sup> and also is linked with the "institutional sanction that two people (spouses) be in love."

Existing values and cultural expectations direct one's sexual life into a consideration of the syndrome of romanticism. This syndrome follows generally from a pattern of love to marriage to the building of a family unit. Implicit in this pattern is the societal presentation to both sexes of the ideal romantic images (i.e., Romeo and Juliet). However, either sex may become frustrated in their search for the realization of this ideal which is epitomized in the notion of 'beauty' and 'social graces'. The end result is that both men and women do marry to fulfil their inherited social ideal and, in turn, romanticize their respective monogamous relationship which represents the ideal. However, women swept up within this process (even if some do choose to have a job outside of the home) are confined to the home for reproduction in the family and for work in the form of domestic labour. Thus, what Tönnies said in 1887 in his discussion of the realm of life and work in Gemeinschaft (in this case the family), as being a necessity for women is still relevant today: "For women, the home and not the market; their own dwelling or a friends dwelling and not the street is the natural seat of their activity." <sup>144</sup> This notion of the "domestic woman" has become evidenced in contemporary society from an unfolding of a chain of related social events - love, engagement, marriage and the establishment of a family.

#### Ideology of Productive Work - Economic Role of Women

Capitalism as it exists in Western industrialized societies is an all-pervasive force in terms of the economic life of individuals. In the midst of the increasing productivity of human labour, individuals are motivated by the accumulation of capital and thus this profit motive colours all of their economic transactions and may, in turn, affect their social situation. Concerning himself with the rising capitalist economy in

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144. Tönnies, op. cit., p. 186.

Western Europe, Weber said in 1904 that: "the capitalism of today which has come to dominate economic life, educates and selects the economic subjects which it needs through a process of economic survival of the fittest."<sup>145</sup> In this same way, contemporary capitalism socializes individuals into various economic roles which are supportive of this respective economic system. However, the majority of these supportive roles are dominated by men. In turn, this domination serves to exclude many women from playing an important role in the labour market and market economy. Within this economic context, the female status clearly carries with it many disadvantages in terms of economic opportunities - property, ownership and income.<sup>146</sup> More women than men are excluded from powerful positions, earn less, and only a small proportion (of women) are in more prestigious positions.<sup>147</sup> The reason for a woman's systematic exclusion from the work force (as a major participant) seems to be based on prior

145. Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (translated by Talcott Parsons), (New York: Schribner & Sons, 1958), p.55. However, later on in his text Weber says concerning the nature of this labour, "wherever modern capitalism has begun its work of increasing the productivity of human labor by increasing its intensity, it has encountered the immensely stubborn resistance of this leading trait of pre-capitalistic labor. And today it encounters it the more, the more backward (from a capitalist point of view) the laboring forces are which it has to deal". (p. 60) N.B.: Women were considered for Weber only within this type of backward traditional form.

146. It is interesting to note that in a majority of societies inequalities associated with sex differences are not usefully thought of as components of stratification. This is true mainly because for a majority of women the assignment of social and economic rewards is determined by the class position of their families - personified in the male head of the family. Cf. Frank Parkin, Class Inequality and Political Order (London: Paladin, 1972), pp. 14-15.

However, Joan Acker, op. cit., refutes this assumption that the social position of the family is determined by the status of the male head of the household in that at least 2/5 of households in the United States do not have male heads (female-headed households or woman works because man <sup>is</sup> retired, unemployed, or <sup>a</sup>part timer). In this case, the position of the family cannot be determined by the male head. She also illustrates an interesting point in which she attempts to suggest that women may have a more relevant role in the stratification process than some sociologists suggest.

147. Acker, op. cit., p. 177

assumptions concerning her biological makeup (i.e., reproductive capacity, stature ...). This appears to put her in a position of physical inferiority in relationship to men. As one social scientist has said: "It is always stressed how, particularly in early stages of social development, man's physical superiority gave him the means of conquest over nature which was denied to women. Once woman was accorded the menial tasks involved in the maintenance while man undertook conquest and creation, she became an aspect of things preserved: private property and children."<sup>148</sup>

If some women do chose to work outside of the home (some for financial reasons)<sup>149</sup> they still suffer the effects of social attitudes which are biased against them and which prefer their exclusion from productive labour in the labour market. Furthermore, professional women or career women have come to be viewed as the antithesis of the feminine woman,<sup>150</sup> while women who work in male-dominated occupations, in particular, are often thought to be sexless.<sup>151</sup> Hopefully, we have come to see how the effects of an ideology of capitalism has excluded women from the economic interests of this dominant ideology and, therefore, denies for most women a viable role in the economic life and activities of a society which has come to be dependent upon men as the primary labourers in the work force.

148. Mitchell, op. cit., p. 102.

149. Gavron, op. cit., see especially, "Mothers and Work", pp. 115-126. Cf. also, Myrdal and Klien for a discussion of the conflict between the two roles of wife and working wife and mother. These authors point out that 1/3rd of the working force in Britain (at the time of their study) were women. However, these women are not necessarily full time workers.

N.B.: For a recent percentage, Mitchell, op. cit., quotes 37%, pp. 189-197.

150. Epstein, op. cit., p. 23.

151. Ibid.

#### 4. Unapproved Sexuality, Deviance, and Lesbianism

##### Unapproved Sexuality

As I have mentioned earlier, I have chosen to use "unapproved sexuality" as a relevant term for my particular type of analysis of lesbianism. However, ironically enough, as Petras brings out:

To speak of types of sexual behavior as unapproved is to assume a residual area of "approved sexuality". But it would be difficult for many individuals to approve of sexuality in any form, except, perhaps, normal intercourse during marriage.<sup>152</sup>

This section will serve as a brief introduction into the area of unapproved sexuality. Further on in this thesis it will be necessary to develop a more extended analysis of lesbianism as unapproved sexuality within the general area of deviance theory. Presently we will discuss the problematic nature of deviance, its social emergence, construction and maintenance.

Basically, we have considered that sexuality is a socially constructed reality which is built up within social, historical and cultural contexts. Its meanings and activities within the social interaction process inform the social process with a conceptualization of sexuality and its further institutionalization.

In terms of the general area of deviance we can say that "the actual fact of defining something as deviant is an outcome which usually reflects a complex interaction between institutionalized norms of the populace (mores) and the actual pattern of behavior exhibited by that populace".<sup>153</sup> However, in the sphere of sexual activity a number of forms of this activity

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152. Petras, *op. cit.*, p. 92. Here again we see that the emphasis on acceptable sexuality reflects heterosexual and patriarchal forms (in terms of objective structure of marriage situation).

153. John H. Gagnon and William Simon, "Introduction: Deviant Behavior and Sexual Deviance" in Sexual Deviance, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-12.

are not characterized by a correlation between laws, mores and behaviour. For example, while no specific law proscribing masturbation exists, strong formal sanctions within various religious groups militate against this type of behaviour. Resultantly, masturbation is socially defined in a negative context and condemned by many individuals.

Our discussion of unapproved sexuality is concerned primarily within the social context of deviance as collective action.<sup>154</sup> However, whether we examine the prostitute within her socially constructed and economically defined milieu, the homosexual as she or he seeks out a commitment in the gay world or the nudist who within the nudist camp experiences the construction of situated moral meanings,<sup>155</sup> we bring to mind these types of unapproved sexuality as being defined within a deviancy context as well as within a collective context.

Unapproved sexuality emerges in society concurrently with the development of various ideologies which are supportive of those sexual activities that are upheld as morally upright and sound.<sup>156</sup> Therefore, individuals in our society idealize heterosexuality and its resultant features of fertility, family and felicity. Yet, for a person who does not fit into this dominant ideology (i.e., lesbian), unapproved sexuality becomes a source of anxiety in a predominately heterosexual world. For the lesbian, her lesbianism exists as the antithesis of the existing sexual

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154. Cf. Howard S. Becker, "Labelling Theory Reconsidered" in Paul Rock and Mary McIntosh (Eds.), Deviance and Social Control (London: Tavistock, 1974), pp. 41-66, especially section entitled "Deviance as Collective Action", pp. 44-49.

155. Cf. Martin S. Weinberg, "Sexual Modesty and the Nudist Camp" in Social Problems (Winter 1965), Vol. 12, pp. 311-18.

156. Cf. Howard S. Becker, Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance (New York: Free Press, 1963), especially Chapter 8, "Moral Entrepreneurs", in which Becker describes the activity of rule creators and rule enforcers who uphold the institutionalized morality.

order in society and particularly as the denial of the "true" nature of women which is solidly bound up within the family structure. However, as Simon and Gagnon point out, "The female homosexual has perhaps a more labile stereotype, one which is capable of greater integration into the fantasy life of the society".<sup>157</sup> As a result, there is less pressure to conceive of the behavior as narrowly confined, nor is there much need to protect the self against the fantasy generated by thinking about the behaviour. (Indeed, if one frequents sex shops one will necessarily view various pamphlets, books ... depicting explicit lesbian love-making - a fantasy deeply rooted in the life of modern man.)

The existence of what appears to be a 'soft-negative' reaction towards lesbianism in our society may alter the nature and shape of those experiences to which the label of unapproved sexuality becomes attributed. For the lesbian, a type of self reaction may occur in which her sense of alienation and estrangement from the conventional heterosexual involvement takes root. In effect, the lesbian may conceive of herself as socially inept in the heterosexual sphere as a reaction to the very social construction of sexuality as well as to the labelling reactive process which society engages in. In this case, therefore, unapproved sexuality appears as subjectively problematic while being objectively realizable in society.

A sense of difference for those engaged in unapproved sexual activity opens the way to one's detachment or insulation from the social world. The subjective reality of their unapproved sexuality may project the individual into a more supportive social milieu or a positive intersubjective reality. (For a lesbian, as we will discover, Lesbian social organization performs

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157. Simon and Gagnon, op. cit., (1973).



this task.) For example, as Weinberg explains, the nudist camp has norms that permit the organization and control of behaviour which defines its participants as "deviant" by their disregard for clothing when in the presence of others (especially persons of the opposite sex). Yet, in reality, as a supportive system, the nudist camp provides a new definition of nudity for the individual nudist and promotes ideas which do not relate nudity to sexuality. Thus, the situated morality becomes for the nudist a means of self identity and the management of a deviant activity.

When we focus upon the phenomenon of unapproved sexuality, we view it emerging as a process of modification, stabilization, and integration into the social life of an individual. Any form of unapproved sexuality involves a series of social elements in a dynamic and variable process. The intricacies of this process present various alternatives for different individuals. The life of a prostitute prior to her involvement in the world of hustling, pimps and johns may present a gradual transformation or drift from the performing of sexual acts for acceptance of status to the performance of specific sexual acts in exchange for payment.

For the male homosexual he may choose his unapproved sexual role in light of various reactions from society and in response to his own perceptions of himself as a sexual being. His increasing commitment to this respective role can become for him sexually satisfying, as well as socially rewarding in terms of his gay world commitments. For the lesbian, the emergent process from self reaction to commitment involves many intricate responses on both the objective and subjective levels (i.e., transformation from lesbian identity to lesbian experience to lesbian social organization). All of these examples reveal each form of sexual behaviour as a complex process in which there is variation in the combinations of attributes that produce similar outcomes in the society's eyes. The outcome is unapproved sexuality.

Deviancy: Objective Reality and Subjective Reality, Society and the Individual

The primary purpose of this discussion is to place lesbianism as a social phenomenon into a perspective which fully integrates both the subjective experience of unapproved sexuality and the objective reality of the social construction, organization and control of this experience. Our analysis will involve a pivotal stance which reflects an awareness of the complexities of the relationship between these conceptually distinct yet social interacting realities. Let us, therefore, examine deviance and society (deviance as an objective reality) and deviance and the individual (deviance as a subjective experience).

Deviance<sup>158</sup> and Society

The social organization and control of deviant behaviour involves a recognition and subsequent analysis of various definitions of deviancy which are built up within the social system and which, in turn, are reacted against. This consideration of social deviance requires us to distinguish<sup>159</sup>

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158. It is interesting to note at this time the lack of any systematic formulation in terms of the relationship of deviancy and women. The basic orientation of this field of inquiry has been primarily concerned with male deviance, and consequently women have received scant attention in this area, with few exceptions.

Cf. Frances Heidensohn, "The Deviance of Women: A Critique and Enquiry, British Journal of Sociology (June 1968), Vol. XIX, pp. 160-175, for a consideration of this problem in terms of deviancy theory; also by the same author, "Sex, Crime and Society", Journal of Biosocial Science (1970), Supp. II, pp. 129-136.

Cf. also an article, Karen Rosenblum, "Female Deviance and the female Sex Role" in British Journal of Sociology (June 1975), pp. 169-185.

Cf. also, Carol Smart, Women, Crime and Criminology: A Feminist Critique (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976).

159. Implicit in both approaches has been the use of official statistics as a source in the definition of deviance. However, the use of official statistics in the study of deviance fails to distinguish between the social conditions which produces a unit of behaviour from the organized activity which produces a unit in the rate of deviant behaviour. One of the demands of labelling theorists is

between deviance as the breaking of social norms and deviance as behaviour which is socially labelled as deviant. Both processes are related in that they mirror the relationship between society and various definitions of deviancy. However, they are analytically distinct. The former view assumes the existence of a consensual authority which designates certain acts as being proscribed as deviant and contrary to the dominant social order, as well as being symptomatic of social dysfunctioning.<sup>160</sup> The latter<sup>161</sup> proposes that the social definitions of and reactions to deviancy assume a problematic stance in the social designation of deviancy. Implicit in this latter view is the rejection of an homogeneous category of deviants along with an acceptance of the social fact of pluralism.<sup>162</sup>

159. Continued from p. 137:

to view statistics within the realm of this latter process (the rate producing process) and to gather data independently from the former process (the behaviour producing process). Therefore, the task of the labelling theorist (in the realm of unofficial data) as a definer of deviance becomes problematic.

Cf. John Kitsuse and Aaron Cicourel, "A Note on the Use of Official Statistics", Social Problems

Cf. also, Jack Douglas, The Social Meaning of Suicide (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967) for an examination of the methodological and theoretical problems related to this type of approach. Douglas relates his study to the specific social problem of suicide.

160. See, for example, Robert K. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure (New York: Free Press, 1957); and also Talcott Parsons, The Social System (New York: 1951).
161. For an example of this view, Cf. Howard S. Becker, op.cit., Esp. Chapter 1, "Outsider" where as a major proponent of this view he develops the assumption that deviance is "created by society". However, he qualifies his statement to mean "social groups create deviance by making rules whose infraction constitutes deviance and by applying those rules to particular people and labelling them as outsiders".
162. Ibid., p. 8. In light of this notion of pluralism note that Becker asks the question: "A society has many groups each with its own set of rules and people belonging to many groups simultaneously. A person may break the rules of one group by the very act of abiding by the rules of another group. Is he then deviant? ..." Further on Becker says, "I doubt that there are many such areas of consensus (in a total sense) and I think it wiser to use a definition (of

My analysis of deviancy will proceed in the direction of this latter view, labelling theory. The analysis attempts to spell out the basic factors which effect the social designation of deviancy. Implicit in my analysis is the awareness of the problem of reconciling the notions of power and control (institutions and 'consensual' or legitimated authority) within this perspective. Before one can talk about social reaction to deviancy and its various contingencies, one must recognize the dominance of what Douglas terms the absolutist conception of morality.<sup>163</sup> If we affirm this existing absolutist morality we do not deny the social fact of pluralism. These two realities are not mutually exclusive. In effect, what we are attempting to do is to conceptualize the public perpetuation and interpretation of an abstract absolutist morality as being

162. Continued from p. 138:

deviance) that allows us to deal with both ambiguous and unambiguous situations".

Cf. also, David Matza, Becoming Deviant (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1969) where he tells us that the fact (of cultural pluralism) must be accepted and not evaded in order to present a "rigorous" definition of deviance (p. 12).

163. Cf. Jack D. Douglas (Ed.), Deviance and Respectability: The Social Construction of Moral Meanings (New York: Basic Books, 1970), see pp. 3-30, "Deviance and Respectability: The Social Construction of Moral Meanings". This absolute conception of morality as distinct from the social conception of morality (which gradually changes) imposes constraints on all forms of social behaviour and, therefore, any challenge to this absolute morality is a challenge to the absolutism of morality itself. In effect, a challenge to this absolute morality is perceived as immoral and threatening to the existing order.

In a different light, cf. E. Lemert, Social Pathology: A Systematic Approach to the Theory of Socio-Pathic Behavior (New York: McGraw Hill, 1951), especially Chapter 3, "Societal Reaction", pp. 54-73, where Lemert talks in terms of the "complete" repression of deviance in society. "An outcome of the societal reaction process leads to complete rejection and actual or attempted repression of deviant conduct. When the norms violated are highly compulsive and universal in culture, then efforts converging from many directions will be made to eliminate the variant behaviour and to smash any organization which may be associated with it." N.B.: Lemert's analysis, however, takes for granted the existence of universal or compulsive norms. I would agree. The deviant who breaks these norms is punished primarily and precisely because he/she is problematic to the society structured on these norms and, furthermore, ideologies.

primary for the establishment of a social order, while recognizing the emergence of a privatized, rhetorical interpretative function of this morality. Therefore, a certain plurality in definitions of and responses to deviance will be evidenced on various social levels. As Douglas states:

When we remember as well that life, especially the complex rapidly changing lives in our pluralistic and international technological society, cannot actually be lived in terms of that abstract absolutist morality, we see there will necessarily develop a split between one's professional (public) reasons for doing something and one's actual (private) reasons for doing it, but that this difference between public and private justifications will in almost all cases be denied and hidden by rhetorical interpretation of the absolute morality for the situation at hand intended to make the interpretation appear to others to fit the (abstract) absolute morality.<sup>164</sup>

However, if we agree with the above statement and, furthermore, if we agree with Douglas that Western society has increasingly become an officially controlled society (which continually objectifies the absolute morality), we are still saddled with basic questions. How does one explain the constancy of the institutionalized powers in defining deviance and how does one account for the establishment of a somewhat abstract general consensus (in terms of the institutionalization of this power) in which deviance emerges and is defined as such?<sup>165</sup> The problem of legitimation

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164. Douglas, op. cit., p. 22.

165. Power is only touched upon in our analysis. It is implicit when we consider the nature of sexuality in society (i.e., the ideology of sexuality which upholds heterosexuality and patriarchy). For an approach to this problem, cf. Ian Taylor, Paul Walton and Jock Young, The New Criminology: Towards a Social Theory of Deviancy (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), where our authors argue that for an adequate understanding of deviance one must see it within the context of rapidly changing economic and political contingencies of advanced industrial societies - a recognition of the political economy of crime.

See also, authors (ed.) as above, Critical Criminology (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975) for a similar approach.

along with the concepts of rhetorical interpretation of the absolutist morality may be linked to the notions of marginality, ambiguity, and shift, which also imply the belief in the social fact of pluralism.

In light of existing absolute morality and the particular interpretation of this morality, marginal areas of activity emerge and are observed as existing on the fringe of legitimated standards. As Matza has said, "When these lie at the margin of deviant or conventional realms, the very designation, deviant is dubious".<sup>166</sup> Ironically, therefore, in order to maintain a clear picture of deviance, we should consider what Rock has termed "the blurred nature of the phenomenal world".<sup>167</sup> Hence as students of the social world and in this case, the social world of deviants, we must accept the ambiguity of the deviance-defining situation, the obscurant nature of its social world and "the easily observable tentative, vacillating and shifty responses to it".<sup>168</sup> However, included in this type of analysis there should be the recognition of certain areas of deviancy as non-problematic, such as certain 'core' deviancies whose "well orchestrated, reactions to them are predictable and understandings about them have become firmly established".<sup>169</sup>

166. Matza, op. cit.

167. Rock, op. cit., p. 23.

168. Matza, op. cit., p. 11.

169. Rock, op. cit., p. 23.

N.B.: In our discussion of lesbianism, we must keep in mind that lesbianism is not illegal in Britain. Lesbianism<sup>m</sup> however, exists as a marginal area of social activity - on the fringe of acceptable social behavioural standards. Yet, this does not imply that a woman will not organize her life around the fact of her lesbianism. In many cases some women do. In this case the labelling process reflects a definite social control mechanism which may signify one as deviant but not penalize her (in terms of an actual prison sentence).

An interesting historical anecdote will explain why lesbianism is not illegal in Britain. After the passage of the Criminal Law Amendment Bill in 1885 (making homosexual acts between adults

The inevitability of plurality of cultures has been recognized and explicitly cited in our analysis. However, what accounts for the institutionalization of a particular culture and, therefore, its social priority over another existing culture? As I have stated earlier (in my discussion of institutions), the existence of institutions (each with their specific members, goals of action, co-ordinated activity, relevant other and mostly importantly specific legitimations) should not appear as a great social revelation to us. Various institutions emerge in society with their existence independent of other institutions and, thus, there may not be a 'functional' or integral link between these institutions. In light of what has been said, we should examine the different institutions in their quest for legitimation. That is, we must look for "a statement about a behavioural institution or a collection of institutions that in some sense explains and justifies it".<sup>170</sup>

However, as Box brings out in his discussion of this phenomenon of legitimation, "Subscribers to one culture normally attempt to have its major precepts legalized thus transforming their culture into the dominant culture".<sup>171</sup> Yet it must be noted in this context that legalization without legitimation may not supply enough social force to maintain a 'dominant'

169. Continued from p. 141:

punishable by law), Queen Victoria refused to sign the Bill until all of the references to women were deleted. Lesbianism was unthinkable to the Queen! (Interestingly enough, in 1921, the attempt to introduce a New Criminal Amendment Bill to penalize "acts of indecency by females" was unsuccessful.)

For an historical presentation of this phenomenon in light of the legal procedure, see H. Montgomery Hyde, The Other Love: An Historical and Contemporary Survey of Homosexuality in Britain (London: Mayflower, 1970), especially, pp. 199-205.

170. Cf. H. Taylor Buckner, Deviance, Reality and Change (New York: Random House, 1971).

171. Steven Box, Deviance, Reality and Society (London: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971), p. 7.

position of power as qualitatively superior (morally superior)<sup>172</sup> to others. Legitimations supply plausible explanations for the existence and perpetuation of a particular set of standards as socially acceptable. Simply, legitimations present social individuals with a sense of the good, moral, necessary, logical and right within an institutional order. Furthermore, in the case of conflicting interests and social problems, the working out of an institutional order, therefore, supplies its members the legitimate method for its resolution. In the case of deviancy, however, one can use the term, counter-institution, as a descriptive concept in which unacceptable forms of social behaviour (which have not been integrated or legitimated in terms of the total institutionalized social world) may be categorized. Counter-institutions emerge along with their own particular legitimations which relate externally to the general stream of the dominant institutionalized order, but which provide their members with a certain amount of subjective biographical legitimation. In light of this analysis, the possibility exists that a counter institution (i.e., lesbian social organization) may eventually emerge into the social sphere as a legitimated social reality along with the simultaneous acceptance and recognition of a past deviance (i.e., lesbianism) as a moral, right, logical necessary part of the institutionalized order.

#### Deviance and the Individual

Previously, our discussion of deviancy has been developed within the labelling theory perspective. To facilitate an understanding of this

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172. For an interesting discussion of this notion of moral superiority, see Rock, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-146, as it relates to the idea of the legitimation of law makers is based on concepts which defend their right to rule. In a morally diverse world, an uncoerced world can be achieved only when those in power are recognized as qualitatively superior to their subject.



phenomenon, I have made an analytical distinction between deviance and society (deviance as objective reality) and deviance and the individual (deviance as subjective experience). Now I will consider the latter distinction or category. My analysis will illustrate individual reactions vis-à-vis the social labelling process. Implicit in this analysis is the importance of identity and role as it becomes evident within the deviance context. The major concerns in this presentation will be to make a conceptual distinction between primary and secondary deviance,<sup>173</sup> to analyze these respective concepts in light of the problem of social control, and to examine the collective activity of individuals who build up legitimations within the realm of the counter-institution.

Firstly, let us distinguish between these two conceptualizations of deviancy. Primary deviance is socially recognized as deviant or undesirable in terms of norm violation. Furthermore, it has only "marginal implications for the status and psychic structures of the person concerned".<sup>174</sup> On the other hand, secondary deviation (identical to primary deviance in its behavioural context) refer to "a special class of socially defined responses which people make to problems created by society related to deviance"<sup>175</sup> and reflects a person "whose life and identity are organized around the fact of deviance".<sup>176</sup> This latter type of deviancy becomes an established way of life as well as a means of organization in the production and maintenance of specified, relevant, deviant roles.

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173. Lemert introduced these terms initially in 1951 in Social Pathology, op. cit. See Chapter 4, "Sociopathic Individuation", pp. 73-93, and then again in 1967 in Human Deviance, Social Problems and Social Control (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1967).

174. Ibid. (1967), p. 40.

175. Ibid., p. 41. Lemert defines these problems as moral problems which generate from various social construction mechanisms - stigmatization, punishment, segregation and social control.

176. Ibid.

In this light, we see that the path to the establishment of a deviant career, although a seemingly subtle process in the societal recognition of the respective behaviour,<sup>177</sup> begins through a gradual series of events which when unwound and deciphered reveal various complexities in terms of personal identification process, role taking process and the social reaction process. Initially, an individual may find himself/herself in social situations which evidence a potential predisposition to deviancy. One stands on the brink of what Matza calls the invitational edge, to the establishment of a world view labelled as deviant. This marginal person may be observed on the fringe of existing behavioral standards; however, she/he may maintain his tenuous position by the effectuation of the mechanisms of normalization and management.<sup>178</sup> Primary deviance implies the intervention of some form of institutionalized social control into the level of human awareness. Possibly because of one's membership in a social order and in light of the resultant existence

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177. In a behavioural context both primary and secondary deviance are identical. Yet, they are distinguished between the original and effective causes of deviant attributes and action or simply between the personal and impersonal effects of deviance.

178. Lemert, op. cit. (1967), p. 40. Here Lemert speaks of the problem of primary deviance as dealt with either through normalization (in which deviance is perceived by the individual and institution as a normal variation) - "a problem of everyday life" or the "management and nominal controls" which do not gravely hinder basic forms of accommodation which emerge from the interactional nexus.

For an interesting elaboration of the theme, normalization in terms of the "secondary deviant", see Fred Davis, "Deviance Disavowal: The Management of Strained Interaction by the Visibly Handicapped" in Howard Becker (Ed.), The Other Side (New York: 1964), pp. 119-137, where Davis presents the various stages in which the physically handicapped "fictionally accept" inferior status thereby showing appropriate regards to social legitimations, the facilitation of reciprocal role-taking around a normalized projection of the self and the institutionalization in the relationship of a definition of self that is normal in its moral dimensions, however qualified it may be in its institutional contexts. (However, Davis in a footnote realizes the problems of defining deviance in terms of the two stages of primary and secondary deviance.)

of various behavioural standards (whose legitimations supply one with a sense of the morally right),<sup>179</sup> this intervention yields a certain degree of conformity in the form of normalization and management. In a certain sense, the attempt of the institutional order to enforce their acceptable patterns of behaviour and definitions of reality on society has been successful and effective.

However, let us go further on in our analysis to a consideration of the transition from primary to secondary deviance. Secondary deviance conceptually illuminates the leap one takes from the invitational edge, so to speak, into the established world of the deviant - a world where stigma, punishment, segregation and social control become central facts in one's relationship to the institutional world and himself/herself.

In an abstract sense, secondary deviance explicitly concerns these stabilizing mechanisms whereby definitions of deviance become more readily typed, solidified and formalized within the institutional arena. Two processes are concurrently involved. On the one hand, social and cultural definitions and constraints do circumscribe the meanings by which the deviant has access to a normal way of life. While on the other hand, the deviant in confrontation with the institutional process realizes the subjective effects of his/her reality flaws.<sup>180</sup> Through its institution-

179. Within this context, Matza discusses the institutionalization of the mechanisms of avoidance and suppression which are inculcated into the individual as a participant in the social order, and which further implies the notion of ban (this factor imbues the deviant act on the individual level with guilt). Therefore, deviant activities and acts defined as such are translated into a series of moral judgments on the institutional level. These judgments are supportive of various legitimations which are socially recognizable and acceptable and which supply social activity with a rationale.

180. Buckner, *op. cit.*, p. 19. As Buckner tells us, since all of the people involved in an institutionalized world think that the recipe of knowledge that they have is a body of generally valid truths about reality, any departure from this recipe knowledge appears to them as a departure from reality.

alization of a "moral" ideology, society presents to the individual deviant experience the objective forms of punishment and degradation as opposed to the "general" distribution of rewards and acceptance to the conforming populace. Society's implication of the deviant in a subversive process (the process of defining an alternative and unacceptable view of reality in light of the existing institutional order) may be degrading<sup>181</sup> as well as personally stigmatizing<sup>182</sup> for the individual or individuals involved. Therefore, in reality the nature of the deviancy defining process is characterized with a certain amount of potency. In this light, deviancy becomes the interactional nexus between the deviant's perspective and experience and the institutionalized order (which presents itself as the social stigmatizer and ultimate basis of social control).

The social reality of deviancy, its emergent process and establishment in society does not imply awareness contexts<sup>183</sup> which emerge within a vacuum. Deviance may be viewed as, but is not, a reified entity.

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181. For a discussion of the conditions of a successful degradation of status (degradation here, implies the process by which moral indignation emerges in terms of societal reaction to deviance and which serves to effect the ritual destruction of the person denounced), see Harold Garfinkel, "Conditions of Successful Degradation Ceremony", American Journal of Sociology (March 1956), Vol. 61, pp. 420-424.
182. For the classic sociological interpretation of stigma and its resultant effects upon the management of identity within the social context of control and abrogation, see Erving Goffman, Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963).
183. In the interactional setting, awareness contexts refer to the combination of what each individual knows of the other and his own identity. Cf. Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser, The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1967), pp. 83-85; and also by the same authors, Awareness of Dying: A Sociological Study of Attitudes toward Patients Dying in Hospital (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1965).

For an interesting analysis of awareness contexts in light of homosexuality (male), see Ken Plummer, Sexual Stigma: An Interactionist Approach (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), esp. Chapter 9, "Some Interactional Problems of the Homosexual", pp. 175-196, where Plummer speaks of the implications of open

Implicit in the nature of deviance is the notion of social interaction on various levels and in various forms. In other words, deviance requires sociation<sup>184</sup> in order to be realized in society. For an explanation of deviancy to mirror a clear reflection of social reality, it should address itself to the notion of collective action.<sup>185</sup> I have already touched upon this point in my discussion of the institutionalization of deviancy through the counter institution. However, at this time not only will certain points be elaborated, but also various subtleties.

Previously, as we have seen, when individuals organize as a counter institution their social lives are organized in terms of an alternate reality or way of life. This institution construction process generates simultaneously legitimations which, in turn, assist one in the maintenance of a deviant identity. In a sense, one could say that these justifications establish rationales of activity and co-operate in the maintenance of a 'base of operation' for the continuance of the counter institution.

Theoretically speaking, in terms of primary deviance, boundaries need not exist with the institutional order, whereas secondary deviance and subsequent collectivities of deviant identities become established and cause flexible relationships with the institutional order to cease in some areas. Parenthetically, let me say that secondary and primary deviance

183. Continued from p. 147:

and closed awareness contexts of homosexuality and the structural conditions for closed awarenesses as well as the strategies for preventing open awarenesses.

184. Sociation is the "form (realizable in innumerable different ways) in which individuals grow together into units that satisfy their interests". See Georg Simmel (trans. by Kurt Wolfe, Sociology of Georg Simmel (New York: Free Press, 1950).

185. Collective action refers to "when one tries to fit his/her own life of action into the actions of others, just as each of them likewise adjusts his own levels according to what he sees and expects others to do". Becker, op. cit. (1974).

do imply collective action in a qualified sense in that the social designation of the definition of deviance emerge within an interactional setting. However, secondary deviance with the resultant organization of one's way of life around a particular type of socially unapproved behaviour may involve an extension of this behaviour into supportive interactional settings or clusters of activity which are more conducive to signification<sup>186</sup> (on the social level) and expression and identification (on the personal level). (In light of this statement, we bring to mind notions of counter institutional activities of subcultural<sup>187</sup> settings). Therefore, an individual may discover a clearly delineated or somewhat blurred (depending upon the nature of the deviancy) area of social activity in which his/her particular interpretation of reality becomes more meaningful and is generally accepted. Within this activity, the symbolic universe of the deviant is thereby recognized as lacking a certain universal content in terms of the dominant institutionalized culture. However, for the deviant participator the very conceptualization of his/her respective deviancy may become imbued with a certain amount of justification (as we have seen) or possibly glorification.<sup>188</sup>

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186. Cf. David Matza, op. cit.; especially Chapter 7, "Signification", pp. 143-197, in which he outlines an academic presentation of signification (actual social process of defining someone as deviant and the complex implications of that process) and its elements of ban, being bedevilled, apprehension, being selected and being cast. I should like to point out that when I speak of signification in terms of the lesbian, I use the term in the threefold sense that Matza proposed, that is: (1) to be labelled (registered), (2) to be stigmatized, and (3) to stand for something else (in this case, perversion, sickness) which is an act of genuine creation requiring an investment of meaning. However, this signification is relative in terms of the degree of marginality of the lesbian who does not experience actual imprisonment for her unapproved sexual behaviour.
187. Cf. Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin, Delinquency and Opportunity (London: Routledge, 1960); Albert Cohen, Delinquent Boys: Culture of a Gang (New York: Free Press, 1955); David Downes, The Delinquent Solution (London: Routledge, 1966), for an understanding of subcultural explanation theories in terms of deviancy (particularly, delinquent behaviour).
188. Slogans like, "Smoke Pot", "Grass is Great" or "Gay is Good", "I'm

One final point should be made concerning the nature of deviancy and collective activity. Collective activity in this sense implies more than the organization of one's life around deviant types of activity. It also involves a complex individual and group articulation in a political process which provides the setting for all collective activity and which, in turn, surrounds deviant actions as well as other forms of social activity with potential meaning (in terms of punishment and rewards through the social control process). As Becker tells us:

Economic organization, professional association, trade unions lobbyists, moral entrepreneurs and legislators all interact to establish the conditions under which those who represent the state in enforcing laws for example, interact with those alleged to have violated them.<sup>189</sup>

In this particular section we have examined the notion of deviance as both objective and subjective reality as well as the various implications of this approach. This type of approach effectively illustrates a perennial societal problem - the problem of the rights of the individual vis-à-vis the nature and necessity of social life. We have seen the deviant on the one hand as deeply rooted in and emergent from the dominant institutional order and, on the other hand, as negatively reacted against in terms of his/her rejection of the institutionalized moral ideology through his/her alternate reality, deviance.

188. Continued from p. 149:

gay and I'm proud" all reflect the glorification of the particular area of activity within which a deviant may operate. In the case of marihuana users as being a counter-institutional force in society, we see that their lives are gradually being enhanced by the continual lack of government control (in the U.S.) over the possession of this disapproved drug. In light of this, one can see that the slow transformation of counter-legitimations into legitimations in terms of the dominant institutional order may be effected.

Cf. Howard Becker, op. cit. (1963), pp. 4-78, "Becoming a Marihuana User" and "Marihuana and Social Control", for a classic sociological statement on marihuana and its social effects.

189. Becker, op. cit. (1973), p. 45.

### Lesbianism - An Introduction

Throughout this chapter we have analyzed sexuality and social change, the conceptualizations of sexual identity, sex roles and their institutionalization vis-à-vis identity role and institution, the sociology of female sexuality and deviancy theory within the labelling theory perspective. To some this type of systematic presentation may appear as a circuitous route to an analytical investigation of lesbianism. A basic assumption in my approach to the sociology of lesbianism is that one cannot begin an adequate sociological presentation without supplying prior explanations of these important social factors and processes. These 'revealing processes' merit prior explanation only in so far as they have prepared the way for a sociological understanding of lesbianism. And it is my belief that they indeed have provided <sup>an</sup> illuminating framework which provides us with a necessary theoretical base from which our analysis of lesbianism will emerge.

A lesbian is a social individual - a woman and a lesbian. All of the relevant elements of her social life interact and combine to make her what she is in society. Therefore, we must understand the various individual and social intricacies of the particular processes from which she emerges and in which she is radically affected.

Becker<sup>190</sup> tells us that we, as students of the social life, should view deviance as a form of collective activity. Relating this exhortation to the study of women's sexuality, lesbians and ultimately all areas of the social life (as Becker obviously implies), I would consequently emphasize the necessity of seeing lesbianism as collective activity whose origin cannot be reduced to cause and effect principles. Therefore, as a sociologist interested in describing and analyzing this phenomenon, I am not

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190. Becker, op. cit., p. 49.



concerned with discovering an ultimate determinant factor. Rather, it is my view that lesbianism should be studied with sociological hindsight in view of its present socially emergent activity as well as analyzed as a culture on its own terms<sup>191</sup> (which is the bulk of contemporary sociological analysis).

Finally, as a researcher who is quite aware of the problems of objectivity within the social sciences, I will enlighten the reader with my bias concerning lesbianism and the problems with a sociological study of lesbianism in contemporary society.

It is my belief that the ideology of psychiatry and the subsequent development of the ideology of psychology within a social scientific perspective, the ideology of the social sciences in general and, indeed, various religious, cultural, social and moral ideologies (all with their negativistic approaches to lesbianism) have exerted a damaging influence upon the lesbian in terms of implicating her in the sin, heresy, sickness, immoral perversion syndrome.<sup>192</sup> I have illustrated how social ideologies<sup>193</sup> have aided in the social construction of sexual images, sex roles, sexual identities which are supportive of ideas about women. Consequently, a lesbian, as the personification of threat to these dominant ideologies in

191. Cf. Severyn T. Bruyn, The Human Perspective in Sociology: The Methodology of Participant Observation: see especially, Chapter 4, "Toward a Human Perspective", pp. 84-124, where Bruyn discusses the "nature and boundaries" of the human perspective in the social sciences and he attempts to develop a basis by which the outer and inner worlds of man with their "conceptual systems and special vocabularies" can be viewed from a humanistic standpoint.

192. Cf. Szasz, op. cit. (1973), especially Chapter 10, "The Product Conversion - From Heresy to Illness", pp. 190-209.

193. Cf. Szasz, op. cit. (1972), where Szasz emphasizes the significance of dominant "contemporary ideologies as determinants of human behavior" (pp. 188-189). Szasz views these ideologies as based on myths, professional, religious and national, "most of which foster the perpetuation of childish games and mutually coercive patterns of human behavior".

their varying contexts is subjected to the tyranny of social control.

As Lemert so wisely stated in his discussion of this major social problem of control:

The coexistence of older philosophies and procedures of punishment with a positive, psychological ideology enjoining treatment of social deviants, sanctions an order of power not far removed from the divine right of kings, it makes possible odious scientific tyranny in which social control is justified less by an individual's demonstrable threat to society than by someone's authoritative judgement of his potential menace. One result is that persons whose moral infractions have been minor can face indentured public servitude of indefinite termination.<sup>194</sup>

Possibly, the lesbian woman of today is "facing indentured public servitude of indefinite termination". However, one of the aims of this thesis is to attempt to remove the shackles placed upon her in society by providing an complex analysis of lesbianism as a viable, if not normal, way of life for some women in our society.

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194. Lemert, op. cit.

**PART III:     THE SOCIAL REALITY OF LESBIANISM**

**Chapter 5     Key Research Concepts: Lesbian Identity,  
Lesbian Roles, Lesbian Experience and  
Lesbian Social Organization**

## CHAPTER 5

### KEY RESEARCH CONCEPTS: LESBIAN IDENTITY, LESBIAN ROLES, LESBIAN EXPERIENCE AND LESBIAN SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

#### Society and the Lesbian Identity

One's identity becomes meaningful and relevant to oneself only as one becomes aware of who one is in relationship to others. In other words, identity necessitates social interaction. Lesbian social reality or, more simply, the living of one's life as a lesbian in society, requires both solitary and shared experiences. The lesbian identity represents the process of becoming aware of who one is in relationship to others and ultimately society.

This identity emerges in a society which is predominantly male-orientated. Within this "patriarchal" social structure,<sup>1</sup> heterosexuality exists as the most acceptable type of sexual identification. It is considered in this way in terms of the normative structure which pervades the social order. Patriarchy accounts for the structuring of sexual relationships between men and women in their most basic forms - work roles (actual labour relationship and nature of work role) and power (differentiation of who has the cultural power). Relationships are processed and heterosexuality emerges as the acceptable sexual identity. This structuring process is embedded in the complex network of activity which we, as sociologists, term socialization. As Jessie Bernard so aptly states, "Femininity is defined in terms of overt behavior, feelings, wishes, motives and attitudes. Vis-à-vis males, it is feminine to be

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1. A structure which is based upon patriarchal definitions (male-orientated definitions).

non-aggressive, dependent, passive, conforming, nurturant, to be able to gratify a love object to arouse males sexually, to have emotional capacity. Masculinity, in turn, is defined in complementary terms: independent, active and aggressiveness".<sup>2</sup>

In light of the above, the lesbian identity exists in society as a "counter-identity". It is contrary to the identity which a male-orientated, heterosexually defined society expects of all women. It is a direct challenge to social norms.

Most individuals in society operate on the assumption that any woman is heterosexual and that she will ultimately become a wife and mother or, if not, at least that she will relate to men in an intimate sexual way. This assumption which I have termed the "heterosexual bias" defines, identifies and categorizes a woman, any woman, in terms of men. Society, therefore, 'processes' (primarily through socialization) all women as male-orientated socially. It is within this process that women become "heterosexually-defined" and achieve a secondary or residual status. (It is important to note here that in terms of sociological analysis, women are perceived as important only in so far as and to what extent they relate to men.)<sup>3</sup>

The lesbian identity calls into question the heterosexual bias which as we have seen is based upon social definitions of women and dominant ideologies. Through the lesbian identification process a woman

2. Jessie Bernard, The Sex Game (London: Leslie Frewin, 1968), p. 46.

3. Cf. Joan Acker, "Women and Social Stratification: A Case of Intellectual Sexism" in Changing Women in a Changing Society edited by Joan Huber (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), pp. 174-184, where she discusses this problem. She attempts a critique of traditional sociology in light of the family and theories on social stratification.

Cf. also, Anne Oakley, The Sociology of Housework (London: Martin Robertson, 1974), especially Chapter 1, "The Invisible Woman: Sexism in Sociology", pp. 1-28; and Cynthia Fuchs Epstein, Woman's Place (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1971).

assigns to herself meanings which are contingent upon being both a woman and a lesbian in society. This implies that a lesbian, being aware of the heterosexual bias, rejects the acceptable heterosexual identity which is presented to her. To be a lesbian in society means to perceive oneself and to define oneself as a self-defined woman in society - in contrast to a male-defined woman. This contrary nature of the lesbian identity requires a self-image or self-awareness which involves not only an unacceptable identification, but also an identification with women. Some lesbians describe the lesbian identity as being the identity of "a woman-identified woman".<sup>4</sup> Basically, to be a woman in society means to be male-defined sexually and male-orientated socially. To be a lesbian means to be self-defined sexually and women-orientated socially.

As the lesbian identity emerges in the face of the male-orientated, heterosexual society, a lesbian becomes aware of an acceptable heterosexual identity which is presented to her as a woman in society. However, while she may confront and reject this heterosexual identity, she discovers that lesbianism is her acceptable identification. This self typification process (the process by which a lesbian defines herself as lesbian), helps her to become aware of what lesbianism means in society. Lesbianism is her acceptable self-definition. Furthermore, it may be acceptable to significant others. However, it is a deviant identity - an unacceptable way for a woman to define herself in society. The lesbian counter identity steps beyond the boundaries of what is normal or acceptable for women in society.

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4. The implication here is that lesbians have a tendency to define themselves independently of men - whether sexually, economically, or socially, and as a result tend to have more role flexibility as women. (For example, most lesbians have to maintain a career commitment because they are not economically dependent upon men.)

Cf. A group of gay women, Radical lesbians, "Woman Identified Woman" in Anne Koedt (et al.), Radical Feminism (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973), pp. 240-245.

### The Born Lesbian and the Self-Chosen Lesbian

During the course of my research, I have found that there appears to be a difference in self-perception between 'born lesbians' and 'self-chosen' lesbians. All of the lesbians in my study perceived of their lesbian identity as being either one which they were born with or one which they had chosen.

A 'born' lesbian defines herself as a "real" lesbian. She is a woman who feels that she was born a lesbian. There is no choice in the matter of her lesbianism. She views herself as a "third sex" and accepts society's definition of her lesbianism as a fixed or static subjective condition. Her lesbianism is only a sexual preference. Yet, this sexual preference may also imply a total commitment or empathy with all women. The 'born' lesbian's view of herself may affect her coming out process (admitting publically in varying degrees that one is a lesbian). Either the 'born' lesbian will try to hide her lesbianism because it is a social deformity which need not be exposed - "After all the sexual is private!" or a 'born' lesbian will accept lesbianism as another part of herself - an "appendage" - "After all, yes the sexual is private, but I can't help the way that I am. I don't want to hide it so society better accept me because I am one of its unfortunates. I had no choice in the matter".

One 'born' lesbian explained her perception in this way:

Well, there is such a thing as a born lesbian ... I am born a lesbian because since the day I was born I sort of knew that I was different. Obviously, I didn't even know what the word was, but I knew that I was different. And so far as I'm concerned this happened either at conception or in the womb or something. But there are people who think that they are lesbians, of course, because there's a big big difference from being a man-hater which I think or I hate to say a lot of the young ones are. [pause] And being a lesbian, a true lesbian [pause] A true lesbian is a born lesbian. There is just no other answer or way out and that's it! You just have to learn to live with it. I'm very lucky I've never had problems because I've always known, I think I've been very lucky ...

She adds:

People are getting more enlightened now that they are getting prepared to accept us as a second sex. I'm sure they do ...

Further on in the interview, she says:

I am as I am because I am. I was born this way. I can't help it, because I think even now only a few of us would say quite literally, "I'm glad to be gay". I am because I'm nice and old and I've enjoyed my life but I'm quite sure there are other women who still prefer to be heterosexual because it is an easier way of life. But, here again this is improving you know.

The self-perception of the 'born' lesbian is markedly different from that of the self-chosen lesbian. The self-chosen lesbian (or the 'fake' lesbian as some 'born' lesbians define her) is a woman who feels she has chosen lesbianism because of various factors which may be either subjective (emotional, psychological), objective (social, political), or both. The self-chosen lesbian tends to see lesbianism more as a total commitment to women than as a sexual preference. This commitment usually involves a choice which more often than not is for social reasons (i.e., did not want to get married). The self-chosen lesbian tends to seek social acceptance whether on the personal level or in definite social contexts. (However, her counterpart, the 'born' lesbian may do likewise.) Objectively, the self-chosen lesbian challenges society's previous explanations for her lesbianism as deviant, sick, perverse or maladjusted. Her 'proposed' element of choice confuses the issue for society, as well as the born lesbian.

One self-chosen lesbian discusses what the lesbian identity means for her:

I do see the lesbian identity as a counter-identity for women. If that's conscious, that is. If you're conscious that your relationship to other women or how you relate to other women is contrary to what society expects of all women. Yes, any lesbian must realize that she is running contrary. Yes, any lesbian is running contrary. But, I mean somehow, in terms of what society thinks, I think that's possible ...



Women's identity is supposedly to prop up men's identity which is the primary identity and women are there to prop it up. They are not going to prop it up any more. I think any not propping up for them [men] is actually lesbianism for men, regardless if it actually involves sleeping with women ...

This same lesbian describes how her self-perception has changed over time:

You start out with a definition, with society's definition of lesbianism ... Then if you think you are, you wonder how you fit into these expectations of what society thinks a lesbian is. And at the same time, you don't think of yourself as necessarily having a negative experience ... Or you don't think of your lesbianism as a negative experience [pause] And also inside you you feel a lot of guilt, because you know other people are going to be upset ... You might turn into another species for them, but I mean you're doing for yourself in a sense ... Then, gradually you articulate something which is almost unconscious. When you articulate it, it is definitely contrary to society's image of it.

The above discussion has shown that lesbianism is a complex social phenomenon on the societal level and exposes a variety of self-perceptions when it is experienced on the individual level.

### Lesbian Identity and Lesbian Experience

What has been described previously is the process by which a lesbian defines, types and categorizes herself in society. The emphasis of this description of the lesbian identity has been upon what I would term the "personal lesbian identity".<sup>5</sup> In order to present an accurate

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5. Cf. Carol Warren, Identity and Community in the Gay World (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1974), where she uses a similar type of analysis. She says, "A homosexual identity is distinguished from a gay identity by the gay community, although not by the stigmatizing society. A homosexual identity simply describes one's sexual orientation, whereas a gay identity implies affiliation with the gay community in a cultural and sociable sense". (p. 149)

In terms of my own research, I would say that the lesbian experience corresponds somewhat to Warren's definition of gay identity. Also, for lesbians, it characterizes "secondary deviance", while the personal lesbian identity is similar to "primary deviance".

picture of the lesbian identification process we should consider another aspect of this complex process - the "social lesbian identity" which I refer to as the "lesbian experience". The lesbian experience implies a transformation of identity (in Strauss' terms).<sup>6</sup> A transformation of identity occurs at the point when a lesbian's specific personal identity becomes a social gay identity. A lesbian's self identity as a lesbian becomes a way of expressing to society the major commitment of her life-lesbianism. It relates to the process by which a lesbian emerges into the institutionalized world of lesbianism.

The lesbian experience may encompass a "closeted" life style or an "out" life style. The former type refers to a life style in which a lesbian does not reveal in most situations that she, in fact, perceives, identifies and labels herself as a lesbian. The latter life style refers to one in which a lesbian openly admits to being lesbian in all or most of the situations in her life. Let us examine more closely the subtle implications of these two lesbian life styles.

#### The "Closeted" Lesbian and the "Out" Lesbian

The life style of the closet reveals that one's relationships with women remain consistently privatized. In other words, a woman whose primary identity in life is as a lesbian keeps secret from society her intimate or sexual relationships with women. She will allow others to believe that she is a 'normal' heterosexual. This conscious silence maintains and even perpetuates the "heterosexual bias". By accepting a role in public situations which does not apply to her own personal life,

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6. Cf. Anselm Strauss, "Transformation of Identity" in Arnold Rose (Ed.), Human Behaviour and Social Processes (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1962), pp. 63-85, where Strauss replaces the term development with the term transformation and thereby implies a consideration of change in the basis formation of identity.

a lesbian exercises a certain amount of what Goffman calls "role distance". Because a lesbian is unable to encompass a role (straight woman) which she implies or states that she has, she distances herself from her real role (lesbian) in society. Ironically, however, her encompassment of the lesbian role effects a certain amount of distance from her expected role. Her life, as revealed in most public social situations, does not reflect her 'actualized' lesbian life style. In the course of my research, I have often heard some women say that they had manufactured names of boy friends, male friends and lovers in order to convince "suspecting" friends, relatives and acquaintances of their "straightness". This type of life style creates and maintains very clear and well-defined boundaries between one's personal life and one's public life. Lesbianism becomes a hidden experience for others while remaining a pivotal reality for oneself. One's primary identification, lesbianism, exists as hidden from and denied to others in varying degrees and in different ways.

The rationale for this type of life style takes many forms and may be perceived as conscious or unconscious. I have heard some lesbians say that lesbianism is seen as sick, evil ... in society, and "coming out" will cause people to get upset. I can recall one lesbian who said, "Why should I tell people that I am a lesbian if they will only get upset and treat me differently?"

Lesbians who are afraid of coming out feel that they may be rejected by the very fact that they are perceived as deviant in society. This fear of rejection is one of the primary reasons for the maintenance of the "closeted" life style. Other reasons for remaining hidden are fear of being labelled as sick, evil, deviant ... ("stigmatization"); guilt by the very fact that one is a lesbian and continues to be a person who is considered sick, perverted ... (I have met some lesbians who accept society's definitions for themselves); desire to maintain the

status quo and not to unduly upset others; for convenience sake by not having to explain one's life to others; and to avoid embarrassment in one's daily life whether at work, with straight friends, or family. Basically, the closeted life may be the type of life style that a lesbian chooses for her whole life or a part of her life. In other words, most lesbians experience the "closet" to a greater or lesser degree depending upon their particular situation - emotionally, psychologically, and socially.

Not only is the "closet" familiar to most lesbians at some point in their lives, but also its "door" is observable at varying degrees of openness - from being totally locked shut to being open partially, almost totally open, and wide open. To emerge from the closet necessitates different stages of awarenesses. The lesbian who is open to society about her lesbianism (out of the closet) is aware that her declarations about herself do and will challenge social norms. Explicitly, she defines herself in a category which is contrary to women. Yet, in spite of these factors, she may find a sense of security which is maintained through a certain amount of emotional stability and support from others to continue to be an overt lesbian - an "out and out dyke" (as some lesbians call themselves). An out lesbian usually finds the emotional support to come out from other lesbians who have previously come out or are in the process of coming out. She may also find support from friends or family who do not consider sexual preference as bearing upon the goodness or badness of the person. Some lesbians have told me that straight people who they come out to and who have knowledge of them as "good persons" and "friends" may easily accept their lesbianism. (However, this is not always the case.)

Depending upon the social location of the process of coming out (i.e., particular social group, gay group, women's group), a lesbian

finds supportive social interaction and establishes her life as a lesbian in society. She develops a network of "cushions" which help her to confront <sup>†</sup>stigmatizing society. Through this process, a social reality of her lesbianism becomes linked up with other similar social realities and she is able to find adequate emotional support. I recall one lesbian saying to me: "I was so afraid of coming out. And yet, after I did, it was one of the easiest things to do in my life at that time". I later discovered that the reason for this ease in emerging from the closet was primarily because this particular lesbian had been a member of a 'close-knit' women's group which had given her a certain amount of emotional support at a time when she had needed it most.

Consistently, my research has shown that a lesbian life style, whether closeted or open, operates on the basis of the recognition of an hostile heterosexual world. Lesbianism is 'deviant' or unapproved sexual behaviour. Furthermore, the life style, in order to be lived out effectively, necessitates collective action<sup>7</sup> - co-operative social activity, as I would term it. The lesbian experience makes one more aware that there exists a "sub-culture of deviance" (the lesbian "ghetto") which organizes itself around the very fact of a particular unapproved social and sexual behaviour (lesbianism). In light of this fact, a lesbian may chose to interact in these particular groups (bars, clubs, women's groups) or reject the group experience and thus remain totally closeted. The latter alternative usually effects a very isolated lesbian experience which can be fraught with loneliness, frustration and fear. One lesbian related to me that after years of this type of isolation and because of her particular living situation (living with another lesbian

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7. Cf. Howard S. Becker, "Labelling Theory Reconsidered" in Paul Rock and Mary McIntosh (Eds.), Deviance and Social Control (London: Tavistock Publications, 1974), pp. 41-66; see especially section entitled "Deviance as Collective Action", pp. 44-49.

lover for eight years), she had never met other lesbians and was fearful at the prospect. However, in time, she gradually saw that it was important for her to communicate with other lesbians about the problems which confronted them. She began to frequent places where other lesbians met (clubs, bars ...) and found an escape from her "cocoon" of isolation which she had created for herself. In general, it can be stated that isolation breaks down as a lesbian begins to recognize, as well as to accept, the positive rewards of co-operative social activity in the lesbian social world. The lesbian social world develops as lesbians interact with one another and it emerges as a process which defines the lesbian in a particular personal and social context. Lesbian collective action is built up as lesbians acquire lesbian knowledge and lesbian meanings. They organize "the lesbian experience" into a mutual, collective and supportive response to what appears to be a hostile heterosexual society. Within this organization, they, in turn, find the support which they may need in order to break down isolation and fear which have been a part of their lives. The complex dynamics of the coming out process involve many layers of interaction. The individual vis-à-vis society situates herself in a position which best reflects her own definition of herself.

If a lesbian defines lesbianism as 'sick', then she will generally not view it as an alternative life for women in society. She will seek to organize herself around this definition (i.e., 'sick woman') and will hide her 'sickness' (i.e., in the closet). On the other hand, if a lesbian sees her lesbianism as an alternative way of life for women, she may begin to create new meanings with other lesbians and attempt to justify this image of herself. Lesbian knowledge is built up within the context of recognizing the positive as well as the negative implications of the lesbian identity.

Let us examine more closely the life style of an "out lesbian".

Her social location (the actual organization of her lesbian activities) necessitates for her a particular type of social interaction in which her life as a lesbian becomes apparent (in varying degrees) to society. Relationships with women become de-privatized as an out lesbian relates these experiences to those with whom she comes in contact (at work, family, friends ...). One lesbian, a teacher, related to me an experience that she had had at a staff party with her co-workers:

I am out at work. Everyone at work knows that I am a lesbian. I brought my lover to the party and we were pissed out of our minds. Gradually the others who didn't know that we were lesbians began to find out. At first everyone who didn't know was taking notice, but gradually as the party went on and more of us got pissed we were no longer the centre of attention. In fact we danced very close and were groping each other as the party went on. And no one noticed.

This particular "I don't care" attitude is peculiar to the out lesbian. A lesbian who has come out at work tends to have the emotional security to be able to handle a certain amount of social approbation, stigma, or negativity. This is because she has made the choice in the first place to define herself as an out lesbian. She has taken upon herself the negative social label of "lesbian" and has recreated for herself with others a positive stance in relationship to her lesbianism. For her, the positive aspects of her lesbian life style seemingly outweigh the negative opinions which exist generally in society. Her overt projection of lesbianism <sup>to</sup> society implies that she has effected within herself a more complete and complex role encompassment than the "closeted" lesbian. Her lesbianism, instead of being hidden and covert, becomes a public commitment to an alternative life style for women. She discovers that her lesbianism which is primarily associated within the context of a particular sexual orientation may be transformed into a way of life, a commitment which extends beyond the sexual sphere of her life into the social spheres. Lesbianism thus, becomes a "totalized reality" which

colours all of her activities as a woman in society.

The lesbian identity is still recognized as a counter identity within society. However, the out lesbian may organize her life in such a way as to challenge society's preconceptions of the stereotypical lesbian (i.e., the aggressive butch, passive femme, ...) <sup>8</sup>. The out life style presents a direct challenge to a heterosexual, male-orientated social world. Society's assumption that one's sexual identity should be maintained by a balance between one's socio-sexual identity (sex which is assigned as a result of a biological given) and one's subjective sexual identity (gender identity which one feels most closely linked with) is called into question.

The dynamics of the out life style challenges society's image of a 'normal' woman in society as well as the stereotypical lesbian. The first image presents the picture of a woman who by accepting her 'true' moral or normal sexual identity should accept the definitions of a male-orientated social world. She relates sexually to men and may not question the secondary status which exists for her in society. The second image of the stereotypical lesbian conjures up the image of a lesbian who finds it difficult to accept all or part of the 'normal' woman's role and who should realize (in society's eyes) that she should not desire to be a man. (For example, the popular ideology which portrays the lesbian as a psuedo male or butch type.)

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8. However, I can recall some friends (straight women) at a lesbian disco. They kept telling me that the lesbians there looked like real "dykes" (real stereotypes). I looked around and saw short cropped hair, dungarees, denim, boots, belts ... when I talked to some lesbians, they say that they dress the way they do not to be like men or ape their image, but to challenge the role of the true women in society (male defined woman) which implies being feminine, wearing dresses and skirts, making oneself up artificially with some 'makeup' ... This explanation for this phenomenon (looking butch) is comparable to 'radical drag' which came out of the male homosexual scene in the sixties.

Cf. Karla Jay and Allen Young, Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation (New York: Douglas, 1972).



Implicitly or explicitly, the out lesbian may deny both of these roles by rejecting society's view of herself as "abnormal" and "psuedo male". The out lesbian may create an alternative role for women. She consciously or unconsciously confuses society's notions of sex and gender depending upon the development of her own awareness or consciousness (as some lesbians call it). For her, regardless of society's views, the importance of gender is only marginally related to those aspects of social behaviour which are culturally perpetuated (ie., that a woman should be passive, dependent ... in terms of a man). For some 'out' lesbians who create an alternative role for women, the root of gender is power - male power, patriarchy in whatever form it may take.<sup>9</sup>

In the course of my research, which has involved talking with hundreds of lesbians in London and throughout Great Britain, I have met only two lesbians who have wanted to be men. (One is aged 45, and the other is aged 29.) These two women desired to be men sexually. Perhaps they perceived or attempted to experience the link between gender and power in society (i.e., patriarchy vis-à-vis women). In terms of my own research, I have found this connection (between gender roles and power) exist as if not the root of the lesbian experience, but relating to it. Most out lesbians I have talked with desire to be 'public lesbians.' By their very choice in coming out they reflect this desire. They come to see their identity as a challenge to a male orientated or heterosexual world. In this context, one lesbian said to me, "It's not we who are sick, fucked up, perverted. It's society that is fucked up".

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9. Although obviously through the development of culture and the interplay of power, certain roles take predominance for either sex and the effects must not be forgotten.

I will discuss this idea of the relationship between gender roles and power in Chapter 7, when I explain the non-subservience factor.

### The Maintenance of a Lesbian Identity through Lesbian Social Organization

A basic finding of my research reveals that lesbian social organization involves two types of lesbian social activity, ranging from what can be termed non-political to political activity. Lesbian social organization reflects the 'institutionalization' of lesbianism into various social groups: non-political lesbians and political lesbians with contingent lesbian roles (straight gay, self defined lesbian, women's movement, gay movement, 'political', mothers, bisexuals, celibates, radical lesbians and lesbian separatists). This typology implies an overlapping of universes of meanings. It also involves varying degrees of well-defined lesbian ideologies and life styles (open or closeted) which are best suited to the respective activity whether of a political or non-political nature.

As a collective response, lesbian social organization 'normalizes' the lesbian counter-identity. As a "counter-institution" it confronts the heterosexual world. It is through lesbian social organization that lesbians develop individual and group legitimations (justifications of lesbianism) and experience a firm sense of group commitment to the lesbian experience.

### Lesbian Social Organization, Lesbian Identity and Status Passage

From what has been previously stated, we can clearly see that the lesbian identity for any individual lesbian may not exist as a static entity in her life. It can be transformed, re-evaluated, revised and re-judged as one interacts within and without various group structures. Therefore, these changes of identity expose the malleability of the lesbian identity and resultant life style within the context of social organization. The implication here is that the development of a lesbian identity involves a socialized and a socializing process in light of various collective options

(rules, roles, ideologies ...) which are open to the contemporary lesbian. These options become evident and are often regularized in an orderly pattern through the lesbian experience.

As Strauss<sup>10</sup> and others<sup>11</sup> before him have pointed out, membership in any group involves the passage from status to status. In other words, at certain points in time, movement in the lesbian experience is reflected through the successful realization of claims to prestige on the personal level. The lesbian experience in the form of social organization presents itself to the individual lesbian as a continual transformation process. It lends continuity to the lesbian identity (self-typification process) as well as provides a certain amount of stability to the group structure. The reality of identity continuity vis-à-vis the lesbian group experience provides a patterned rationale for the ordering of the lesbian experience. A certain status is attained if one has met particular ideological standards as well as individual non-political or political performance, whatever the case may be.

Within this context, I can recall a conversation that I had with a lesbian who had recently moved into London and established herself in the ghetto. She related to me that after a few weeks of her arrival she realized that there were in the ghetto certain ways of relating and these patterns were very much a part of her new environment. Initially she responded in these ways and felt as if she was becoming more accepted by the group which was becoming familiar to her. She said, "I felt as if I was being promoted by the others".

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10. Strauss, op. cit., especially pp. 71-78, "Regularized Status Passage".

11. Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, Character and Social Structure: The Psychology of Social Institutions (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1954); see especially, "The Status Sphere", pp. 315-322.

At any moment a lesbian by organizing her lesbian experience in terms of a preferred rationale or ideological stance effects a passage from one group to another. For example, I have met some women who initially came out in the closeted "bar dyke" setting. They became further socialized in the group context and saw their lesbianism in social terms through contact with lesbian, gay women's groups. At a later time, they joined these respective groups. I met one lesbian who went from membership in a gay group to a women's group and is now proclaiming herself as an aspiring radical lesbian. At present, she is organizing her lesbian experience around radical lesbianism as her relevant form of lesbian social organization. The implication of this process or movement from group to group implies status passage from one social group to another, as well as re-alignment within the various groups themselves. It further implies the acquisition of the relevant ideologies, rationales, argot (language) and legitimations (justifications of group structures) necessary at the particular moment of transition.

Therefore, in light of what has been stated we can see that the lesbian experience becomes evident in society through alternative explanations of the phenomenon of lesbianism. In other words, stability and continuity are maintained within each social organization and between the varying social organizations through a gradual mobility or constant movement. Thus, transformation is able to occur on the personal level. This process illuminates the fact that lesbianism is not a fixed reality or unchanging social phenomenon in society. Alternative realities of the self-same phenomenon of lesbianism are consistently and constantly being presented to society in the form of various group structures. Therefore, an adequate understanding of lesbianism is being compounded by the very complicated nature of its social exposure or lack thereof. It is for this very reason that the individual lesbian, confronted with varying

definitions of herself and the lesbian experience, goes through a continual process of transformation. The continuous phases in the process of transformation and their intensity, duration and variability are dependent upon a lesbian's personal experiences throughout the entire institutional process (i.e., lesbian social organization).

### Lesbian Social Organization vis-à-vis the Lesbian Ghetto<sup>12</sup>

In terms of the research process, much can be derived from an analysis of "social lesbianism" or institutionalized lesbianism as a unique social movement.<sup>13</sup> As a collective progression, the emergence of lesbianism aims to establish a "new order of life". In its inception, this emergence is characterized by a state of unrest (conflict with the heterosexual bias) and acquires a twofold system of motives. With the initial organization of lesbianism, motivational impetus originates from dissatisfaction with the social label of 'deviant' as well as from the desire to "revitalize"<sup>14</sup> and to construct a more satisfying culture.

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12. The lesbian ghetto is the pre-formalized area of lesbian social activity. It includes all lesbians from the totally closeted lesbian who may or may not be involved in a lesbian relationship (i.e., with lover) to the totally out lesbian who has continual interaction in all forms of lesbian social organization. The ghetto represents the immediate interactional framework in which the lesbian finds herself. As the base of the framework, it provides immediate legitimation for oneself and is, therefore, the social individual cum social location of all lesbian activity.
  13. Cf. Herbert Blumer, Social Movements in Studies of Social Movements: A Social Psychological Perspective, edited by Barry McLaughlin (New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1969), pp. 8-29, where Blumer outlines the typology of social movements. He suggests that there are three types: the general, the specific, and the expressive. For our purposes we are only concerned with lesbianism as a general social movement and its relationship to specific social movements.
  14. Cf. Anthony F. C. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements" in Studies of Social Movements: A Social Psychological Perspective, edited by Barry McLaughlin (New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1969), pp. 30-52. In this article, Mr. Wallace says "a revitalization movement is defined as a deliberate, organized conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture. It is thus,

At its starting point, the emergence of lesbianism is loosely organized, formless, and amorphous. Collective behaviour exists on a 'primitive level' and in its rudimentary form. The dynamics of interaction are simple, undefined and spontaneous. Cultural standards are low and shared perspectives are minimal. I have termed this type of lesbian activity as the lesbian "ghetto". From the "lesbian ghetto", a complex web of lesbian social interaction and organization emerges.

Gradually, the ghetto develops organization and form. It accumulates a body of lesbian customs, tradition, literature, recognized leadership, a division of labour, lesbian roles, lesbian rules, social values and ideologies. A transformation occurs when a general social movement (lesbian social organization) emerges from the lesbian ghetto.

The establishment of the social organization of lesbianism implies the establishment of the general and vague aim of the social acceptability of lesbianism. Its career is episodic "with various, scattered manifestations of activity". Progression through lesbian social organization is sporadic, non-uniform and, oftentimes, discontinuous. "Lesbian leaders" in this context tend to play a primary role in being "pace-makers"<sup>15</sup> for

14. Continued from p. 171:

from a cultural standpoint, a special kind of cultural change phenomenon: the persons involved in the process of revitalization must perceive of their culture, or some major area of it, as a system (whether accurately or not); they must feel that this cultural system is unsatisfactory; and they must innovate not merely discreet items but a new cultural system, specifying new relationships as, in some cases, new traits".

The organization of lesbian activity implies this revitalization in that it attempts to challenge and change cultural attitudes towards lesbianism. As we have seen, the ideology of female sexuality along with deviancy implications establishes a negative definition of lesbianism. Through an organized or collective response, lesbians direct their lesbianism into a system of patterned responses and motivations which hope to "revitalize" society and its cultural system.

15. Blumer, op. cit., p. 10.

other lesbians whose organizational goals may<sup>be</sup> as unclear as their leaders. A body of literature develops as a faint reflection of the goals and aims of the culture. Individual lesbians who participate in this lesbian culture find that they develop new images of themselves. Prior to their entry in this culture, they experienced an ambiguous status in light of their lesbian identity. For them, entry into and interaction in lesbian social organization provides the tools for new-awarenesses of themselves, new interests and new directions. They become sensitized to the lesbian experience. Lesbians who emerge from the above organizational framework and who continue to maintain this framework activity are non-political lesbians. Two roles emerge as non-political lesbian activity. They are the straight lesbian role and the self-defined lesbian role.

#### Lesbian Social Organization and Specific Social Movements

Within specific social movements, the social organization of lesbian activity emerges from lesbianism as a general social movement. Lesbianism becomes more formalized, well-defined (in terms of organizational goals) and stylized as an expression of lesbian collective reaction. Specific social movements emerge in society in two ways: (1) as a reform movement and (2), as a revolutionary movement. The dynamics of specific social movements enable lesbians to experience a system of heightened lesbian social activity. A sense of "popular excitement" reigns as members grow and develop. Within these organizations, lesbians build up varying degrees of solidarity, lesbian ideologies, roles and tactics - all of which establish organizational fronts vis-à-vis society.

As reform movements, specific social movements seek to reform some area of the existing social order. On the other hand, lesbianism within a revolutionary movement not only directs a challenge to the

existing social order, but also attempts at a radical restructuring of society. Various lesbian roles emerge within specific social movements. They are differentiated and defined according to the particular group structure within which a lesbian may organize her lesbian experience. In my study I refer to lesbians who are involved in specific social movements as political lesbians. Roles are differentiated by two types of activity - reformist and revolutionary. Reformist<sup>16</sup> lesbian roles are: the gay movement lesbian, the women's movement lesbian. Revolutionary lesbian roles are radical lesbian and lesbian separatist. 'Political' lesbian roles emerge from either of the specific movements.

#### Lesbian Social Organization and Marginal Roles

Within lesbian social organization, three roles emerge and are distinguishable in either the general lesbian movement or specific social movements. These roles, the lesbian mother, the celibate, and the bisexual, are considered marginal because, in organizational terms, expectations within the lesbian experience, they exist on the fringe. However, they have varying degrees of importance in terms of their organizational function.

It is hoped that this chapter has provided the roots for an understanding of the social reality of lesbianism. The key concepts (lesbian, identity, lesbian roles, lesbian experience and lesbian social organization)

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16. It is important to note here that the gay liberation movement (which is now disorganized in London), traditionally provided a revolutionary role for lesbians. However, as I learned from a discussion with a lesbian involved in G.L.F., it has now lost some of its political potential because of "in fighting" between gay men and gay women members. G.L.F. could be analyzed as counterpart of Women's Liberation Movement (which will be discussed in Chapter 8).



and an introductory analysis into the inter-relationship among these concepts have been presented. This interactional setting and respective conceptual framework will provide the foundation from which further analyses in the thesis will develop. At this time, I hope that the reader is becoming aware of the complexities of lesbian social behaviour.

**PART III: THE SOCIAL REALITY OF LESBIANISM**

## Chapter 6 Lesbian Relationships and the Interactional Network

## CHAPTER 6

### LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS AND THE INTERACTIONAL NETWORK

After laying out the groundwork for an understanding of lesbianism within the context of lesbian identity, lesbian role and lesbian social organization, I will be more specific in my analysis of lesbianism and discuss lesbian relationships - their social construction and their formalization into relational roles and contexts. This particular discussion necessitates a more descriptive account of the unique and subtle interplay between and among the three above key concepts.

In order to unravel this complex account we should begin with a "workable" definition of Lesbian relationships. Simply, lesbian relationships are the varying types (with whom?, where?, in what social context?, why? ...) of meaningful relationships that lesbians experience as lesbians in society. (It is important to note here that this definition expands the meaning of lesbian relationships beyond the purely sexual (i.e., between lesbian lover and lesbian lover) and extends it to imply a distinct stance in the ghetto vis-à-vis society - both of which are built upon human interaction (interactional networks). Lesbian relationships are based upon the interactional networks which are built up by the very fact that one is a woman and a lesbian in society. They are bound up within two "emergent", creative processes: the lesbian ghetto and society at large. Therefore, within these processes, relationships are contingent upon being a lesbian in both the lesbian "subculture of deviance" (the lesbian ghetto) and society at large. Both processes involve the institutionalization of lesbianism within distinct, yet related social contexts.

Here we see the important factor of social location (the particular social context in which one is situated at a particular point in time) as it relates to a lesbian's attempt to establish a meaningful social life within various interactional networks. As we have seen earlier, the lesbian is a social being. She is situated within a society which sets up proscriptions, as well as prescriptions in terms of her particular social behaviour.

The questions which should concern us in our present analysis are: How does a lesbian organize her social life?; How does she establish meaningful relationships within her interactional network? Within this context, it is necessary to reveal a further concern of this thesis.

One of the findings in my study is that the definition of lesbianism as a current social phenomenon is being affected by social movements which challenge ideas on sexuality and sex roles.<sup>1</sup> In light of this finding and with a view to further the understanding of lesbian relationships, we must consider the notion of sexual<sup>2</sup> power and the resultant affect that

1. Particularly the gay movement and the women's movement which challenge cultural ideas on the homosexual role and women's role.
2. Sexual power is the socially based and culturally defined power which is related to the differences between the sexes. In a patriarchal and heterosexual society sexual power relates to the high status (heterosexual and male) or minimal status (homosexual and female) that sexual identity and roles have in terms of the institutionalization of sexuality in society. In other words, social status is related to cultural values in definitions of sexuality. It is valued more to be a heterosexual male than a homosexual female. Heterosexual roles and male social roles are dominant and effect higher status than homosexual roles and female social roles. This respective power relates to social images about the nature of sexuality and dominant ideologies which perpetuate these images.

Amos Hawley says, "Every social act is an actor exercise of power, every social relationship is a power equation and every social group or system is an organization of power". Amos Hawley, "Community Power and Urban Renewal Success," The American Journal of Sociology (January 1963), 68, pp. 422-423.

Looked at in the above light, sexual power becomes a pervasive force in sexual relationships. Sexual politics equals the use of this power in relationships. "Sexism" or "Sexist" are terms which were

this power has on lesbian relationships. A clear descriptive account of what has been initially defined as "lesbian relationships" requires the recognition of the importance of "the mobilization of sexual power" or, more simply, sexual politics in interpersonal relationships.

The impact of changing ideas on sexuality upon Western society has questioned not only the nature of sexuality, but also the whole structuring of sexual relationships in terms of patriarchy, "the sexual politics whereby men establish their power and maintain control."<sup>3</sup> My contention is that no matter how a lesbian views herself socially, she is a woman in society and is therefore affected by the challenge to existing roles (stereotypes) and structures in social relationships.

As I have shown in another context (Chapter 4, "Laying the Groundwork"), the position of women is achieved through the socialization process, perpetuated through ideological means and maintained by relevant social institutions. The lesbian, however 'deviant' her sexual preference or social performance is, nonetheless sustains her position as a woman in society. She is therefore influenced greatly by the sex role stereotyping process and, more importantly, the processes of structuring sexual relationships. Hence, she is not immuned to 'sexual politics' because she relations (sexually) solely to women.

The social construction of sexuality affects social individuals in such a way that they may translate sexual politics into their sexual

2. Continued from p. 177:

developed by individuals in society who became critical of sexual politics. See, for example, Ann Oakley, The Sociology of Housework (London: Martin Robertson & Co., 1974), "The Invisible Woman: Sexism in Sociology", pp. 1-28, where she describes "sexism" in society. These terms imply patriarchy, male-domination, etc.

3. Juliet Mitchell, Woman's Estate (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 65.

relationships in varying degrees and in a multiplicity of ways. Its social penetration may be subtle, but objectively it exists. Mitchell contends that sexual politics exists because society = patriarchy. She says, "Perhaps patriarchy's greatest psychological weapon is simply its universality and longevity".<sup>4</sup> Further, Mitchell, in a similar vein, says, "Patriarchy is all pervasive, it penetrates class divisions, different societies, historical epochs ..."<sup>5</sup>

In this context, lesbian relationships involve interactional networks interposed by patriarchy and sexual politics. The following will be a specific description of these relationships in terms of the lesbian ghetto and society at large.

#### Lesbian Relationships and the Interactional Network

Previously, I implied that lesbian relationships involve the process of a lesbian identifying herself as a lesbian, while setting up interactional networks within relevant social spheres of activity. These "relevant social spheres" act as pivots or pivotal points from which she emerges and develops a meaningful lesbian experience. In other words, lesbian relationships are framed within dual social contexts: the lesbian ghetto and society at large.

For the lesbian, the lesbian ghetto is established as "the home ground" and provides an interactional support network for the immediate legitimation or justification of her lesbianism. It is within the lesbian ghetto where a lesbian feels most herself ("at home") and is most able to express her individual needs. This ease of expression is immediate and consistent. It is also within this particular context that one's lesbianism

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4. Kate Millet, Sexual Politics (New York: Doubleday, 1970), p. 58.

5. Mitchell, op. cit., p. 65.

becomes institutionalized into an interactional network which creates an alternative (yet, meaningful) way of life.

On the other hand, there is the society at large or the "world out there" (as I have heard some lesbians call it). The "world out there", because it provides the ultimate or final social definition of the correct way of doing things, propels the lesbian into a deviant career (through social approbation) and initiates the inevitable "stigmatization process".<sup>6</sup> Society at large, therefore, presents the lesbian with a deviant or negative image of herself and her social world. It is this very society from which the lesbian needs to escape to the 'comforts' (ease of expression and social acceptance) of the lesbian ghetto.

Both contexts provide a complex framework in which a lesbian experience is created. In general, these contexts exist for the lesbian as the "institutional nexus" or links between herself and social reality. Her "reality flaws"<sup>7</sup> or her social flaws, defects, weaknesses ... which are based on the fact that she is a lesbian are activated in society and contravene the established (acceptable) norms. By creating her own alternative reality (i.e., lesbianism is right for her), the lesbian illustrates the fact that there exists a conflict between her lesbianism and the established society.

My research has shown that a lesbian's participation in these contexts provides her with various rules and roles. In order to set up interactional networks, these rules and roles are contingent upon the particular social contexts from which she operates at any given point in time. It is here that we see most clearly the duality of the lesbian

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6. Cf. Erving Goffman, Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1963), especially pp. 11-55.

7. Cf. H. Taylor Buckner, Deviance, Reality and Change (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 45.

experience - the conflict between the individual and society.

### The Nature of the Lesbian Ghetto

When I refer to the lesbian ghetto, I am using this term to describe the social location of the lesbian experience in light of one's alternative reality, lesbianism. Whether a lesbian is a 'closeted dyke' or an 'out dyke', a non-political or political lesbian, she must at some time or other either actively participate in the lesbian ghetto or at least acknowledge its social existence. (It is important to recall here that this thesis is concerned only with those lesbians who are active participants in the lesbian ghetto.)<sup>8</sup> It is obvious, therefore, that the lesbian ghetto spans across a wide range of social areas, activities and interactional settings.

Since the lesbian ghetto extends across many areas of lesbian social life, the actual participation in the ghetto varies according to the specific location of interactional settings. In other words, the question may be asked: "Where does a lesbian emerge from or live in order to participate in the lesbian ghetto?"

### The Lesbian Ghetto and Social Location

Let us examine the specific location of lesbian interactional settings. They include: the bar scene, the club scene, the disco scene and the "ghetto within the ghetto". As interactional settings, these "scenes" also have in common the fact that they form a base for the interactional network of the lesbian experience.

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8. This fact does place obvious limitations upon the conclusions which arise from my research. However, I do feel that the active creation of the lesbian ghetto in a lesbian social world is a worthwhile area of inquiry.



### The Bar Scene and The Club Scene

A lesbian may choose to socialize in the bar scene which provides her with a lesbian atmosphere or a gay atmosphere, whatever the case may be (depending upon if it is an all lesbian scene or a gay women and gay men scene).<sup>9</sup> In these atmospheres, she creates an environment which is conducive to the establishment of interactional networks. The basic orientation of a bar scene is to socialize in a bar context which is relaxed and informal. A lesbian is able to either converse with a particular woman or mix with groups of women for whom drinking and talking become the means of establishing interactional contacts. From these social contacts, she begins to create a specific interactional network which may overlap with other interactional settings.

A lesbian may choose the club scene (lesbian or gay) where members socialize with one another in an atmosphere of drinking, chatting or dancing. This scene is also informal, but there is usually a membership requirement (monetary fee). The fee implies a certain amount of formality in terms of actual number of participants and it effects boundaries for prospective relationships.

The club and bar scenes seem to be orientated toward the establishment of the idea that being an outcast, deviant ... in society does create an 'out group'. However, in the bar and club scenes, a lesbian is made aware (through the social organization of these settings in terms of lesbianism, lesbian argot, group membership or "lesbian" ambiance) that society is an outgroup (i.e., as evidenced in the expression "world out there"). Furthermore, any intrusion from an "outsider" (a non-lesbian) from society at large could become obvious to the participants and an embarrassing experience for the outsider.

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9. The latter "scene" refers to a "mixed gay" context which implies the presence of both men and women.

### Women's Discos

With the development of the women's movement, the idea of women (straight or lesbian) coming together to socialize as women autonomously from men, created women's discos. Gradually women's discos became organized in various areas with varying regularity as a type of activity which meant "women together". In reality, more lesbians than straight women tended to frequent these discos. However, organizers of these discos tended to emphasize that the discos are open to all women. Yet, straight women may feel out of place or uneasy in a predominant lesbian environment. After attending a disco one straight woman said:

I enjoyed it so much, women being together and dancing, but I wish more straight women would come.

This woman was looking for support from other "straight women" and was able to perceive of herself as different in this particular social situation (disco). Although only women were present, she could perceive the differences of being defined and defining oneself as a lesbian and a straight woman.

Another "straight" woman (at her first disco) was quite upset because she said that she had seen a man in the room. The 'man' was in fact a woman, a lesbian, who could be described as a "heavy"<sup>10</sup> (in

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10. A "heavy" is a lesbian who attempts to "come down heavy" on society's image of a typical woman. She may wear men's clothes (boots, dungarees, denim ...), have short cropped hair, and roll her own "fags". She does this in order to effect a challenge to society's image of what it means to be a woman. In political lesbian, circles, she is not an extreme case. Some political lesbians reflect male styles in order to challenge society's expectations. These lesbians believe that they should attempt to redefine sex roles but also the nature of relationships. By wearing "male clothes" they feel that they challenge male power and begin to redefine their own sex roles as women. In non-political contexts, the heavy is a "heavy duty butch number" and usually will make "sexual come on", on other lesbians.

lesbian argot). For the lesbians at the disco this particular lesbian was in fact a woman to them all and no one seemed to take any notice of her as did the straight woman. Her (straight woman's) initial perception was later proven wrong. However, the fact that she perceived a woman as a man in that particular context became an indicator to herself of her social distance from the disco setting.

At the discos, the interactional network which is also maintained in other supportive contexts for the lesbian is oftentimes relaxed and "free flowing" for a lesbian. However, for the straight woman it can become an alien network in which she becomes a marginal member. The above incident illustrates how the straight woman could not make a correct judgment because she perceived of herself as a somewhat alien member of the group (i.e., lacking the continual support system which a lesbian may experience in other contexts). As a result, this woman was self conscious and oblivious to the particular cues of interacting which are built up over time.

### The Ghetto within the Ghetto

Some lesbians choose to live most or all of their social lives with other lesbians. In other words, they may create a "ghetto within the ghetto" as I have described it. These lesbians tend to live together with friends, lovers, etc., ... in similar locales and develop a close interactional network. This network provides a lesbian with a unique immediate and continual support system. It is spatially defined and the support system provides a complex social organization (including a promotion system, particular lesbian ideology, lifestyle, dress) which is created and upheld by the particular lesbian group. The group exerts subtle pressure upon an individual lesbian to conform to the particular dynamics of living with the ghetto within the ghetto.

As a result, a lesbian in order to set up an interactional network may not have the need to venture out of the ghetto within the ghetto to associate or build an interactional network with lesbians outside of her immediate context. Furthermore, this unique support system may never be experienced by other lesbians who live outside of the lesbian ghetto within the ghetto and who may share similar lesbian ideologies.

However, at various times, a lesbian who lives outside of this ghetto within the ghetto (and who emerges<sup>s</sup> from the lesbian ghetto) may receive a certain amount of support from this particular group of lesbians. She may come into the ghetto within the ghetto (parties ...) or invite her "friends" to socialize outside of this context (for meals, concerts, discos, ...). However, the lesbian who experiences social distance from the ghetto within the ghetto (whether through lack of time and energy, living situation, or newness to the ghetto) finds that it provides her with a different type of interactional network and support system than one which is experienced by those who live on the inside. Because she is not a full participant in the interactional network, but a part of it, she develops an alternative socializing network which is based upon a different perception of her 'home ground'.

#### The Lesbian Ghetto and the 'Insulation Effect'

As we have seen, the lesbian ghetto in terms of actual experience varies to a great extent from group to group, place to place, and lesbian to lesbian. The lesbian ghetto reflects the social reality of lesbianism as a complex, socially constructed phenomenon which is not easily understood by the outside observer as well as an individual lesbian.

The variety of experiences within the interactional network of the ghetto is directly influenced by the particular self or group identification process. This process defines, types, categorizes a "true" or "valid"

lesbian experience in terms of one's particular interactional settings in the lesbian ghetto. The process also provides individual and group legitimations which help to create this alternative and all encompassing ghetto structure for all lesbians.

The ghetto has a variety of social implications for any lesbian. These implications are dependent upon the varying individual perceptions and social definitions of lesbianism. Therefore, however, and in whatever social context a lesbian defines herself, she will seek to align her responses to various definitions and channel her activities in these directions.

In light of what has been stated, my research findings reveal an interesting correlation between a lesbian's self definition and her personal cum social activity in the interactional network of the lesbian ghetto. For example, many lesbians who are "political lesbians" tend to view their lesbianism as a total commitment to women and organize their lives around this respective commitment. Lesbianism becomes an open, public issue and, therefore, a social concern. As Abbott and Love state:

Lesbianism is a way of living: with assumptions on the value and meaning of the self; it constitutes a kind of statement of belief of independence and freedom for all females. Society denies itself an opportunity to learn more about women and how they can function by making the Lesbian seal off her Lesbianism in all interactions with society.<sup>11</sup>

Non-political lesbians tend to perceive and experience their lesbianism as a sexual preference which is for them a private matter. (However, the way people relate sexually does affect their involvement with society.) Lesbianism is not a social issue. Therefore, some non-political lesbians do not come out because their lesbianism is perceived as a personal cum private matter. Their lesbianism is usually kept hidden

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11. Sidney Abbott and Barbara Love, Sappho was a Right-On Woman: A Liberated View of Lesbianism (New York: Stein & Day, 1972), p. 64.

from their daily social interactions outside of the lesbian ghetto.

By the very fact that she is closeted, a lesbian must "conceal the many details that bear tangentially on her sexual identity and she therefore must sacrifice more and more of herself to this effort".<sup>12</sup>

Both types of lesbian experience create a process which I term, "the insulation effect" within the lesbian ghetto (for the political lesbian) and also society at large (for the non-political lesbian). This insulation effect refers to the process by which the lesbian maintains supportive interactional networks while avoiding conflicting or negative images which are presented to her. Let us look more closely at this phenomenon.

On the one hand, the political lesbian tends to establish a primary commitment to lesbians or women in her life. By that very fact, she directs her energies towards women, straight or lesbian (depending upon if she is a separatist, where she lives ...). She insulates herself within the lesbian ghetto in order to create a meaningful support system and to cushion herself from negative definitions which are part of this society. Basically, society acts as a negative or conflicting force in terms of her own lesbianism. Within the lesbian ghetto, she may insulate herself from other lesbians (non-political) who may uphold conflicting life-styles, self definitions, lesbian ideology ... In the immediate sense, the interactional networks of the non-political and political lesbians seem remote to each other in light of the insulation effect within the ghetto. However, some overlapping of networks does occur, as I will explain later in the text.

On the other hand the non-political lesbian by tending to remain closeted maintains a privatized definition of herself and her lesbian

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12. Ibid.

interactional network. Although she may also establish a primary commitment to women, she effects a certain amount of insulation from both the political lesbian (in terms of the political nature of the lesbian commitment) and society at large (in terms of the negative lesbian identity). She cushions herself from the challenge to be openly a lesbian, while insulating herself from society by "privatizing" her lesbian relationships.

These descriptions remain fairly consistent. However, at certain points in time, as I have mentioned earlier, an overlapping does occur in the interactional networks of the political and non-political lesbian. I observed certain occasions when social contact between the social groups within the ghetto became established. One particular instance is worth recalling. A group of political lesbians decided to go along to a lesbian social club which is predominantly orientated to non-political lesbians and where one is able to drink and dance. When the group arrived, one lesbian said, "Well, are we ready to freak them out?". Basically, they all sat at one booth, chatted together and danced together in a fairly obvious circle. Initially, their presence was noticed by most of the other lesbians there, but gradually the more they danced and enjoyed themselves, the more they seemed to be accepted by the others. In fact, at one point a group of four lesbians (non-political) from the bar came to join in their "circle dance". By the end of the evening the circle dance included other lesbians who seemed to be enjoying themselves, and even the presence of these political lesbians.

This incident illustrates the breaking down of the insulation effect which exists within the lesbian ghetto. The very presence of political lesbians in a non-political scene challenged traditional interactional patterns on both sides. In effect, the interactional network of the lesbian ghetto effectively overlapped, if only minimally, and for

a brief period of time.

### The Lesbian Ghetto and Social Relationships

This section of my analysis will deal with the form (types) and content (relational roles) of lesbian social relationships within the lesbian ghetto. In the lesbian ghetto, a clear distinction<sup>13</sup> is usually made between lovers and friends.

### Lesbian "Lover" Relationships - The Forms

Lovers include the person or persons a lesbian is having a current sexual relationship with. There are various kinds of lover relationships in the lesbian ghetto. They include: monogamous relationships, affair relationships, multiple relationships, primary relationships and secondary relationships. These types of relationships characterize the forms which lesbian love relationships emerge from.

### Monogamy

This type of relationship is usually based upon the most common type of relationship in a heterosexual society. The relationship which epitomizes heterosexuality in our society is the monogamous marriage. Basically, it is through the marital bond and the family structure that heterosexuality becomes institutionalized in our society.

For the lesbian, monogamy is a relationship in which two individual lesbians desire to establish an exclusive and explicit sexual relationship

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13. However, some lesbians have told me that they do not make a real distinction between friends and lovers. Friends may be lovers in the present or future lovers. One's lover might have been a friend first. Some lesbians never use the word lover, they only use the word friend, so it becomes difficult for others to know about their intimate affairs. In a sense, these lesbians try to de-emphasize the sexual aspects in a relationship and see it as one of many facts in a meaningful relationship.



with one another. Not only do they establish an exclusive sexual relationship, but also they preserve the primacy of their relationship above all other relationships. Within the lesbian ghetto monogamy may be scorned at and criticized as an aping of the straight world and the marriage relationship. It may also be upheld as the ideal or a viable alternative. Some attack monogamy because the potential intrusion of power, manipulation and control seems to them almost inevitable in a monogamous context. "After all", as I have heard one lesbian say, "monogamy is a way in which men control women in the marriage, and the family. Why should we try to control each other in the same way?" On the other hand, some lesbians who are monogamous or accepting of monogamy, view it as a viable form of lesbian relationships because it provides a sense of security and energy direction.

### The Lesbian Affair

This type of relationship usually occurs when one lesbian who is involved in a monogamous relationship decides to have an "affair" with another lesbian outside of her monogamous context. The affair relationship tends to be a clandestine experience which is shared solely between the lesbian and her lover in the affair context. The choice of the affair changes the nature of the monogamous relationship into a primary relationship as opposed to an exclusive relationship. However, this transition is usually unknown to the other party (in the monogamous relationship) who may remain oblivious to the affair or affairs of her primary partner. By its very nature, the affair is potentially destructive or threatening to the primary 'monogamous' relationship. Sometimes, however, affairs may not carry with them potential threats and this factor depends upon the degrees of openness, friendship ties and emotional stability which exists between the three women involved. The very choice of an

affair does change the nature of the original monogamous relationship. Lesbian affairs tend to occur in interactional networks which are based upon the intrusion of power in relationships (society's ideas on sexual relationships). This phenomenon will be explained further on in this chapter.

### Multiple Relationships

This type of relationship involves a social situation in which a lesbian's interactional network is channeled or directed towards the belief that she is able to have meaningful relationships (sexual) with several or more than one woman at any given point in time. A lesbian involved in these types of relationships sets up relationships with other women (lesbians and sometimes bisexual) on the basis that she will learn much from giving and taking in several relationships, and that one person does not become the ultimate focus or the source of the satisfaction of her needs. In other words, different women help to fulfil various needs in her and vice versa. In this way, one relationship does not take priority over and above another relationship in terms of total need fulfilment. (However, it is interesting to note here that there are lesbians who espouse these types of relationships while they implicitly establish a primary relationship with one woman in their interactional network. The theory is upheld, while the practice is not.)

A lesbian involved in multiple relationships attempts to establish "non-exclusive" types of caring relationships with other women. The rationale or justification for multiple relationships revolves generally around the idea that "exclusivity is anti-women". They believe that women in order to get strength as women must support one another on all levels, and thus break down sexual hierarchies. Exclusivity implies a certain amount of control, possession, or power which they see as male-defined.

Therefore, by keeping one's options open to women, basically any woman in an interactional network, the lesbian feels that she effects a restructuring of power on the relational level.

From an observational viewpoint, these relationships involve a great amount of mobility, time, space, emotional energy, flexibility and personal security. These factors may become difficult for many lesbians to sustain over a long period of time. Often, I have spoken with lesbians who have maintained a belief in multiple relationships and then found themselves in a situation in which they "fall in love". As a result, they are faced with the contradiction of acting out the cultural implications which result from the 'romantic love syndrome', while (because of their initial belief in non-exclusive love) trying to create a certain amount of autonomy within their present primary love relationship. This dilemma faces some lesbians. It reflects the ambiguous, yet constant problem of coping with the restructuring of power relationships which has developed in certain areas of the lesbian ghetto. This development is proposed as not only a challenge to existing sexual relationships in the ghetto and society at large, but also a specific means of setting up a complex interactional network.

#### Primary Relationship and Secondary Relationship

Primary relationships imply the notion (as in monogamy) of establishing another lesbian as primary in terms of one's interactional network. However, they may also involve (unlike monogamy) the belief in a non-exclusive sexual relationship. In other words, by the very fact that a lesbian has established a primary relationship with another lesbian, does not imply that she will not relate to other lesbians sexually. She has established herself in working out a caring relationship with another lesbian, but has not closed off the options of relating to other women.

She is, therefore, not excluding them from being potential lovers in her interactional context.

If she does involve herself sexually with another lesbian or other lesbians, she establishes "secondary relationships" with them, while still maintaining the "primacy" of her initial relationship. However, these relational contexts may bring with them the fact that at any point in time a lesbian may find a secondary relationship more worthwhile than the primary relationship (for a variety of reasons - emotional, social, psychological, etc.). She opts to transform a secondary relationship into a primary one. Therefore, a new primary relationship is established as a new secondary relationship. Primary relationships may also become monogamous relationships when both parties experience outside relationships as a threat to their own relationship. They therefore effect an exclusive relationship in their interactional network.

It is interesting to see how the dynamics of these relationships do affect lesbians who are in the "other party" in a relationship. In a sense, they may perceive of themselves as more powerless, defenceless, or expendable to the lesbians who are in the primary relationship. Ironically, the primary relationship creates an exclusivity in terms of its priority, while both parties in a primary relationship espouse the general belief in a non-exclusive relationship.

The lesbian who has secondary status may experience the similar types of frustrations, emotional instability and insecurity which arise in the "affair" context.

The structure and interplay of a power relationship is evident in the former example (affair), but more subtle in the latter example (primary).

## The Content of Lesbian Love Relationships

### Lesbianism and Power

The intrusion of power in any lesbian relationship is usually the outcome of one partner's attempt to maintain and control the actual dynamics of the relationship. The content of these relationships vary according to the particular lesbian roles which are played out and enacted. The content or relational roles reflect the hierarchical structuring of the lesbian relationship (in terms of sexual politics).

One can distinguish between three structuring processes: the butch and the femme (overt interplay of power), dominance and submission (the subtle interplay of power) and equality (minimization of power).

### The Butch and the Femme

The overt interplay of power in a lesbian relationship involves the traditional social stereotypes of the lesbian: the butch and the femme. The social dynamics of these types of relationships are based upon the control of the femme (the passive, dependent, secondary role - womanlike in either behaviour or dress, or both) by the butch (the dominant, aggressive, independent primary role - psuedo male role). This type of relationship creates a situation of inequality or inferiority for the femme who usually responds to the butch lesbian, similarly to the way a heterosexual woman responds to a heterosexual man. In a sense they are straight lesbians who are acting out sex roles which are predominant in a heterosexual society.

I observed some lesbians in bars, clubs or discos who identified with these relational roles. However, most lesbians that I observed fell within the second structuring process.

### Dominance and Submission

I observed this relational context (dominance and submission) as the one in which the majority of lesbian relationships existed. Basically, the content of these relationships involve the subtle interplay of power between two lesbians. These relationships establish and maintain situations of control, manipulation and power which are not/<sup>as</sup>easily recognizable as in the butch femme relationship. In these relationships a dominant role (for one who wields power or control at a given point in time) may be played by one lesbian for the entire span of the relationship, for most of the relationship, or for some period of the relationship. The duration of enactment of the submissive role (one who submits to the dominance of the other), may also correspond to the above.

The distinguishing feature of this relationship is that at one point in time, due to particular social psychological factors (peer group in the lesbian ghetto, living situation, emotional state, physical state ...), one partner may have more control over the relationship than the other partner, and vice versa. In other words, roles may be exchanged. In this way, power intrudes as a subtle force in the relationship, but it may not remain the primary modus operandi (as in the case of the butch and femme). This type of relationship is important analytically because it represents, as I have observed it, a transitional stage in the development of the contemporary lesbian relationship.

### Equality

The quest for equality in lesbian relationships is a quest for the minimization of power, vulnerability, or powerlessness in one's intimate relationships. The idea of vulnerability emerged from the theoretical base of the contemporary women's movement. A major proponent of this theory, Shulamith Firestone, developed the idea of vulnerability

in relationships in The Dialectic of Sex. She states:

Love is the height of selfishness; the self attempts to enrich itself through the absorption of another. Love is being psychically wide-open to another. It is a situation of total emotional vulnerability. Therefore it must be not only the incorporation of the other, but an exchange of selves. Anything short of this exchange will hurt one or the other party.<sup>14</sup>

I have not observed this type of relationship frequently. However, it does exist in seed form throughout the lesbian ghetto. Generally, it was more difficult to observe and analyze because I had to uncover areas in the ghetto where these relationships might have been possible. Next, I had to discuss the content of these relationships with those lesbians who were involved in them, and only then was I able to understand their inception and growth within the interactional network. This relationship involves discreet (and barely observable) interaction between two women who attempt to minimize power ("game playing", as some call it). Thus, they desire to break down "power plays" on the level of human relationships.

Lesbians involved in these relationships rely upon their own emotional vulnerability (openness, trust ...) in order to create a situation of caring. In other words, commitments are made, but the primary one is to establish a powerless situation in which control, competition and force are minimized. These lesbians are motivated to maintain autonomy and choice in personal relationships. As one lesbian who was involved in this type of relationship said: "I always think of this question: Would you share your autonomous self and sexuality with me?".

Some of these lesbians believe that the only way to have an equal relationship in society is to only relate to women. They expressed that until society has a radical change on the level of culture, social

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14. Shulamith Firestone, The Dialectic of Sex (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), p. 128.

relationships between men and women will not be equal. Furthermore, they feel that the intrusion of power which they view as male social and sexual power makes it difficult to establish equal relationships with men.<sup>15</sup> For these lesbians, relationships are equal only with women. One lesbian said: "It's easier for me to relate to women because we're equal full stop".

I made further enquiries about this belief and found its basic foundation resting upon a belief in the universality of women's oppression. In this context, one lesbian expressed her belief:

Because society is the way it is (women as being oppressed). I could never have an equal relationship with any man. So I decided to become a lesbian. I suppose some people in society as women in the movement are critical of me, but its the only way for me.

This idea of vulnerability and the minimization of power in relationships may be as new to the lesbian ghetto as it is to society at large.<sup>16</sup> A future research interest would be to study this restructuring process and to see how long, in what ways, it is perpetuated in the lesbian ghetto.

### Lesbian Friendship Relationships

Lesbian friendships may be formed within the context of the lesbian ghetto, or society at large. (The exception is the lesbian separatist who usually does not relate to women who relate with men. They tend to

15. However, it should be noted here that lesbian relationships are not immuned from "male power". As one lesbian said in the course of an interview, "Lesbians can be just as sexist as men ... so can women for that matter".

16. This notion of vulnerability as it relates to sexual politics was originally the idea of Firestone in 1970. She attempts to analyze how love, power and sex are intrinsically linked in society. So far, for Firestone, love has been based upon an unequal balance of power between two people and is potentially destructive. She contends that love demands vulnerability as well as equality. Cf. Firestone, op. cit., pp. 126-145, "Love".



confine themselves to other lesbians who share their particular ideology within the lesbian ghetto.)

Let us look at the different types of lesbian friendships which are set up in an interactional network. They are friendships with other lesbians, other women (straight or bisexual), and men (straight or gay).

### Other Lesbians

Most lesbians find a unique support system from other lesbians who are in the lesbian ghetto. Lesbian friends include present lovers, former lovers (who may have become close friends), schoolmates, workmates, neighbours (especially in terms of the ghetto within the ghetto), relatives (sisters, cousins ...), lesbian mates, future lovers.<sup>17</sup> All of these friends form a cohesive network from which a lesbian is able to gain varying degrees of support. Her lesbian friends experience the same oppressive features of being both a woman and a lesbian in society. This dual aspect of the lesbian experience can create strong bonds of solidarity and "sisterliness" (as some lesbians call it). These bonds help a lesbian to cope with a 'deviant' definition of herself. In this way a lesbian is confronted with social oppression by the very fact that she is a lesbian. However, her friends have a "cushioning effect" in terms of society at large.

Within the ghetto she finds a comfortable haven from the negativity of society which may appear as oppressive. (Here we see the occurrence of "the world out there" syndrome in friendship contexts). In response to her particular situation, the lesbian with her friends may view her life as a social being and as either oppressed by a predominantly male

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17. As I noted in another context, some lesbians will form relationships with friends who then become lovers. Even if one makes clear a friendship status, the possibility of forming a future lover relationship is not totally denied.

world or an anti-gay world, or both. This view depends upon how she, along with her friends, defines the lesbian experience and contingent definitions (women's oppression or gay oppression).

However, no matter what aspect of oppression is emphasized, the lesbian discovers that her lesbian friends provide her with the necessary emotional tools for coping with her life. As a lesbian in society, she is able to be an "out dyke" with her other lesbian friends, albeit she may continue to remain in the closet in terms of her other friends, family ...

#### Friendships with Other Women

Oftentimes, a lesbian forms close friendship ties with other women who are not lesbians (at school, work ...). The motivations for the establishment of these relationships vary from relationship to relationship, and lesbian to lesbian. On the one hand, a woman may prove to be a close friend and confidant with a lesbian who is able to share similar experiences. The lesbian may or may not tell her that she is a lesbian. This usually depends upon if she perceives it as being an important factor in the dynamics of the relationship. If this relationship becomes problematic she may risk losing a 'good friend'. However, she may discover that coming out in this context will not destroy the relationship and that close emotional ties will remain. (This situation breaks down the myth that a lesbian is a totally sexual being who is attracted to all women.)

One lesbian related to me her problems with coming out to a close woman friend:

I am afraid to tell her because she may not want to be my friend any more. I know that she likes me but maybe she may feel I'll pounce on her.

A problem arises if a lesbian "fancies" a straight woman friend who does not know of her lesbianism. In this situation a lesbian may perceive that a revelation of her lesbianism may or may not threaten the relationship. If the friend is in fact straight (however, she may also be in the closet in this situation) and is repulsed by lesbianism she may place negative labels upon her lesbian friend.

On the other hand, the straight woman friend may accept her friend's self-definition and may not let it affect the relationship. However, some lesbians feel that a disclosure of their sexual attraction for a presumed straight friend might also follow a disclosure of their friend's lesbianism. Usually, lesbians weigh the relevant situational factors and make an optimal choice.

One lesbian expressed how frustrated she was because of the above situation. She valued highly her friendship with a woman, yet she asked herself, "How can ... be a true and close friend if she doesn't even know that I am a lesbian?" For this lesbian, her lesbianism was an integral part of her life. However, when she had difficulties with her current lover, she was unable to communicate her feelings to her straight woman friend. On the other hand, when her straight woman friend had problems with male lovers, she felt free to discuss her problems with her lesbian friend (who was considered straight to her). (This situation arises whether or not sexual attraction comes into play.)

If a lesbian comes out to straight women friends, she may create an atmosphere in which her lesbianism does not threaten the relationship. The lesbian speaks freely about her lesbian relationship (lover) and finds a supportive context. Sometimes, an out lesbian may include friends within the lesbian ghetto. I have observed that some lesbians desire to break down barriers which exist between lesbians and straight women.

The term "lesbian chauvinism" refers to a lesbian ideology which puts lesbians first before all other women. It became a defensive reaction for lesbians who felt that they were oppressed by other women because of their lesbianism. These lesbian chauvinists retreated into the ghetto for security, acceptance, and recognition. Thus a split emerged between lesbian and straight women.<sup>18</sup> However, lesbian chauvinism in the ghetto is being gradually broken down due to the friendship ties which are consistently being created between lesbians and straight women. "After all", as I heard one lesbian say, "we're women first".

### Male Friends

Male friends include: ex-lovers, ex-husbands, lovers or husbands of friends, workmates, schoolmates, relatives, gay men ...

Many lesbians include male friends within their interactional network - in terms of society at large (except in the case of gay men whose interactional network may overlap within the general gay ghetto).

Objectively, if a man is gay he shares gay oppression with a lesbian in a predominantly heterosexual society. They may go together to various mixed gay bars or pubs and share common experiences. Lesbians who find it difficult to relate to straight men (for various reasons) may find it easier to relate to gay men. They feel this ease in relating because of the absence of the sexual elements in the relationship. On the other hand, she may find that gay men oppress her as men (through sexism) and she may or may not continue the relationship.

Sexism is one of the primary reasons why some lesbians find it difficult to establish close relationships with straight men. Because of

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18. This phenomenon is evident especially within the women's movement.

the potential sexual definitions or use of sexual power which they see as a part of these relationships, these lesbians find them difficult to establish. In order to avoid an embarrassing situation ("sexual come on"), a lesbian may come out to her male friends. She may keep it hidden and make it possible to "play his game" (as some lesbians call it). However, the latter alternative is more difficult to maintain because of the obvious embarrassment which results. A lesbian may also retreat from these situations.

However, I have observed that if a situation is made clear between a lesbian and a straight man (i.e., she is out), any prior potential for sexual involvement either tends to be minimized or tends to escalate. In this situation, one lesbian felt that she was viewed either as a "real friend" or as a possible "conquest". A primary factor in the dynamics of establishing lesbian and straight men friendships is, not only biographical knowledge, but also attitudes of acceptance and sociability for both parties. The above exposes structural problems which emerge on the intersubjective level. However, most lesbians who have straight men friends tend to structure these respective relationships according to their emotional needs at the time. In other words, while the subjective content of the relationships becomes de-sexualized, the objective form (male and female close relationship) remains and is imputed with the sexual.

Some lesbians, who do not have friendships with men, feel that these relationships are not only pervaded with sexual meanings (in society's eyes), but also are sexist (in terms of any man's use of sexual power). Lesbians who believe this tend to be separatists. Because they feel that they are more sensitive to the nature of sexism in society, they do not want to involve themselves in relationships which are potentially "sexist". The rationale behind separatism is that rather than direct negative energy to a man or men, a lesbian directs her energies towards women. In this

context, one lesbian said, "I don't have the energy nor the time to relate to men. I don't even have the desire". This particular lesbian was a separatist.

One lesbian felt that since she had defined herself as a lesbian, she had experienced more confidence in her relationships with men. Before she came out, she experienced a general hostility towards men because she felt that they were "the sexual aggressors". However, by defining herself as a lesbian, she experienced that her hostility was minimal in particular situational contexts and she could now have "meaningful relationships with men". "I can plug into them intellectually", she said. She was relaxed and she felt that men could no longer control her (in sexual contexts). Her social conflict with men was resolved when she defined herself as a lesbian.

This chapter has examined the nature of lesbian social relationships. We have looked at the roles, contexts, forms and motivations of lesbian relationships. The setting, the lesbian ghetto vis-à-vis society, is the complex interplay between the web of meaningful relationships and the lesbian experience. This particular interactional network is observable, unique and structured. It changes as lesbians emerge from it and create the contemporary lesbian experience. Process and change are evidenced, while stability and continuity are maintained. The social reality of lesbianism exposes 'meaningful' relationships and 'meaningful' social lives.

The data which was used in this chapter was primary or qualitative data. From this type of data we were able to obtain "first hand" information about the life of the observed. Through this type of presentation, our analysis became clearer and reflected the 'natural quality' of the phenomenon of lesbianism.

The remaining chapters of this thesis will be concerned with a presentation and further analyses of quantitative data, as well as qualitative data. The inclusion of the former type of data into our sociology of lesbianism is useful at this time. Previously, we were concerned with micro-level areas and a descriptive account of these areas. In future, our emphasis will be directed towards not only a descriptive account of these areas, but also a statistical analysis of lesbian social organization as a microcosm of society at large.

**PART III:**

**THE SOCIAL REALITY OF LESBIANISM**

**Chapter 7**

**Lesbian Social Organization: Lesbians,  
The Lesbian Experience and Women**



## CHAPTER 7

### LESBIAN SOCIAL ORGANIZATION: LESBIANS, THE LESBIAN EXPERIENCE AND WOMEN

#### Lesbian Social Organization

By the very 'nature' of her lesbian identity, the contemporary lesbian becomes aware of its deviant and further threatening character. As a result, many lesbians in order to have meaningful personal experiences, relationships, etc., ... socialize in certain contexts which are lesbian orientated, or women defined. (In other words, these areas of social activity exist, are organized and function for and by lesbians and/or women.) It is in these areas that lesbianism becomes 'institutionalized', regulated, patterned, or channeled as a distinct, complex social phenomenon. Specific social contexts with well-defined boundaries provide an atmosphere for lesbian collective action. In these contexts, lesbians collectively respond to or react to (whatever the case may be) the heterosexual, male orientated society which lesbians (because they are lesbians) know to exist and to be the legitimate society. The collective response compels a lesbian to develop, if not to be aware of, a realistic sense of oneself, as well as a common justification of lesbianism. These individual and group legitimations facilitate the group experience of lesbianism to be experienced on both levels, respectively.

Yet, whatever way a lesbian may organize her life or lesbian experience in terms of collective activity (for our research purposes, lesbian social organization), depends usually upon her own view, definition and justification of lesbianism. She aligns her ideas and beliefs with a group which most reflects her own lesbianism. Her social activity becomes lesbian social activity vis-à-vis a particular social grouping.

It appears to be structured, transformed and identified within a particular group context which satisfies her social needs and simultaneously other members' social needs.

My research reveals two types of lesbian social activity or lesbian social organization - non-political and political. Membership in these groups are characterized by two types of lesbians, the non-political lesbian and the political lesbian. These two types of lesbians differ greatly. In fact, a closer analysis of lesbians may reveal only one observable social similarity (and that in particular contexts) - the fact that they are lesbians.

Let us examine the differences that exist between these two types of lesbians and which can be recognized as distinctive social characteristics within the area of lesbian social organization.

#### Non-Political and Political Lesbians

My idea to distinguish between political and non-political lesbians came about midway in my study. At that time I began to realize that there were obvious differences in dress, language, social meetings, atmosphere, self-perception, ideas and beliefs among the various lesbian groups which I was observing at the time. In other words, any lesbian group which I observed had 'group specific' characteristics which were found most noticeably within the particular group in which it was formed and from which it emerged.

Furthermore, I began gradually to distinguish between lesbian social organization of a 'non-political' nature and lesbian social organization of a 'political' nature. With this awareness, I was further able to differentiate not only between the two groups of lesbian social organization, but also among the particular group which I was observing at the time. For example, I saw that lesbian social activity which was

political involved a whole series or spectrum of lesbian social activity. This spectrum became evident to me as I branched out in my research into social contexts which were predominately populated by political lesbians or lesbians who were 'politically minded'. (Political lesbian is a term which I use in the course of my research to describe broadly a lesbian who perceives of her lesbianism as political activity, who sees herself as a political woman, or who believes every social act carried out by a social animal is political.) In contrast, the non-political lesbian does not see lesbianism as political activity, etc., and tends to emphasize the personal cum social aspects of the lesbian experience. This research reveals that certain social contexts (i.e., bars, clubs, political meetings, demonstrations ...) are usually more conducive to one type of lesbian social organization than the other. (However, analysis of a specific context at any one point in time may reveal an almost equal distribution of, or similar representation from both types of lesbians. Yet, this situation may be a rare occurrence.)

Towards the completion of my study, I began to observe an increase in the social interaction between political and non-political lesbians. I attributed this difference to the process of social change which was affecting the contemporary lesbian experience. Furthermore, I explained this phenomenon as being the result of a changing definition which was then, and is now emerging from the women's movement and the gay movement.

#### Lesbian Social Organization: The Sample

My sample for my study (which I explained previously) was composed of 63.7% (N = 201) political lesbians and 36.3% non-political lesbians. There were 88.1% political lesbians and 11.9% non-political lesbians at the lesbian conference (N = 101); 39% political lesbians and 61%

non-political lesbians were subscribers to the magazine (N = 100). Initially, I predicted that there would be more political than non-political lesbians represented at the lesbian conference, and vice versa for the subscribers.

Why was this? Basically, I inferred from previous observations that the lesbian conference by the very fact of being a conference demanded a certain degree of 'political' awareness and would probably attract more politically motivated lesbians than not. These lesbians would be compelled to use their own time (a weekend) in order to organize around the issue of lesbianism publically and with other lesbians. On the other hand, the subscribers (some, I was told, whose only contact with lesbians is through the magazine) would probably tend to be less political or even non-political in terms of their own lesbianism. In other words, for some of these women their contact with lesbian social organization occurred only every month when they received their subscription. However, it must be noted here that the more 'political' subscribers could attend weekly meetings and that option was open to them.

Early on in my study I perceived the isolation of the above type of non-political lesbian and contrasted it with the solidarity of other non-political lesbians and the political lesbians. However, I have observed that not all non-political lesbians are socially isolated. On the contrary, non-political lesbians have their particular group contexts in which they structure their social activities or more simply, socialize, as do their political counterparts.

#### Social Characteristics of Lesbians: Age, Occupation and Religion

The age category into which the highest percentage of political lesbians was distributed was between the ages 18 - 25 (49%), the next highest was 26 - 31 (43.5%). For non-political lesbians the highest

percentage (26%) was distributed around 18 - 25, while the next highest (23.3%) was 26 - 31 (see Chart 1.0).

As far as occupation was concerned, lesbians in both categories were involved mainly in skilled or supervisory non-manual work (41.1% of non-political and 25.8% of political lesbians), then lower non-manual type work (17.8% of non-political lesbians and 14.4% of political lesbians). My findings concerning occupation for this survey reveal a definite middle class bias. (See Chart 2.0)

An interesting finding with regards occupation is the fact that more political (7.8%) than non-political (1.4%) lesbians are unemployed. I have found this tendency throughout the course of my research. One can observe in more 'radical' elements of lesbian social organization a disdain for any form of career commitment or long term occupational goals. This disdain is supported by an ideology which proposes that any form of "institutionalized" employment is ultimately male-defined or dependent upon a sexist society. Therefore, some political lesbians support an ideology which proposes that it is almost an impossibility to engage in any form of meaningful employment which is not male-orientated, or servicing men, or a male society. Thus, some lesbians remain unemployed and actively refuse to be a part of the work ethic which demands women as a secondary labour force and, furthermore, dependent upon the male wage.

In a similar ideological framework, but with differing economic implications, I have observed some political lesbians who are university educated and career orientated, who consciously cease any prior occupational goals and employment concerns and who re-organize their entire career commitment. What this implies is that these women will retrain in various obvious male-defined occupations (i.e., electrician, car mechanics, carpenters or plumbers, etc.). Thus, through their newly acquired skills, they attempt actively to challenge society's attitudes towards certain types of labour

CHART 1.0LESBIAN SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Age in Questionnaire Sample - 201

Age Categories	Total Sample	Non-Political	Political
18 - 25	(68) 33.8%	(19) 26.0	(49) 38.3
26 - 31	(60) 29.9	(17) 23.3	(43) 33.6
32 - 39	(29) 14.4	(13) 17.8	(16) 12.5
40 - 49	(30) 14.9	(15) 20.5	(15) 11.7
50 - 55	( 8) 4.0	( 7) 9.6	( 1) .8
56 - 68	( 2) 1.0	( 2) 2.7	( 4) 3.1
NA	( 4) 2.0		
	(201) 100	(73) 100	(128) 100
Mean	30.358	34.603	27.938
STD dev	10.137	10.652	9.012
Median	28.364	32.00	26.346

CHART 2.0LESBIAN SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

## Occupation in Questionnaire Sample

Category Label	Total Sample	Non-Political	Political
Higher Managerial or Professional	( 9) 4.5	( 2) 2.7	( 7) 5.5
Lower Managerial or Professional	(26) 12.9	(11) 15.1	(15) 11.7
Skilled or Super- visory	(63) 31.3	(30) 41.1	(33) 25.8
Lower non-manual	(29) 14.4	(13) 17.8	(16) 12.5
Skilled Manual	(18) 9.0	( 6) 8.2	(12) 9.4
Unskilled Manual	(12) 6.0	( 4) 5.5	( 8) 6.3
Residual, State Pensioners	( 1) .5	( 1) 1.4	-
Students	(20) 10.0	( 2) 2.7	(18) 14.1
Unemployed	(11) 5.5	( 1) 1.4	(10) 7.8
NA	(12) 6.0	( 3) 4.1	( 9) 7.0
	<hr/> (201) 100 <hr/>	<hr/> (73) 100 <hr/>	<hr/> (128) 100 <hr/>

which have been traditionally open to men only. This becomes their particular solution to a problem which is also the concern of her unemployed counterpart. In other words, these lesbians explore the possible contradictions which they believe are inherent in and directly related to any form of female employment. Political lesbians in these circles believe that they expose the exploitative nature of women's work (i.e., secretarial, nursing, teaching and ultimately, housework) and go beyond the 'expected' work role for women.

Another finding is that a higher percentage of non-political lesbians (58.9%) than political lesbians (43.0%) were distributed in the higher occupational levels (1-3). One explanation of this tendency could be that non-political lesbians tended to have more of an 'ideological stake' within the system than political lesbians. In other words, their career commitments and occupational goals as well as class interests, reflected the wider society's expectations of them as women and, furthermore, as middle class. For the non-political lesbian the economic benefits which were connected with occupational status, career advancement and, possible upward social mobility, outweighed the choice of a certain degree of material deprivation which was the ultimate implication of her more extreme political sister. (N.B.: However, it must be pointed out in this context that I have observed many political lesbians whose material comforts are comparable. What I am attempting to point out are the vested interests of the specific groups of lesbian social organization vis-à-vis society. Simply, the non-political lesbian has more material cum ideological concerns at stake, in any potential 'politicization' process, than the political lesbian.)

As far as religion is concerned, most lesbians in the total sample (65%) did not see themselves as having any current religious affiliation, regardless of any previous affiliation. 34% of the non-



political lesbians had no religious beliefs, while 76% of the political lesbians were non-believers (see Chart 3.0). One of the reasons which I have observed, and which may account for this fact, is that more political lesbians than non-political lesbians by the very way in which they structure their social organization tend to actively criticize any form of hierarchical structure. They view hierarchy within the context of a traditionally male-orientated culture. Because of this view, they may find it relevant to reject any form of organized religion which perpetuates this structuring process. Most non-political lesbians who reject religion usually formulate their reasons along with the growing humanistic trend which is part and parcel of the advanced technological society.

There also exists within some areas of lesbian social organization (both political and non-political), a revival of matriarchal religion and spiritualism as well as a growing interest in the occult and astrology from a woman's perspective. Various types of groups have formed over the years to satisfy the need for spiritual fulfilment. However, these groups tend to be selective in membership and in beliefs.

### Lesbian Self-Definition

It is a major hypothesis of this thesis that a lesbian's self-identity and how she views her lesbianism in society ultimately affects how she organizes her life. In other words, a lesbian identity is organized and made meaningful in respective lesbian social organizations. Both concepts, identity and organization, relate not only to a lesbian's perception of herself, but also to the ways in which she desires to maintain and chooses to relate her self-perception to society in a group context.

Many (42%) of the non-political lesbians defined lesbianism as a sexual preference, while 29% of political lesbians did likewise. The

CHART 3.0LESBIAN SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

## Religion in Questionnaire Sample

Category	Total	Non-Political	Political
Church of England	(25) 12.4	(15) 20.5	(10) 7.8
Catholic	(14) 7.0	(10) 13.7	( 4) 3.1
Jewish	( 4) 2.0	( 2) 2.7	( 2) 1.6
Quaker	( 2) 1.0	( 1) 1.4	( 1) .8
Christian	( 8) 4.0	( 3) 4.1	( 5) 3.9
Buddhist	( 5) 2.5	( 1) 1.4	( 4) 3.1
Protestant	( 3) 1.5	( 2) 2.7	( 1) .8
Methodist	( 6) 3.0	( 3) 4.1	( 3) 2.3
Spiritualist	( 2) 1.0	( 2) 2.7	
NA	(132) 65.7	(34) 46.6	(98) 76.6
	<hr/> (201) 100 <hr/>	<hr/> (73) 100 <hr/>	<hr/> (128) 100 <hr/>

majority of political lesbians (53.9%) defined their lesbianism as a total way of life, while 28.8% of the non-political lesbians expressed this definition. (See Chart 4.0/<sup>and</sup>for the relationship between the type of lesbian and lesbian self-definition see Chart 4.1.)

The fact that political lesbians tend to see lesbianism as a total way of life, while non-political lesbians tend to see lesbianism as a sexual preference can be illustrated by looking at the responses which were given in the interview context.

Let us examine some of the answers to the question: "How would you define lesbianism?".

Some of the political lesbians answered:

Lesbianism is a total identity ...

I see it just in terms of my own experience, which is probably the best way to see it. I see it as women relating to other women, in every possible way, on every possible level and I think that the last thousands of years we've stopped off from relating to each other by a male dominated civilization ... I know lots of women and I relate to them in a way that I never related to anyone before ... To me being a lesbian is not just having sex with a woman. It's just my whole being in touch with other women ...

It's just me and how I live. It's just like a total way of life without men, um, well it's just every kind of new, sensitive, loving, beautiful way of loving which is part of me.

It's a way of life for women who are emotionally and sexually attracted to women.

As we can see from the responses, the political lesbians tend to see lesbianism as a way of life, a total commitment to women. Thus, they organize 'politically' around that total way of life.

On the other hand, non-political lesbians tended to define or view their lesbianism within the context of the 'sexual', that is as a sexual preference, or a sexual attraction to women. The following responses illustrate this tendency:

CHART 4.0

LESBIAN SELF DEFINITION

Question: How would you define lesbianism?

Responses	Total	Non-Political	Political
Total way of life	(90) 44.8	(21) 28.8	(69) 53.9
Sexual preference	(60) 29.9	(31) 42.5	(29) 22.7
Alternative way of life for women	(38) 18.9	(18) 24.7	(20) 15.6
Counter Identity	( 6) 3.0	( 1) 1.4	( 5) 3.9
NA	( 7) 3.5	( 2) 2.7	( 5) 3.9
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	(201) 100	( 73) 100	(128) 100
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>

CHART 4.1RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TYPE OF LESBIAN  
AND LESBIAN SELF DEFINITION

## Lesbian Definition

Count Row % Column % Total %	Total Way of Life	Sexual Preference	Alternative Way of Life	Counter Identity	Row Total
Political	69 56.1 76.7 35.6	29 23.6 48.3 14.9	20 16.3 52.6 10.3	5 4.1 83.3 2.6	123 63.4
Non-Political	21 29.6 23.3 10.8	31 43.7 51.7 16.0	18 25.4 47.4 9.3	1 1.4 16.7 .5	71 36.6
Column	90	60	38	6	194
TOTAL	46.4	30.9	19.6	3.1	100

Raw Chi Square: 15.62290

3 Degrees of Freedom

Significance = .0014

Missing observations: 7

I would say it was a woman who was sexually interested in women and active with women ...

Women who relate sexually and emotionally to other women ... I think it's a positive thing ... not because women don't get on with men. There's no choice in the matter, but it is an inherent commitment ...

You totally reject the heterosexual way of living. And you look upon your relationships as being with women ... You can become close friends with a man but the moment when there is sexual involvement you back off and you just associate with women ... There is no way in which you can see yourself as having a sexual relationship with a man. Whether you have in the past doesn't matter. You've decided you're a lesbian and a lesbian must totally commit herself to women.

I think it's very clear because I think that a lesbian feels towards another woman the way a man feels towards a woman or the way a woman or heterosexual people feel towards each other ... I mean as far as I'm concerned its completely (um), it takes over my whole life. Its basically everything that I am, everything that I feel towards women and I don't think that man hating has anything to do with it ... and neither is it just physical. Its really mental too ...

From the above we can see that whether a lesbian sees lesbianism as a total commitment or as a sexual preference, she usually defines her life as revolving around women. I have found that most lesbians do consider that lesbianism is related to the identity of women in some way, if only marginally. Let us look at some of the respondents' feelings regarding this matter.

Lesbians are women who have a sexual preference for other women. I'm not sure whether it's exclusive or whether it's just a matter of sexual preference. In other words, I'm not sure that you would define lesbianism excluding bisexuality or you talk in terms of putting exclusive preference on women in everyway.

A woman who loves other women, purely and simply that.

I once defined a lesbian as a woman whose meaningful relationships are with other women, which means a woman is going to be more important ... is going to occupy the same place in her life as a man would occupy in the life of a straight woman ...

In the above cases a lesbian identifies with women in some way. Ideas and definitions about lesbianism tend to go beyond a sexual preference (regardless of one's primary definition). Lesbianism involves an orientation towards women or an empathy with women. For example:

Lesbianism is an empathy with women ...

I used to think of lesbians as women who had sex with other women, but now I don't think that is so crucial. I think it's a question of being physical with women, but it's not the sex. I think it's more that I have a feeling of empathy with other women and putting them first and relating to them on a primary level, rather than on a secondary level ... Men are their primary relationships and I suppose that's the way I think of it now and that's not to downgrade the friendships that I do have with men because they are very important. I don't see it in purely sexual terms but it's the implication that goes with the sex ...

Apart from the fact that I respond to women, instead of men, I don't think I'm different from other women. My identity is linked up with other women ... It is perfectly possible for a woman to fall in love with another woman. She understands her feelings more. Men don't have any real comprehension of what a woman feels and how she responds ...

Lesbianism may not be seen as a total commitment for some lesbians, but it does involve one's orientation (social, emotional, psychological, or sexual) and it influences a lesbian's life (if only from an objective viewpoint). Some lesbians recounted to me how lesbianism was experienced in this way.

Lesbianism is a total way of life in the sense that it's like being born again. I mean that's how I felt. The trouble is though um, the old me didn't die completely. There's still lots of crap left over from the old life and so one's born again and literally that's how I feel now living with all these wonderful women. But I also got lots and lots of shit and conditioning from my old life which still hangs me up ...

Lesbianism colours your whole life, it has to. You're slightly cut off from society in general and you don't talk openly about it. I mean people come in and say, I mean the women at work mainly about their husbands, I mean they come in all red eyed and weeping saying the bastards left me and aint it awful, darling ... But you can't come in red-eyed and weeping and say my girl friend has played me up, so this is why I say up to a point you are cut off.

It's not a commitment or a way of life. It's just the way it is, like when I breathe, that's a lesbian breathing or like when I brush my teeth ... but it is a total way of life because I am a lesbian 24 hours a day even when I'm on the street, but I don't walk around and say, "Hey, look I'm a lesbian".

Some lesbians did not see lesbianism as a total way of life.

However, they felt that it did affect their lives in a unique way. In this context one lesbian said:

I don't see lesbianism as a total way of life, um, because of society's structures. Ideally I see lesbianism as separatism and yet I don't think it can be because every-time when you walk down the street you're interacting with men, unless you live totally out with 10 women in a commune and never see guys at all, that's the only way that I could see it as a total way of life ...

Another lesbians, relating lesbianism to her life as a teacher, said:

I see lesbianism as a total way of life only if you were a separatist. If I go into the classroom and I say I'm gay there is no context because it has nothing to do with my sexuality. For example, "Today, we're going to talk about indifference curves and by the way I'm a lesbian". To make it total, its very forced and it's impinging upon areas in your life in which it's not relevant. Like if I'm teaching certain subjects, I don't think that I could bring it up unless it was during break time. If someone asked me, "Are you married?". I'd say, "Well, actually, I'm gay". I would bring it up then.

For some lesbians, the lesbian way of life is a total way of life" to the same extent that heterosexuality is a "total way of life".

One lesbian said her experience was that:

Lesbianism is a total way of life parallel to heterosexuality, but obviously it does not have the same role play as heterosexuality.

Another older lesbian felt that lesbianism was total, but shared:

Of course, lesbianism is a total way of life but it's shared with heterosexuals. I mean let's face it. Our parents are heterosexuals. I'm certainly not one of those people who would like to see them off the face of the earth. How crazy can one get. I have as many heterosexual friends as I have lesbian and male homosexuals ... It's unreal the same way that if you're wholly with hets you can get hangups because there are certain things where we don't relate even in conversations. You take a lesbian in a hair dressers, for example, they're all yapping around about babies and food and uh cooking and



that kind of thing. I think we have far more intellect in a way, probably because some of us have suffered even if it was only the growing realization of what you are. I think we should mix, the more the better, while we can educate the hets as I flatter myself I have done. That's why I have a pretty easy life as far as being a lesbian is concerned because I just made them understand. There is no good trying to fight people. Persuasion that's the answer ... and understanding.

From the above, we can see that a lesbian's self definition and her ideas about herself and her own lesbianism affect how she organizes her life, whether it is political or non-political. My research reveals that there is a relationship between lesbian identity and lesbian social organization. For example, I have found that the more a lesbian sees her lesbianism as a total commitment, the more that she will actively organize around that commitment in a 'political' way. If her lesbianism is viewed as being within the sexual context only, and as a sexual preference, she will have a tendency to separate her private life (i.e., the sexual) from her public life (i.e., the social or political). In this way her lesbianism, in particular, like sexuality, in general, is made private. Therefore, a lesbian may not feel it necessary to make her life (i.e., lesbianism) 'political' or actively organize against social oppression.

#### Lesbianism and Women - "Woman before Lesbian Factor"

This study has consistently revealed that lesbians tend to see their lesbianism in some way connected with the experience of what it means to be a woman in society. Whether a lesbian sees herself as a woman who has a sexual preference for women, or as a woman who is totally committed to women, she is a woman and perceives of herself as such.

Seventy-five per cent of all of the lesbians in my survey<sup>1</sup> felt that their lesbian identity was closely linked up with or very much a part of their identity as a woman (see Chart 5). Furthermore, all of the lesbians that were interviewed in the course of the research related that this experience is true for them, if only in a limited way (i.e., at work).

I propose this finding which I term, the "woman before lesbian factor", as one of the major findings of this study. This finding is simply that a lesbian, whether she is political or non-political, perceives herself as a born lesbian or a self chosen lesbian, does relate herself, her identity, her experience in some way to the general experience of all women. One lesbian put it this way:

In order to be a lesbian, you have to be a woman first.

And one lesbian, who felt that her identity was as a woman, said:

I don't really have a lesbian identity. I have an identity with women in general. I'm not sure what a lesbian identity is. It all goes back to how you would define lesbianism and then by my definition, my actual definition, I don't know how I would fit in or that I would fit in or not. I would define myself in relationship to society and I see myself as deviant and I've stepped outside and all the bricks fall down and now I'm coming back to say, "You have to take me the way I am. I am [um] or the way I've chosen to be". You know I know many lesbians who suppose they are lesbians because of experiences they've had very early on. Oh, their fathers left their mother when they were born, or they were raped when they were 13 and they have been really messed about by society and they see themselves as predetermined. They are the way they are because they are. I accept this. But, in my case, I don't accept this. I take responsibility for it. I followed along and I was in no way damaged by my father. My father is a very beloved, gentle figure to me. I wasn't messed about sexually by good fortune and uh, I am capable of having or I was in the past capable of submerging myself sufficiently to have reasonable relationships with a couple of men. But, I have taken the responsibility to be

1.

1. Furthermore, 83% of the lesbians in the total sample expressed that they were either totally or primarily committed to women. The woman before lesbian factor reveals that being a woman is an important factor which relates to being a lesbian (see Chart 6.1).

CHART 5.0

LESBIAN IDENTITY AND WOMEN'S IDENTITY

Answers	Total	Political	Non-Political
N.A	(3) 1.5	(3) 2.3	00
Yes	(151) 75.1	(104) 81.3	(47) 64.4
No	(47) 23.4	( 21) 16.4	(26) 35.6
	<u>(201) 100</u>	<u>(73) 100</u>	<u>(128) 100</u>

Question:

"Do you see your lesbian identity as being very much  
a part of or closely linked up with your identity  
as a woman?"

as I am but I'm not sure how that relates to the lesbian identity and whether I have a lesbian identity. I have the sense of myself as a woman.

From the above statements, we can see that the fact of being a woman is important in some way for most lesbians. This finding dispels the general social myth that most lesbians want to be men.

Lesbians are women and are aware of being women. In whatever way they choose to organize their life (whether in terms of a particular identity, awareness, experience, or 'objective' social issue) varies from lesbian to lesbian as well as from lesbian social organization to lesbian social organization. However, I would propose that the "woman before lesbian factor" is an abiding reality or ever-present factor for the majority of lesbians.

#### Lesbianism and the Non-Subservience Factor

An important finding of this research is what I term the non-subservience factor. I propose that it is crucial in terms of this particular study and for an adequate understanding of lesbianism in society. Basically, it reveals that despite the various differences in identity, role and social organization, there is one constant factor which remains observable and which may apply to every lesbian in this study. This factor (which the researcher has observed or discussed (or both) consistently with many lesbians in this study) is that lesbians do not want to be subservient to a man (if only in a sexual situation), some men, or all men. Furthermore, lesbians desire to be independent of men in some way or other. This research points out that whether or not a lesbian has been married (23% were married), has had sexual attractions to men (73% had), or has had a sexual relationship with a man (67% had), she tends to be a woman who does not desire to be subjected to the sexual dominance of a man. Lesbianism does not necessitate general hostility

towards all men, however, it presents a direct challenge to a male society.

One lesbian, when asked what lesbianism meant to her and why she thought that she was a lesbian, stated:

I would say that it [lesbianism] was an empathy with women but [pause] mainly because it's a reaction against men, and society or male-defined society.

(B. "Why are you a lesbian?")

... looking back on it, probably, well [pause], no [pause] but probably I wouldn't be able to tell you, I mean I wouldn't have realized it at the time. But I would say that I didn't want to be subservient. I wanted to be my own self, my own independent self and I always got on better with women. And I should think what probably helped me along was not having any brothers. So I wasn't used to men. I know women better.

Lesbians have a desire for independence - emotional, sexual, economic, or all three types. One lesbian discussed the freedom that a lesbian may experience. She says:

I suspect we may be freer to make what we want to our lives economically independent of men. Yes, I mean we're presumably, most of us, have to look after ourselves financially. Therefore, we've got a certain amount of financial independence, as well as, a certain amount of emotional independence. Well, I think one is freer than a [pause] than the average straight woman is, presumably into the nuclear family bit [pause] I think that one can carve out one's own parameters, perimeters, or whatever the word is ...

And in another context she says:

We are very much against the assumptions of heterosexuality that exist in society, of being a wife and mother, of being financially dependent. [pause] We're certainly up against what all women are ... I think what it is is that a homosexual woman is um, um, nearer as it were to a person than as it were to a category. And so you can act as a person and God willing you're free to act as a person, true to your own person, with any luck, and that means it might strike some people as a bit odd. Because an awful lot of other persons in the world - male or female - are terribly tied. I think, I mean I'll go back to our discussion before. This freedom we have got a freedom, if we can take it of being true to ourselves as people and not in a sense to ourselves as women or not to ourselves as lesbians. I am like I am,

you know so to the extent that we are capable of being free we are going against all standard pictures of ourselves, as women or which is rather idealistic, but I think that's what it [lesbianism] could be and what in the good moments it is.

Another lesbian expressed that lesbianism implied for her that one is free from "the tedium of having to relate to men". She states:

I would say that any woman who is a lesbian is lucky up to a point in so far as she doesn't have to get it together with men. But, of course, in a society which regards men of primary importance to to [pause] um women, they take an opposing point of view. They [people in society] think poor things they haven't got any men to cope with.

The non-subservience factor exposes the varying degrees of social independence that a lesbian may experience in her relationships with men. I would contend that this factor emerges from the process in which sexuality and sex roles are presented in society. If a woman is confronted with the passive female role which demands her subservience to a man or men, she may choose to reject this secondary position in a relational context. (Of course, this does not deny that some heterosexual women choose to reject a secondary position within the relational context.) What this finding illustrates are the important structural problems, or objective social problems, which confront the lesbian as she emerges from society - a society which imposes upon her acceptable definitions for women and subsequent roles. Also, the desire not to be subservient exposes a lesbian's identification with the acceptable female role (objectively, in terms of society) and rejection of this respective role as unacceptable to her (on the subjective level). The correlation between the lesbian identity and the social process (subjective experience vis-à-vis objective reality) reveals itself in this context.

Lesbianism: Valid or Viable Way of Life for Women?

All lesbians in the study felt that the lesbianism is a valid or viable way of life for women in society. In fact, some lesbians (17.9%) felt that it could be a way of life for all women, while some lesbians (32.3%) viewed it as a valid way of life for most women, and 45.8% of the lesbians saw it as a valid way of life for some women (see Chart 6.0).

In the course of my research I met more political than non-political lesbians who thought that lesbianism could be a viable way of life for all women. One political lesbian who felt strongly about this attitude said:

One can only speak from personal experience ... Now I've spoken to lots of women about this. A lot of women are straight friends because I only came out 8 months ago and they all are intrigued and lots of them say, "Oh, no". But, lots of them relate to women, women are renowned for having women friends, but the patriarchy propaganda is effective. They still think that they need a prick up them and um, you know, there was one friend of mine who said that she had slept with about fifty or sixty men and she never had an orgasm. I pointed out to her, "Can you think of one man who has slept with sixty women and who has never had an orgasm?" And she still maintains that she likes men sexually ... but she is conditioned to believe this. I mean I think lesbianism is a way of life for all women ...

Later during the interview she talks about how things should change in terms of women's particular awareness. She says:

... It's a way of life for all women when they come to realize it and a lot of things. They have to be de-conditioned I mean, so it's not a way of life for all women. Lots of women feel really threatened by us and no one puts down some dykes like women, like my mother who is unbelievable and ghastly to me and makes me feel like an animal ... well it reflects so much on their own sexuality. They just can't handle it at all ... They live in a very straight community and again the whole alienation trip of what men have done to us, what have I done wrong ... Well I think my mother doesn't have a chance ...

In certain areas of the lesbian ghetto, this type of attitude (lesbianism is for all women) goes along with a particular ideology that

CHART 6.0

VALIDITY OF LESBIAN LIFE STYLE

Answers	Total	Non-Political	Political
N.A.	( 7) 3.5	(2) 2.7	( 5) 3.9
All Women	(36) 17.9	(2) 2.7	(34) 26.6
Most	(65) 32.3	(21) 28.8	(44) 34.4
Some	(92) 45.8	(48) 65.8	(44) 34.4
Few	( 1) .5	00	( 1) .8
None	00	00	00
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	(201) 100	(73) 100	(128) 100
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>

Question:

The lesbian life could be valid for: (Check one)

All Women

Most

Some

Few

None



CHART 6.1LESBIAN IDENTITY

Answers	Total	Non-Political	Political
N.A.	( 2) 1.0	000	( 2) 1.6
Total	(114) 56.7	(46) 63.0	(68) 53.1
Primary	(55) 27.4	(21) 28.8	(34) 26.6
Equal	(12) 6.0	( 2) 2.7	(10) 7.8
Other	(18) 9.0	( 4) 5.5	(14) 10.9
	<u>(201) 100</u>	<u>(73) 100</u>	<u>(128) 100</u>

Question: "How do you see yourself: (Check one)

- (a) As a woman who is totally committed to women and seeks their company for social, emotional psychological and sexual support;
- (b) As a woman who is primarily attracted to women for emotion, social, psychological support but sometimes seeks the company of men for the satisfaction of these needs;
- (c) As a woman who is equally attracted to both women and men and seeks emotional, sexual and psychological support from men and women 'equally';
- (d) Other (explain).

proposes that any woman can be a lesbian. In fact, a button which I observed and which was displayed on the lapel of a lesbian's jacket read: "Any woman can". Some lesbians believe that all women have the potential to be lesbians because they are women and, objectively oppressed by men. Other lesbians say that all women are lesbian but because of social conditioning, male power, pregnancy, the family ... they are unable to express their lesbianism.

However, one lesbian expressed her doubts about this belief:

Lesbianism is for every woman, but it can't be ...  
Straight women are not allowed to be themselves and they may realize the wholeness that lesbians have and I think you know they think it's very intriguing but its not for them ... It makes them think.

One lesbian felt that one can't really talk about lesbianism as being a valid or viable way of life for women because that idea implied a certain degree of choice. She felt that lesbianism was not a choice which could be open to all women. She expressed her feelings in this way:

Women should not be pressurized into thinking that it is not valid and that you have to get a man in the end ... but it's not a choice. You can't choose something as basic as a lesbianism or heterosexuality ...

Similarly, another lesbian denies an element of choice by saying:

... It's the way we are but here again it's almost like the colour question. All right there's black and there's white, yellow or red, but we all mix in and I think it should be the same way for lesbians, why not? ... of course its valid ...

Some lesbians felt that lesbianism is valid just by the very fact that one is a woman. For them, lesbianism means the only way:

... Well, I'm a woman in society and its the only way for me and therefore, it's valid. It has to be. Otherwise, I'm not real. I'm not living in a real world. For some women in society this goes back to "Are all women bisexual?". It's definitely very valid for some women, possibly for a lot more women than actually believe that it is. It's an expression of your being and an expression of the person that you are ... If lesbianism doesn't manifest itself in your behaviour then you're not being that person you are. And

if you hide behind heterosexuality or bisexuality then  
you're not totally expressing yourself ...

Another interesting characteristic which is revealed when we look at the relationship between the lesbian identity and women's identity is the affect a lesbian's identity has upon her commitment to women. I would contend that the "Women before lesbian factor" affects not only a lesbian's sense of self and her particular group commitment (lesbian social organization), but also her general commitment or sense of duty to all women.

In light of the above, it was interesting to see that of the total sample, 83% saw themselves as being either totally or primarily committed to women (see Chart 6.1). Along with this finding, 91% of the non-political lesbians expressed that commitment, while 79% of the political lesbians did likewise.

From what has been stated previously, it would seem that there would be a greater tendency of the political lesbians to see themselves as totally or primarily committed to women. Yet the results seem to prove otherwise. However, it must be noted that the reader must take into account the political lesbians who responded, "equal ..." (7.8%) and "other" (10.9%). These categories should be considered in order to understand the above seemingly contradictory result. In fact, if we look at the responses, we find that those political lesbians who responded "other" usually fit into the first two categories of commitment, but felt that they wanted to elaborate on their ideas. Those who responded "equal ..." (as I found out through interviews), considered themselves "lesbians" of a particular type. That is, these women saw themselves as bisexuals who were committed to women and who for various reasons (emotional, personal, social ...) identified with this particular "fringe" lesbian role. (I will discuss the bisexual role in the following chapter.)

### Lesbians and Women: A Difference with 'Deviant' Implications

As we have seen, a lesbian may perceive of her life style as a viable and valid way of life for all women, most women, etc., ... She may see herself as totally or primarily committed to women.

However, despite all of these awarenesses, a lesbian knows that her life is different or possibly deviant from other women in society. (It is interesting to note here that I have met some lesbians who knew that their lives were different from other women and who from quite early on defined themselves as lesbians. Yet, they did not perceive of it a deviant implication until they were much older. On the other hand, some lesbians refused to accept the deviant label at any point in time. This latter phenomenon is rare. I have observed it twice in the lives of two non-political lesbians.)

A lesbian life style and a lesbian identity implies a certain amount of negativity on the social level. It also implies various differences in one's relationship to the acceptable female role. At this time we should examine the social implications which arise within the lesbian context vis-à-vis women. Three aspects of lesbianism are important in an analysis of the relationship between lesbianism and women in society. They are: (1) the lesbian way of life as an unacceptable way of life for women; (2) the lesbian life style as objectively less restricted and "freer" than the majority of women, and (3) the lesbian identity as a "counter identity" for women. Let us examine each aspect closely.

Firstly, a lesbian life style is not the acceptable way of life for women. Because women are usually viewed as being "male defined" or defining themselves in terms of their relationships with men, lesbians as women are not acceptable. Objectively, a lesbian does not meet up to society's standards for a woman and resultantly, she does not fit into the above social categories or definitions. Therefore, she is deviant, as far

as society is concerned.

Some lesbians recounted their ideas on how society views them and their "lesbian practice". For example, the following excerpts illustrate how society views lesbianism (from lesbians' eyes):

They think all sorts of things ... perverts, abominable mutations ... We had an argument with a woman who told us that we were abominable mutations ... but I don't think that I can find anything perverse or deviant about women, they are beautiful whole people ...

... Society, zilch ... Society views us very badly. I think society doesn't realize that it's a threat and therefore, just thinks of it as sick and disgusting [pause] and unnatural. But it doesn't know the reason why and doesn't bother to think why it should be ...

Oh, it's just not on for them ...

I think it's one of the very much unacceptable ways of life for a woman. Almost, by definition a woman a lesbian classifies herself away from men. We're also different in that you are something different ... So men define you as a lesbian and so in fact, you define yourself as a lesbian and you define the way you live as a lesbian. Hopefully, you have as little influence from outside sources as possible. But as soon as the influences come from society you get it and its predominately rules by men anyway ...

I think that general society, uneducated society or the wider society thinks that lesbians are queer in some sense or very odd ... Maybe they think they're very off putting ... I presume I don't like society's way of life because I'm afraid to come right out and say without being pushed into it - "I'm a lesbian" and I wouldn't dream of introducing it into the conversation ...

Society takes a poor view of lesbianism ... out of ignorance. I think that they think that lesbians are poor, you know frustrated ... They're unnatural and they are women who can't get themselves a man, you know, that kind of thing. I'm not talking about sophisticated society, but if you were to take a whole spectrum of the 20 million adults that there are in England it's even worse than being single, I think which is at least excusable because poor thing at least she couldn't get a man ...

Yet, in this context one lesbian pointed out that she thinks society's views are changing. She says:

I suppose society's attitudes are getting much better. Whereas it used to be really taboo and revolting and all that stuff there's much more of it on tv, much more in the movies. Wherever you turn lesbianism is talked about so

it will be soon much more of an accepted thing ... we're right back in the middle of a big change because I think that definitely yes it used to be considered deviant and it probably will be for a long time by some, but much less so, and [pause] its changing rapidly in leaps and bounds ... what else is there to say ...

Secondly, a lesbian life style is objectively less restricted and freer in many ways than the experience of the majority of women whose main role in life is servicing men in the family through domestic labour, or in areas of employment which for women are usually in existence to service the needs of society in the secondary female role.<sup>2</sup> Some lesbians felt that they had more opportunity to be independent women. Other lesbians felt that they were more able to be "women-identified". And still others pointed out that lesbians were freer from the expected roles of women and furthermore, were not bound to the legalities of marriage or to the responsibilities and restrictions of family life.

In describing the openness of the lesbian life style, one lesbian told me:

... Well basically lesbianism is open and the rest of them are closed little boxes. I mean basically you can open a door I mean you can open a refrigerator door and stay in there. And you can walk into the refrigerator and stay there, yeah right, O.K. ... Basically the other ways of life are not particularly open. They're shut. Essentially I mean everything else is basically a stereotype that you can walk into. I mean as a way of life [and here she named a very closeted gay organization in her eyes] is like an old gay closety group. I mean they sit around and they drive trucks and they have their own type of refrigerator ...

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2. For an interesting discussion on the notion of women's work and how it has developed historically alongside of the notion of the home, the family and marriage, see Barker, Diana Leonard and Sheila Allen, (Eds.), Dependence and Exploitation in Work and Marriage (London and New York: Longman, 1976). Also, it is interesting to see how the volume develops the theme of the interdependence of work and home for women as well as the development of unique female work roles which are contingent upon this historical arena of productive and non-productive labour, respectively.

Another lesbian said:

... What is so great is that a lesbian is completely free to be an individual and a person, whereas a wife is completely or a woman who is married is completely identified with her children and her husband and is no longer in my opinion anyways an individual. Or rather, it's much harder for her to be a real individual and only if she has a really good job or whatever can she be an important person ... and that is why we are a real force to be reckoned with. I suppose because if we have opinions we put them across whereas other women just keep everything to themselves ... I don't really think married women take part in society in changing society and all that or anything along those lines ...

It is interesting to note that the above lesbian had been married and was, throughout the interview, comparing her life as a lesbian now with her life as a married woman nine years ago.

One lesbian points out the similarities and differences which exist between the lesbian life style and the married life style as she sees it:

Lesbianism is not really different in terms of how feelings would be. Obviously, it's not a commitment in terms of having a paper binding you together. And in that way you have a deeper commitment. But, I don't agree with marriage anyway. I think a relationship should be strong enough to last without all that legal stuff. I don't understand why people get married or why there is a need for marriage or people to get married at all ... In fact, even if lesbians marriages could be performed I wouldn't because I still hold to the thinking that a relationship should be strong enough to last, and further to sort of say "marriage isn't necessary".

I recall an interview with one lesbian who was also a mother and who had recently left her husband and the marriage context. She related her experiences and pointed out the limitations of the lesbian experience. Looking back on her life, she said:

I have a fairly good experience having been in both [marriage and lesbian relationship] ... I would say that the lesbian life probably gives one less wide experience socially. It is really quite confining too narrow circles. If one is grown up in this [lesbian circles or ghetto] and hasn't made contacts professionally, or I don't know either through one's childhood ... um My lover (who had also been married and a mother) and I noticed that having both come from very wide social circles and we both had very sociable husbands we noticed that um the same people see the same people each week and these people are not always very broad in their experiences

[Here she means lesbians in the ghetto] because women's career and opportunity for experience has always been narrower ... their financial position is less good ... uh so that it's very much more constricted ... I found personally too that this might be that I haven't found my love life culturally more restrictive ... there are fewer people to share lots of things with ...

Thus, for this particular lesbian, her life was restricted socially by her coming out. Later on she said that the limitations of the lesbian ghetto could be overcome on the individual level if one was willing to become totally a part of the ghetto and thus "free" oneself from any social definitions.

In this context (ghetto), a lesbian makes up her own acceptable definitions (legitimations) and gives them meaning for herself and for other lesbians.

Thirdly, the lesbian identity is recognised as a type of counter-identity for women. Throughout the course of my research, I observed this recognition by lesbians. The lesbian identity exists as contrary in society (i.e., what society expects of all women). It is contrary to the identity of a woman in a male-orientated and heterosexual society.

By the very fact that a lesbian is a lesbian implies that she assigns to herself lesbian "meanings" and "types" herself as a woman who is contrary, deviant and unacceptable, in terms of general social norms.

The lesbian identity, therefore, reveals a certain amount of negativity which takes place on the individual as well as the social level. Whether or not a lesbian personally feels unacceptable, deviant, etc., ... she will inevitably have to face, in some way, society's disapproval of her. When a lesbian interacts with people in 'general' social contexts (i.e., outside of the lesbian ghetto), she may be considered by others to be a normal heterosexual woman. Yet, she is not; she is a lesbian. Whether she is an out lesbian or a closeted lesbian, her initial experience of meeting others carries with it varying degrees of negativeness - from



slight awkwardness in herself and others, embarrassment, uneasiness, to outright rudeness, rejection or 'snubbing' from others. The potential for negative responses towards her tends to create an 'in built' awareness of her different, 'deviant' or unacceptable identity. This negative feature of the lesbian identity does not usually alter a lesbian's commitment to women. Rather, it reveals the "heterosexual bias" which exists in the social process or, more simply, in interactions in general social contexts.

Some lesbians felt that not only was the lesbian identity a counter-identity, but also that the identity of women was a "type" of counter-identity. These lesbians expressed that women's identity in society existed as a secondary or subordinate identity in relationship to men. Therefore, women's identity in their eyes was a counter-identity.

In this context, one lesbian describes her views on experiencing both lesbianism and womanhood as counter identities. She said:

... I suppose I see the lesbian as being one who stands up to all women who don't want to be defined by their roles ... I suppose that's why we are so persecuted - because men are very afraid of women who can live independently. I do see lesbianism as a counter identity ... but it's not a single identity for women ... there are as many types of identities as there are within any human grouping ... the identity I have is not a single identity it is a post women's movement identity ... We're trying to show that women exist.

This lesbian expressed her difficulties with looking at the existence of a women's identity:

Women are so oppressed that I can see only the beginnings of what I would call a woman's identity. Before the women's movement you couldn't even say what or who women were because they are so much tied up with and defined by men. It's not possible to say this is woman's identity.

Another lesbian said:

Well, I think women are second - class citizens ...

One lesbian felt that:

Women don't exist. Only men exist.

In a similar context, an older lesbian looking retrospectively on her life said:

... I think, or rather certainly if a woman doesn't exist to serve a man she doesn't exist. And to have a satisfactory existence on her own is unthinkable and threatening ... One of the very amusing things to me was that lesbians can move quite comfortably together in society and not be recognised because it is not recognised that women exist independently of men ...

### Lesbians and Social Change

Within the past century, our society has experienced a certain amount of changing opinion concerning sexuality and the position of women. Traditional ideas about a woman's role, and her status vis-à-vis a male orientated society have been questioned not only through the suffragette movement and more recently, the socialist movement and the women's movements, but also by women themselves.

Keeping in mind the above facts, as well as recalling the "woman before lesbian factor", let us consider the following as relevant to any contemporary understanding of lesbianism.

In light of this research and an understanding of the historical position of women, I would propose that society's ideas about lesbianism, lesbianism as a social phenomenon and ultimately, the lesbian experience itself is affected by any altering of the position of women in society.

This is illustrated if we analyse lesbians' attitudes towards change. In other words, does a lesbian's ideas about lesbianism, or her definition of lesbianism change over time? If the answer is yes, then why?

It is interesting to see that 82.1% of all of the lesbians in the questionnaire survey saw their ideas about lesbianism as changing. 87.5% of the political lesbians expressed this belief, while 72.6% of the non-political lesbians did likewise (see Chart 7.0).

CHART 7.0LESBIANISM AND CHANGE

Answer	Total	Non-Political	Political
Yes	(165) 82.1	(53) 72.6	(112) 87.5
No	( 36) 17.9	(20) 27.4	( 16) 12.5
	<u>(210) 100</u>	<u>(73) 100</u>	<u>(128) 100</u>

Question:

Have your ideas about lesbianism or your  
definition of a lesbian changed over time?

CHART 7.1REASONS FOR CHANGE

Answer	Total	Non-Political	Political
Personal Experience	(135) 67.2	(48) 65.8	(87) 68.0
Women's Movement	( 70) 34.8	( 4) 5.5	(65) 50.8
Group Therapy	( 7) 3.48	( 2) 2.7	( 5) 3.9
Gay Movement	(77) 38.31	(15) 20.5	(62) 48.4
Individual Therapy	(13) 6.46	( 5) 6.8	( 8) 6.3
Other	(21) 10.44	( 4) 4.0	(17) 17.0

Question:

If yes, why do you think this has happened?

As we can see, the percentage of lesbians who perceived change is smaller in the non-political sample than in the political sample. I attribute this finding to the fact that more non-political lesbians than political lesbians tend to see their lesbianism as a sexual preference or as a static or unchanging entity.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, in this way they reject the possibility of change. However, the majority (72.6%) of non-political lesbians did experience change. I would suggest that one of the reasons for this finding is that non-political lesbians with their recognition of a close relationship to women's identity (81%), do associate themselves in some way to a changing definition of women and thus to themselves as women.

From Chart 7.1, we see that personal experience accounts for the greatest percentage of change in the total sample (67.2%), as well as for the particular groups - non-political (65.8%) and political (68.0%).

I would propose that current changing ideas about lesbianism as well as women's role in society have affected the lesbian experience. For a lesbian, media representations, educational factors, and the emergence of various social movements present new images of women. A lesbian's experience of discovering her identity, living out particular roles, and learning specific behavioural responses in a group context, vis-à-vis a rapidly changing society, affect her on the subjective level.

From the Chart (7.1) we see that the women's movement and the gay movement have contributed to a changing definition of lesbianism for 34.8% and 38.3% of the total sample, respectively.

Change effected in the above manner tends to be experienced more

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3. This idea that lesbianism is a fixed or static entity corresponds to society's beliefs about sexuality in general (i.e., sex and sexual behaviour are pre-fixed from birth). However, if we accept sexuality as a social construction, we question this notion of sexuality in society.

by political lesbians than non-political ones. This tendency reveals the political lesbian's propensity to organize within well-defined political contexts or structured organizations which exist for that very purpose.

An interesting finding is the tendency for non-political lesbians to experience change more through the gay movement than the women's movement. (20.5% and 5.5%) There are observable explanations for this tendency.

As we saw earlier, non-political lesbians see themselves as being defined within a predominately "sexual" context (i.e., lesbianism is a sexual preference). Therefore, for them any obvious conflict or personal feeling of oppression with regards to their lesbianism is usually experienced on that level - the sexual. Sexual oppression in society has developed in the form of the oppression of homosexuals and women. However, sexual oppression is experienced in many different ways by lesbians. In other words, one lesbian may feel more oppressed as a homosexual than a woman, while another lesbian may feel more oppressed as a woman than as a homosexual.

In the course of my research, I have observed more non-political lesbians than political ones who felt oppressed as homosexuals or 'gay women'. (It is interesting to note here that a political lesbian's analysis of sexual oppression tends to be rooted in the whole structure of society - i.e., patriarchy, capitalism, or both. Therefore, sexual oppression is endemic in the system and oftentimes there is no need to make a distinction between homosexual oppression and women's oppression. For them both forms of oppression are symptomatic of a sick society.)

For non-political lesbians this oppression is evident in society's prohibition of their sexual behaviour and ultimate social prejudice against them. They are labelled deviant. Some non-political lesbians take this

label for themselves and as a result, suffer guilt.

Many non-political lesbians are "fearful" of organizing against the oppression of women in the women's movement. Despite the fact that many of them viewed their oppression in this manner, they were afraid. These lesbians believed that the women's movement was "off-putting" because its members were "man-haters" or "too aggressive". They were intimidated. One older lesbian who emerged from non-political to political lesbianism (in the gay movement) said:

... There is a big difference from being a man-hater which a lot of these young women's libbers are and a lesbian ... um ... obviously the women's movement is a wonderful thing and it's about time it happened ... I am a little afraid of the aggression that is coming with it. This, I don't like because this is not going to help the movement at all. In fact, it is going to put people's backs up against us. But I don't think as far as women's movement is concerned that it matters a damn whether we're lesbian or not ...

On the one hand, some lesbians (usually non-political) believe that their homosexuality should be accepted as another sex role (i.e., a "third sex"). On the other hand, some political lesbians view lesbianism as a "catalyst" for social change. In this way, it becomes a threatening element in the process of structuring social relationships. Words like 'gay' or 'homosexual', are used more often in specific lesbian contexts than in others. For some lesbians, the word 'gay' is looked upon in delight because it expresses a new, enlightened meaning for homosexual. Other lesbians view it with disdain because, for them, it is oppressive (i.e., heterosexual or male-defined).

For the most lesbians, the one word, which appears to be very threatening to society in its singularity, is lesbian. Thus, some use it; others don't. Its usage varies according to the level, extent and direction of a lesbian's fear vis-à-vis society.

### Development of the Lesbian Experience

We have seen how various social and psychological factors have affected a change in a lesbian's perception of her lesbianism. Let us now examine how the lesbian experience developed within this changing context. How do lesbians categorize their first lesbian experience? What was the initial experience of lesbianism? In what particular social context was it set? (See Chart 8.0)

From the above, we see that most lesbians (78.6%) categorize their initial lesbian experience as being independent of any social movement. In other words, entry into lesbianism did not tend to occur from participation in a particular social movement (which was related in some way to lesbianism). Only 14.1% of political lesbians had their first lesbian experience through the women's movement. None of the non-political lesbians had. 7.8% of the political and 5.5% of the non-political lesbians had their initial experience in the gay movement.

Entry into lesbianism did not necessarily emerge from participation in a social movement. Rather, participation in relevant social movements generally took place after entry into the lesbian experience.

What are the important moments in a lesbian's life? For the purpose of developing a sense of chronology, it is useful to examine three moments in time. They are: the age of attraction (when a lesbian remembers her first attraction to a woman), the age of the first lesbian experience and the age of self-definition (when a lesbian actually defined herself as a lesbian). See Charts 8.1, 8.2, 8.3.

Most lesbians in the survey were attracted to women at 11 - 13, had their first lesbian experience at 21 - 22, and defined themselves as lesbians at 22 - 23.

These ages prove to be interesting because (as I have consistently observed from interviews) a lesbian's initial sexual involvement with a



CHART 8.0CATEGORY OF FIRST LESBIAN EXPERIENCE

Category Label	Total	Non-Political	Political
N.A.	( 8) 4.0	( 5) 6.8	( 3) 2.3
Women's Movement	(18) 9.0	000	(18) 14.1
Gay Movement	(14) 7.0	( 4) 5.5	(10) 7.8
Independent	(158) 78.6	(62) 84.9	(96) 75.0
Other	( 3) 1.5	( 2) 2.7	( 1) .8
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	(201) 100	(73) 100	(128) 100
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>

Question:

Was your first lesbian experience an independent experience, came from involvement in the gay movement, in the women's movement, other?

CHART 8.1AGE OF ATTRACTION

<u>Ages</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Non-Political</u>	<u>Political</u>
1 - 5	(27) 13.4	(13) 17.8	(14) 10.9
6 - 12	(65) 32.3	(24) 32.9	(41) 32.0
13 - 20	(82) 40.8	(28) 38.4	(54) 42.2
21 - 26	(15) 7.5	( 5) 6.8	(10) 7.8
27 - 45	( 8) 4.0	( 1) 1.4	( 7) 5.5
N.A.	( 4) 2.0	( 2) 2.7	( 2) 1.6
	<hr/> (201) 100	<hr/> (73) 100	<hr/> (128) 100
MEAN	13.066	11.944	13.609
MEDIAN	12.810	12.250	13.00
STANDARD DEVIATION	6.712	6.814	6.597

Question:

At what age did you first know yourself  
to be attracted to women?

CHART 8.2AGE OF FIRST LESBIAN EXPERIENCE

Ages	Total	Non-Political	Political
7 - 16	(35) 17.4	(11) 15.1	(24) 18.8
17 - 22	(87) 43.3	(34) 46.6	(53) 41.4
23 - 29	(48) 23.9	(16) 21.9	(32) 25.0
30 - 37	(14) 7.0	( 2) 2.7	(12) 9.4
38 - 54	( 8) 4.0	( 7) 9.6	( 1) .8
N.A.	( 9) 4.5	( 3) 4.1	( 6) 4.7
	<hr/> (201) 100	<hr/> (73) 100	<hr/> (128) 100
MEAN	21.776	22.586	21.311
MEDIAN	20.400	20.00	20.60
STANDARD DEVIATION	7.020	8.426	6.058

Question:

At what age did you have your first lesbian experience, that is, when did you first have a sexual experience with a woman?

CHART 8.3AGE WHEN DEFINED SELF AS LESBIAN

<u>Ages</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Non-Political</u>	<u>Political</u>
2 - 16	(37) 18.4	(17) 23.3	(20) 15.6
17 - 22	(73) 36.3	(24) 32.9	(49) 38.3
23 - 29	(49) 24.4	(15) 20.5	(34) 26.6
30 - 39	(22) 10.9	( 8) 11.0	(14) 10.9
40 - 54	( 9) 4.5	( 6) 8.2	( 3) 2.3
N.A.	(11) 5.5	(3 ) 4.1	( 8) 6.3
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	(201) 100	(73) 100	(128) 100
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
MEAN	22.579	23.00	22.33
MEDIAN	21.50	21.00	21.600
STANDARD DEVIATION	7.688	9.108	6.754

Question:

At what age did you define yourself as a lesbian?

woman does tend to make a lasting impact upon her sexual identity. For some time<sup>4</sup> (since 11 - 13) most lesbians felt attracted to other women. Yet, for various reasons - emotional, personal, social, psychological, they did not act upon their attraction towards women.

Furthermore, it was only after the explicit sexual encounter with another woman that most lesbians defined themselves as lesbians. The isolated, yet vivid sexual experience, oftentimes, brings with it a lifetime of similar intimacy with women. As we have seen, this intimacy may extend beyond the boundaries of the purely sexual into the realms of the social and 'political'. Yet, for some women, complex motives and social factors come into play and ultimately suppress any potential for full participation in the lesbian experience (i.e., fear, family pressures, a marriage, a pregnancy, a job, etc.).

The first lesbian experience is very important for most lesbians. Usually it propels a lesbian into a life-long commitment to lesbianism. The lesbian self identity may emerge long after the first sexual experience. However, I propose that this initial experience has definite affects upon a lesbian's identity. A 'lesbian' before she takes upon herself a lesbian identity may get married, relate to men sexually, and be adverse to any further relationships to women. However, a lesbian encounter may affect her in some way. It may facilitate on the subjective

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4. The average age of the total sample is 30. Therefore, most of the lesbians in the sample have been attracted to other women for approximately 19 to 17 years. Yet, in the majority of cases, lesbians did not express this attraction until they were 21 or 22. This points out that most of the lesbians were actively lesbian for 11-12 years, while being attracted to women or lesbian orientated for 19-17 years of their life span - more than half of their present life time. However, they did not express their lesbianism in a sexual context for a period of 10 - 12 years. This period tended to be the adolescent period for a lesbian and it was a time which is characterized by heightened social pressure to conform to the acceptable female role - to go out on dates with men, etc. In this context, we see the effect of social expectations upon a lesbian and the effect of socialization vis-à-vis the female role.

level the transformation of identity from an acceptable women to an unacceptable one, or from a 'normal' identity to a 'deviant' one.

One lesbian who had married, expressed how she had developed a sense of awareness about herself. She did not have any sexual experience with a woman until the 12th year of her marriage (she was married for 13 years). However, this initial sexual experience with a woman brought with it a set of responses which culminated in her lesbian self-definition. She says:

In order to express some sort of sexual preference for women I had to first develop a tremendous sense of self awareness that I in fact, existed in my own right, that I had integrity, that I had a right to exist in an affirmative way and that the things society told me about myself, in fact were completely erroneous. So I had a tremendous sense of self awareness to do what I've done ... to break up a really good marriage with a terrific guy who I had more in common with than I shall ever have probably with a woman. But a sense of self awareness came first. Then out of that came lesbianism, but not in a group context, in an individual context ...

It is interesting to see how some lesbians recall this important, initial experience. One older lesbian recounted that in retrospect for her it was quite humorous:

It's a very funny one. I was about 14 and I was seduced by my governess. She was beautiful. She was married to a French doctor. It happened after she left me. Of course, I was at school at the time. She went over to Paris to live but she came over here to see her folks and um, it was suggested that it might be a good idea if she and I had a couple of weeks holiday together for old time's sake, and we did. As I said she seduced me and of course, she got very frightened and she said she would never do it again. She sort of begged and pleaded with me and cried you know, not to tell my mother. Well I would never tell my mother ... but anyways that's how it was ...

It was a very 'natural' experience for another lesbian.

The person I started to have an affair with was someone that I had [pause] that seemed to be perfectly average sort of person. Not the sort of thing that there was anything sordid about it ... and previously I thought these things were sordid and maybe nasty. But this woman was particularly the opposite and just a normal sort of person she didn't look particularly butch or

anything like that and uh ... it all seemed very nice, it was nice and all very natural ...

One lesbian found it difficult to relate to her initial experience because it was alien to her at that time. She said:

I definitely knew I was a lesbian. Well, when I first had scenes with this woman, this \_\_\_\_\_, which seems a long time ago. I kind of knew then. I kind of knew it but I could not bring myself to say it um and because I am a very out of doors person and very handy person around the house I mean I used to do all these sorts of things for my mother ... when I met \_\_\_\_\_ she was a kind of femme, dolly bird type which she changed. I mean I changed too I guess it must of been certain role playing. I think even though say it wasn't as heavy say as like the really butch, the really femme, we weren't on that trip but also because I really did not understand the whole sort of oppression bit. I did not relate to the oppression of blacks, Jews, whatever ... You know, women's oppression. During the whole period of say 2½ years the changes were incredible and I believe differently now.

An older lesbian who 'came out' at 46 spoke about the "ambivalence" which characterized her first experience. She said:

It was dirty, twisted, a ghastly thing, I thought. I've done an experience that I couldn't tell anyone about and yet it felt so good and the emotions were so marvellous ... But it was a hell of a muddle and I really thought it was just a one off. I had fallen very much in love and been loved tremendously by a woman and that was it.

### Lesbians and Social Movements

As I pointed out earlier, society's ideas on and attitudes towards sexuality have been challenged by the emergence of the gay movement and the women's movement. Furthermore, I would contend that these movements have also challenged lesbians' definitions of themselves. In the following section, I will examine the involvement of lesbians within particular social movements. Also, I will point out the various movement 'specific' roles which have developed vis-à-vis lesbian political social organization.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, I will be more concerned with emphasizing the

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5. A more detailed analysis of lesbian roles will follow in Chapter 8, "Lesbian Social Organization and Social Roles: The Interactional Framework in the Ghetto".

sociology of political lesbianism than non-political lesbianism. However, we recall that non-political lesbians are not immuned to political consciousness (if only on the personal level) and are aware of and may lend ideological support to existing social movements (if they choose not to participate in them).

The research has examined two specific social movements and their relationship to lesbian roles, identity and social organization. They are: the gay movement and the women's movement. In this context, it must be pointed out, that other social movements have had effects upon some lesbians in my survey (organized socialist movement with gay caucus, transexual movement, new Christian movement, health movement, youth movement, peace movement, etc.). However, I have focused mainly upon the gay movement and the women's movement.

As a social movement develops it takes in the character of a society. It acquires organization and form, a body of customs and traditions, established leadership, an enduring division of labour social rules and social values, in short, a culture, a social organization and a new scheme of life.<sup>6</sup>

Blumer in the above text describes the characteristics of a social movement. These elements exist within the gay movement and the women's movement.

Within the last decade some individuals<sup>7</sup> in society call for the identification of and recognition of a lesbian movement as a distinct social movement. In light of what I have observed over the past 4 years, I would suggest that the special characteristics of lesbian social organization are evidenced more in terms of an amorphous pressure group (i.e., a

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6. Hubert Blumer, "Social Movements" in Studies in Social Movements: A Social Psychological Perspective (Editor, Barry McLaughlin, New York: Free Press, 1969).

7. Cf. for example, Jill Johnston, Lesbian Nation (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973) for a discussion of lesbianism as a social movement.



general social movement) than as a well defined, specific social movement.<sup>8</sup> Further, I would contend that the social emergence of lesbians as a pressure group is affected by the growing participation of lesbians who are fighting homosexual oppression within the gay movement and women's oppression within the women's movement. Ironically, lesbians experienced oppression as lesbians within these specific social movements. This subsequent oppression effected, what I would term, 'lesbian solidarity' and more recently 'lesbian chauvinism'. Both of which reflect lesbianism as a general social movement. Let us examine each movement in relationship to the lesbian experience.

#### Lesbianism and the Gay Movement

One of the ways in which 'lesbian solidarity' developed was when lesbians encountered directly or indirectly oppression from gay men in the movement. Gay men's problems differed from their own as gay women. This illustrates that lesbians were coping with a dual oppression on the organizational level. They were women and they were gay. Problems tended to arise between gay men and gay women. For some lesbians, problems were insurmountable and they left. Others, who were willing to fight within the movement, remained. Today, the vestiges of this conflict are evidenced when lesbians, who were once active in gay liberation, recall their experiences. For some, it was a bitter one. For others, it was an ideological struggle.

The following are examples of some lesbians' experiences of the gay movement.

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8. For a more detailed analysis of Lesbianism as a general social movement and as emerging from specific social movements, see Chapter 5, "Key Research Concepts, Lesbian Identity, Lesbian Roles, Lesbian Experience and Lesbian Social Organization" where I distinguish between the various forms of lesbian social organization.

One lesbian recalled:

I really don't have any more to do with the gay movement because it is so totally dominated by men, and it's so ----- male, I mean they are such a load of wankers that I just can't have anything to do with them.

Another lesbian said:

... As far as I am concerned the gay movement can go to hell in a rowboat with all the faggots in it. You see because I don't like gay men. Essentially they're a pure form of misogynist more than a straight man. I'm sort of not interested in the gay movement. The women in it should be out of it ... The gay movement has nothing in it for women. I mean the gay movement is built up from scraps of feminist theory that have been lifted out of the women's movement.

An older lesbian who had experience in an gay group said:

... The gay movement is largely males. I do think to be fair to the men [pause] I don't know I get conflicting reports. Some say that gay men are very chauvinistic and at the same time you get gay men saying very desperately, "We need more women". I think there aren't many women in the gay movement. I think this is because women are not very much joiners ... Another problem why lesbians get so fed up with the gay movement is that there's so much of the gay male and I mean gay male in it. It is concerned with don'ts, let's not have police in the cottages. It's so the whole thing is concerned with sexual freedom. Gay women go along and say, "The hell with it". They don't understand cottaging. Anyways, they haven't got much patience with chaps who got 3 different men every night and end up having to go to the V.D. clinic because gay men are so obsessed with sex. Or they appear to be um ... Gay women say, "why should we bother to go and lend our weight? What has this got to do with us? We have great problems as women than helping a lot of men get free sex in the cottages ..."

One lesbian who was initially involved in the gay movement and is presently in the women's movement, said:

I think the gay movement has primarily to do with male homosexuality and I don't know how lesbians actually link up with the gay movement. I think lesbianism is much related to feminism and the women's movement. I don't know how it is related to the gay movement.

From the above statements, we see how some lesbians experience the gay movement as being male orientated.

However, there are lesbians who may recognize this orientation

but who actively involve themselves in this movement.

One lesbian who is presently active in the gay movement states how her experience has been a positive one:

... There are problems yes but I think in the gay movement you ameliorate the problem of men and relate to men differently than in the women's movement and you as, "what are the positive sides of relating to men? ... of gay men and gay women relating together ...?" Definitely in areas in which one can work. But I think it's important for women to maintain separate groups. I think it's sad when women join the gay movement and don't get involved in women's activities. They're always outnumbered by men whether at discos or meetings ...

Another lesbian who had been active in the gay movement felt that lesbianism should be a key issue in the movement because of the very fact that "it's still male dominated". Later on she told me that she actively organizes with gay men because she feels that through her encounters with gay men she will help to "challenge its male character".

It is interesting to see that 85.6% of the lesbians in the survey felt that lesbianism should be a key issue in the gay movement. Both groups - political lesbians (89.8%) and non-political lesbians (78.1%) saw lesbianism as important for this movement (see Chart 9.0).

One lesbian expressed her feeling with regards this issue:

It should be a key issue simply because it's about women and women have got to be a key issue before we really level out ... we have to make women the key issue in any movement ... One hears awful stories of [she named gay group] where men take it for granted that women are going to go back stage and make the coffee and all this business ... It seems trivial but it's every minute of your life ... Yes women have got to take much more of a part, they are not equal ...

### Lesbians and the Women's Movement

Many of the lesbians in the survey felt that lesbianism should be a key issue in the women's movement (65.2%). More political than non-political lesbians expressed this opinion (80.5% and 38.5% respectively). (See Chart 9.1)

CHART 9.0

LESBIANISM AS A KEY ISSUE IN GAY  
MOVEMENT

Answers	Total	Non-Political	Political
N.A.	(11) 5.5	( 4) 5.5	( 7) 5.5
Yes	(172) 85.6	(57) 78.1	(115)89.8
No	(18) 9.0	(12) 16.4	( 6) 4.7
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	(201) 100	(73) 100	(128) 100
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>

Question:                      Should lesbianism be a key issue in the gay  
   movement?

CHART 9.1

LESBIANISM AS A KEY ISSUE IN  
WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Answers	Total	Non-Political	Political
N.A.	( 7) 3.5	( 4) 5.5	( 3) 2.3
Yes	(131) 65.2	(28) 38.4	(103) 80.5
No	(63) 31.3	(41) 56.2	(22) 17.2
	_____	_____	_____
	(201) 100	(73) 100	(128) 100
	_____	_____	_____

Question:

Should lesbianism be a key issue in the  
women's movement?

During part of my research, I was interested in looking at the relationship between lesbianism and the women's movement, as well as in examining lesbians' views concerning the relationship between lesbianism and feminism (see Chart 9.2). 92% of all the lesbians saw feminism as either inseparable with or somewhat related to feminism. (85% of the non-political and 96% of the political.)

From the chart, we can see that considerably more political lesbians (64.8%) than non-political lesbians (20%) expressed that lesbianism and feminism are "inseparable".

One lesbian (political) when discussing her attitude about feminism said:

If feminism is a way of looking at women and relationships between women, then lesbianism is to open that door.

An older (50-year old) radical lesbian said:

Lesbianism and feminism are related 100%. I really think that lesbians are the vanguard of feminism because in the practical aspect of living feminism, the lesbian is not dependent upon men for sex or money. So she is already not necessarily competing but she is self-sufficient in those two very central areas ...

However, one lesbian (non-political) points out her reservation in relating the two:

They're not necessarily related but obviously they become related and perhaps we feel things more strongly than a heterosexual feminist but I don't know one way or other ... what about the man in her life, but that shouldn't be true either because feminism is pro men anyways and pro women. What I think we're trying to achieve is a more balanced knot of life for everybody because at this point men carry most of the responsibility - (let's say being the money earners and all that kind of stuff - working and running the world I'm sure an enormous amount of men would adore to share the responsibility with women ... It's so obvious inequalities exist that we live in a man's world and I mean any thinking person is going to see if the blinkers are taken away ... because blinkers make one think all women's libbers are man-haters ... the whole world is run from a male point of view ... yet all this doesn't have to relate to lesbianism. I was just reading something about Rita MacBrown who says a true feminist must be a lesbian it's the only way and so one ... don't feel you have to be a radical lesbian or whatever for changes to happen ...

CHART 9.2LESBIANISM AND FEMINISM

Category	Total	Non-Political	Political
No answer	( 1) .5	00	( 1) .8
a) Are totally contradictory	0	0	0
b) Are inseparable	(98) 48.8	(15) 20.5	(83) 64.8
c) Are somewhat	(89) 44.3	(48) 65.8	(41) 32.0
d) Do not relate	(13) 6.5	(10) 13.7	( 3) 2.3
	_____	_____	_____
	(201) 100	(73) 100	(128) 100
	_____	_____	_____

Question:

Lesbianism and feminism: (Check one)

- (a) Are totally contradictory
- (b) Are inseparable
- (c) Are somewhat related
- (d) Do not relate to one another

On the other hand, another lesbian (political) sees lesbian differently:

Lesbianism ... I mean it is feminism. More feminists should see lesbianism as the key ... one of the strengths. I think lesbians are women and feminists are women and that the sooner that women realise that it is possible to relate on every level then the better ...

Many lesbians are active in the women's movement. However, the manner in which they organize their particular lesbian ideology, roles, life-styles, varies from group to group within the movement. There are several types of lesbians who participate in the women's movement - women's movement lesbians, radical lesbians, or radical feminist lesbians, lesbian separatists, political lesbians, and other types. (See below)

In this study I use the term women's movement to describe a social movement which is composed of women who are concerned with women's issues in any way. (In the following chapter I will make a distinction between the women's movement and the women's liberation movement.)

Within the women's movement there is a spectrum of lesbian political activity which is somewhat definable and which operates as part of the 'politics' (active living out) of the women's movement. This spectrum is distinguished by analysing various roles which emerge from particular social groupings with specific group interests. For our research purposes, they are generally: women's movement lesbians, radical lesbians, or radical feminist lesbians, lesbian separatists, as well as marginal areas of activity which are usually distinguished by roles rather than by definite social groups. These later roles are 'political lesbians', 'bisexuals', and lesbian mothers.

In the following chapter I will discuss these roles, as well as other lesbian roles which emerge from the lesbian experience.



**PART III:**

**THE SOCIAL REALITY OF LESBIANISM**

**Chapter 8**

**Lesbian Social Organization and Social Roles:  
The Interactional Framework in the Ghetto**

## CHAPTER 8

### LESBIAN SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND SOCIAL ROLES: THE INTERACTIONAL FRAMEWORK IN THE GHETTO

#### The Interactional Framework and the Creation of the Contemporary Lesbian Ghetto

When we examined the context of lesbian social organization, we saw how lesbians tended to align their personal ideas, beliefs and identities etc. ... with a group which most reflected a meaningful interactional network. The major concern of this chapter is to make clear various social tensions in the ghetto, as well as to define the rules, roles and ideologies which generate and formalize the existence of the lesbian ghetto vis à vis society.

The creation of the lesbian ghetto is an ongoing process which is contingent upon the acting out of contemporary lesbian roles. This process affects every lesbian, whether she is aware of it or not. It has a history prior to any lesbian's entry into it and, furthermore, it will most likely change as she interacts in it, lives within it, and moves from it. The ghetto is her "base of operation", her link with society. The creation of the ghetto reflects the changing 'nature' of lesbianism in a lesbian's eyes, in society's eyes, and in the ghetto's eyes.

#### Lesbian 'Organizational' Roles

The development of the lesbian ghetto activates specific lesbian roles which are lived out and which, upon closer analysis, can be identified and differentiated. In light of our sociological perspective, we see that, on an individual level, roles build up a meaningful interactional network from which a lesbian emerges. (It is important to note here that, at this point in the thesis, we are concerned only with

'organizational roles' and not 'relational roles', which we spoke of earlier in our discussion of Lesbian Relationships.) In other words, it is through her particular role that a lesbian's social world becomes intelligible. Her role with its specific set of meanings, cues, behavioural expectations and temporal persistence, as well as fluidity, becomes structured and formalized within the ghetto. The ghetto is further defined through lesbian social organization (of a non-political or political type). The very existence of the lesbian ghetto calls forth group legitimations and commitments which are peculiar to society's expectations of the 'general' lesbian role and to the ghetto's expectations of a particular lesbian organizational role. Within the organizational setting of the lesbian ghetto, ten roles appear and are distinguishable to the watchful observer. These roles are: "straight-gay" lesbian, self-defined or self-governed lesbian, gay movement lesbian, women's movement lesbian, political lesbian, radical lesbian or radical feminist lesbian, lesbian separatist, bisexual, celibate lesbian and lesbian mothers.

The research findings point out that certain roles tend to be located within particular areas of lesbian social organization. For example, straight-gay lesbians and self-defined or self-governed lesbians, have a tendency to organize their lives around non-political social organization. Gay movement lesbians, political lesbians, women's movement lesbians, radical lesbians and separatists, direct their activities towards political social organization and represent, what I term, the spectrum of lesbian political activity. The remaining roles, bisexuals, celibates, and lesbian mothers, span across both areas of lesbian social organization. For lesbians committed to the other particular lesbians roles, they tend to have difficulties in accepting these three, somewhat marginal roles of the bisexual, celibate and mother. The presence of these marginal areas creates an anomalous situation. However, for the sociological observer,

the appearance of these three roles has interesting implications concerning a contemporary understanding of the phenomenon of lesbianism. The immediate implication for us is that a variety of roles do become active in the ghetto and are presented to the wider society as the 'lesbian experience'.

#### Organizational Roles: Social Process, Change and Status Passage

The choice of roles in the ghetto is both problematic and flexible: problematic not only because it involves a certain amount of discernment, but also because it necessitates specific strategies and tactics for the successful encompassment of the desired role and flexible because it demands role versatility in light of the changing 'nature' of the ghetto. The normative structure of the ghetto vis à vis the normative structure of society sets up a meaningful 'lesbian experience' for those who are aware of these structures. Lesbians invest a certain amount of energy in taking upon themselves various relevant roles. However, these roles do change in time, not only through individual choice, but also in specific organizational settings. In other words, roles do not exist or were not created in a 'vacuum'. As I implied earlier, they have a history. They appear, were created, emerge, and are performed within the interactional framework of the ghetto. Also, they have varying degrees of status within either area of lesbian social organization. These roles change as do the individual lesbians who play them.

Lesbian role-taking process represents a continual progression for the individual lesbian. Her role is not a static, social reality which is superimposed upon her by the fact that she is a lesbian (whether or not she believes that she has a choice in the matter). A lesbian actively chooses the role she is to play and accepts the status which it implies. Furthermore, in the ghetto she comes to realize that she is

not bound by some "sacred vow" to live out this role for the rest of her life. Rather, she has a choice in the matter of what particular role she acts out during the course of a lifetime. For example, I have met some lesbians who begin their lesbian experience in non-political social organization and within a few years, they are involved in political social organization. The opposite movement holds true as well.

Lesbian roles, therefore, have a chronological significance in a lesbian's lifetime and may also facilitate an understanding of who she is in her particular social context. The implication of the above is that a meaningful lesbian experience develops and involves a social process in which a particular lesbian role or, possibly, various lesbian roles are played out in the course of a lesbian's lifetime.

Membership within the ghetto indicates a variety of collective options which are open to a lesbian and which may ultimately effect a status passage. The process, the taking of a lesbian role, may be a continual transformation process which lends fluidity and continuity to a particular lesbian experience as well as stability to either form of lesbian social organization. The lesbian experience, therefore, becomes formalized and ordered. Implicitly, a lesbian attains status through her particular role-conformity and by her acceptance of organizational group standards. Her successful participation in lesbian social organization is measured by her expected performance in terms of her group's behavioural expectations, needs, and demands. Knowledge of the group's commitments along with its justifications (legitimations) for existence enables a lesbian to successfully encompass her role.

However, it is interesting to note that, at any point in time, due to various social psychological factors, a lesbian may organize her life in terms of another preferred rationale or lesbian ideology. She therefore, not only effects a passage from one lesbian group to another,

but also experiences a change in her status. This passage necessitates an adjustment of identity and role within the 'preferred' group structure as well as a re-alignment of her perception of her current group with her previous group and other groups within the ghetto.

The acquisition of lesbian roles in the ghetto involves a complex set of human interaction which illustrates the changing nature of the lesbian role. Alternative explanations of lesbian experiences, realities, justifications, ideologies, identities and roles, exist in the ghetto. Lesbians create these alternatives and present them to society as the contemporary lesbian experience.

Heterosexual women may pass through a series of roles and create new alternatives for all women - i.e., single women, career women, working mother, wife ... As we have seen, lesbians may also experience a certain amount of flux in the choice of their roles. However, unlike the heterosexual woman, the lesbian's primary social role is as a lesbian. It is socially unapproved and remains her organizing principle. Furthermore, it is likely to 'determine' her choice of particular organizational roles.

### The Creation of the Lesbian Ghetto and Non-Political Roles

#### The "Straight-Gay" or the "Straight-Lesbian" Role

Within the lesbian ghetto, the "straight-gay" role appears as meaningful to those lesbians who consciously or unconsciously cultivate stereotypical heterosexual roles into their lesbian life styles. For "straight-gays", therefore, the "straight" world is the primary indicator for the accumulation and appropriation of their particular lesbian roles. Heterosexual role play acts as their most meaningful model of lesbian role play and is translated in some way into their general interactional framework. As a result, "straight-gay" social relationships indicate the significance of the interplay between the masculine role and the feminine

role in this area of the ghetto. For the "straight-gays" the butch role (masculine) and the femme (feminine) role are well defined in "relational" and "organizational" contexts. These roles carry with them their particular symbolic meanings, as well as behavioural responses which serve to highlight the different social natures of each role. The imitation or 'aping' of heterosexual roles varies to a greater or lesser extent and is not only dependent upon an individual's choice, but also on the particular social context in which her role is acted out (i.e., in relational context or organizational context).

I have found that many "straight-gay" lesbians tend to accept society's definition of lesbianism as being "sick", "deficient", or possibly "evil". They may also go to great lengths to hide their lesbianism. For them, it is not a 'choice' but rather an 'inbuilt' sexual preference for women. The identity of the majority of "straight-lesbians" is that of 'born' lesbian. This "straight-gay" role eliminates a certain degree of choice on the individual level. A "straight-gay" does not question the fact that she is a lesbian (although she may question the fact that she is considered 'deviant' in society). Organizing politically around the existence of her lesbianism or lesbianism, in general, does not come into play in her life. She believes, as I implied earlier, that her sexual identity like all heterosexuals is fixed from birth and she performs her determined roles like most men and women, in terms of the masculine and feminine roles.

Perhaps because of her ideas on sexuality, along with the belief that her lesbianism makes her different, the "straight-lesbian" identifies herself solely in sexual terms. Society has always focused upon the sexual side of the lesbian role, although there is not any comparable focus on sex in the world of straight relationships and roles. In a real sense, not only does the straight lesbian imitate straight role play, but

also she reflects straight society's ideas and values concerning the nature of sexuality.

### "Self-Governed" or "Self-Defined" Lesbian Role

The self-governed or self-defined lesbian role like the straight lesbian role is distinguishable in non-political social organization. Unlike the straight lesbian role, however, the self-governed lesbian rejects the utility or necessity of imitating heterosexual roles. Whether she feels herself to be a 'born' lesbian or a self-chosen lesbian, she views herself as self-governed, self-defined, or independent in terms of how she lives her lesbian lifestyle. She carves out in her own life for herself what her lesbianism means for her. Perhaps this particular excerpt from Abbott and Love best explains her position in the ghetto:

Some lesbians in the straight world strive to appear to be asexual, non-descript, or even neuter. They do not want to look too feminine, which would put psychological restrictions on behaviour and attract sexual attention from men and they do not want to look too masculine, which seems equally unnatural. The point is, a Lesbian is not an excessively sexual creature, as she is expected to be. But, if she is indeed a total person, with sex an integrated part of her life, some may find this bizarre ...

Basically, the self-governed lesbian has a 'stake in the system' and does not want to accentuate her lesbianism in society, or further, to 'politicize' it in any social movement. She is not considered as a political activist, although she may feel that she knows the social cum political implications of her lesbianism. (This fact was revealed to me by some self-governed lesbians in the interview setting.) A self-governed lesbian does not believe that it is necessary to organize her life totally around the fact that she is a lesbian. Obviously, she realizes

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†. Sidney Abbott and Barbara Love, Sappho was a Right-on Woman (New York: Stein & Day, 1972), p. 11.



that her lesbianism does affect her life. Given that fact, she is most concerned with carrying on with it as 'normally' as possible. Some self-governed lesbians expressed to me that they considered themselves to be 'normal' lesbians because they went along with the mundane existence of their lives (i.e., a job, family, friends ...) like the average single heterosexual woman. Many of these lesbians were career orientated. Some lived with a lover, had multiple relationships, or lived alone. Their lesbianism was an integrated part of their lives and was meaningful for them.

These lesbians did not desire to upset the balance or "conformist nature" (as some said) of their lives by becoming political activists. As a result, they did not believe that it was necessary to come out totally to people about their lesbianism. However, there were varying degrees of outness among the self-governed lesbians. For them, lesbianism was a commitment to women, but not a total way of life. They led what any unknowing bystander would call seemingly, 'normal' lives.

#### Spectrum of Lesbian Political Activity: Rules and Roles (See Chart 10.0)

Within the area of lesbian political social organization, there appears to be the emergence of five distinct, yet related, activist roles. They are: Gay movement lesbian, women's movement lesbian, radical lesbian, political lesbian and lesbian separatist. Let us examine the subtle complexities of each role.

#### Gay Movement Lesbian Role

The gay movement lesbian role gained historical and political significance, as well as individual status, with the emergence of the gay liberation movement in the mid-1960's. One of the chief aims of gay liberation is to fight homosexual oppression in society. This oppression, members feel, is experienced by both gay men and women alike, and they

CHART 10.0SPECTRUM OF LESBIAN POLITICAL ACTIVITY

(n = 128)

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Gay Movement Lesbian	(22)	17.2
Women's Movement Lesbian	(29)	22.7
Radical Lesbian	(32)	25.0
Separatist	(11)	8.6
Political Lesbian	(14)	10.9
Other	(20)	15.6
<hr/>		
TOTAL	(128)	100.0
<hr/>		

rally together to combat oppression on all levels - educational, employment, legal, etc. ...

The gay woman takes upon herself a particular lesbian role in which her primary identification is as a gay, a homosexual who is socially oppressed and socially deviant. Oftentimes, she works together with other gays (men and women) to organize political pressure groups which challenge society's views about homosexuality.

The gay movement lesbian may believe that she is either a born lesbian or a self-chosen lesbian. However, regardless of her personal identity, she identifies herself as a gay woman. Because her primary social identification is as a gay woman, she defines herself as a political activist vis à vis society. The gay movement becomes for her the centre of her political activity. Participation in this role provides her with an atmosphere which is conducive to her coming out. From her contact with other gays in the movement, she acquires the necessary emotional and psychological, as well as social, tools which enable her to build up positive acceptable definitions of herself and her "gayness". As a result, she tends to be more 'out' than lesbians who are involved in non-political social organization. Her stake in the system varies according to the extent<sup>to</sup>/which she challenges society's attitudes towards homosexual equality, the perpetuation of the 'primacy of heterosexuality', the nuclear family, or sexuality. Furthermore, a gay movement lesbian may question whether or not any existing political or social system includes her. She may also concentrate her efforts on trying to change the existing normative structure which upholds only one acceptable lifestyle - the heterosexual's. The non-conformist nature of this role rejects a certain amount of adaptation to society and attempts to create a more accepting, or pluralist, conception of society. Gay movement lesbians attempt to effect a radical change in the value structure of society - in what is considered right and

and wrong, normal and abnormal, or acceptable and deviant.

### Women's Movement Lesbian Role

#### The Women's Movement and the Women's Liberation Movement

Before we discuss the social characteristics of this particular lesbian role, we should first understand an important distinction which is being made. For the purpose of clarity, I have chosen to make a distinction in my research between the women's movement and the women's liberation movement. In most people's eyes, both movements appear to be synonymous. The women's movement is the women's liberation movement and vice versa. This is evidenced by the misrepresentation of popular sociologists, psychologists and journalists whose arbitrary use of the term "women's libber" does indeed cloud certain important issues. A "women's libber" may be any one of a number of women on the social spectrum - from one who burns bras, to a wife who refuses to wash her husband's dishes, to a sexually aggressive female, to a 'husband swopper', to a 'trendy' bisexual, to a woman who smokes Virginia Slims, to a woman who has a 'male' profession (i.e., doctor), or to a woman who looks "dykey".

These representations have focused on the changing position of woman in society, but they do not make clear the subtle distinctions which exist and which are the operating principles in a social movement of women. My research over the past four years reveals that there are definite social distinctions between the women's movement and the women's liberation movement.

On the one hand, the former movement is an amorphous movement of women who are becoming more aware of their inferior, secondary, or unequal position as women and who, in turn, are developing a feminist consciousness. These feminists direct their activities towards reforming society's values about women. Furthermore, some of these women actively work in organized

pressure groups to effect governmental reform (i.e., contraception, abortion, equal opportunity, education, and sex discrimination). Their major emphasis is on 'reformist' tactics in that they are working to change or reform the existing system.

On the other hand, the latter movement has more observable social boundaries and members than the women's movement. (I would contend, in terms of my impressionistic account, that it probably includes fewer women.) These women, women's liberationists, are most concerned with the development of 'feminist politics' as opposed to 'reformist politics'. Unlike a pressure group, they actively seek to develop a liberation movement which exists apart and possibly contrary to organized social structures. As a result, this movement lends itself more to a revolutionary character than the women's movement and participates in developing (what it terms) the 'best feminist' analysis. Thus, within the women's liberation movement itself there emerge various sects which propose their own particular brand of 'the best feminism' as the ultimate solution. Although these groups have a variety of strategies and tactics, they uphold radical revolution as the major emphasis of the women's liberation movement.

Lesbians within both movements have found their places very recently over the past decade. Both movements have accommodated the lesbian role but, historically, it was a struggle for women to accept the 'deviant' into their movement. However, gradually, in recent years the lesbian role has achieved a high status, especially within the context of the women's liberation movement. Yet, even to the present day, the straight/lesbian split is evident in both movements.

#### Women's Movement Lesbian Role

This particular lesbian role emerges from the women's movement and lesbians who live out this role view their primary identification as

women (unlike their gay movement sisters). The women's movement lesbian is most concerned with equality - politically, socially, economically, for all women, including lesbians. She does not necessarily use her lesbianism as the primary base or modus operandi of her political organizing. Rather, she views the oppression of women and her secondary status to men as a social evil which must be challenged and rooted out of the existing structures. Participants in this role tend to express a self-chosen lesbian identity. This role calls into question a 'static nature' of sexuality and furthers more complex, diverse, and possibly less, deterministic views about sexuality. Some women's movement lesbians expressed to me that bisexuality should become the norm in society. In this way the polarity between the sexes would be reduced and the differences between the sexes minimized. Possibly, women would have a greater chance for equality on all social levels and (as some lesbians have related to me) "people could really exist". Like the gay movement lesbian role, this role challenges directly whether or not any existing political system includes the lesbian. However, objectively (if not subjectively), this role presents a more comprehensive challenge because it is most concerned with extending the existing value system to include women, as well as gays. The reformist, and potentially radical nature of the role directs its participants to 'come out'. However, there are varying degrees of 'outness' in terms of this role. Many women's movement lesbians have a 'stake in the system' (whether in terms of employment, family and friends). Yet, they may feel that their 'stake in the system' enables them to be better able than most lesbians to work from within to bring about social change for women. Some women's movement lesbians call themselves 'professional' lesbians because they orient their lives around building an acceptable image of a woman as a lesbian. Primarily, they want to show society that they can and will succeed in a man's world which is changing into a people's world.

### Radical Feminist Lesbian or Radical Lesbian Role

Within the women's liberation movement, the role of the radical lesbian or radical feminist lesbian achieved a certain degree of status. At first glance, the radical lesbian role appears as society's image of the 'typical dyke' - rebellious, dressed in male clothes, etc. ... She rejects society's image of women and actively recreates by her lifestyle an image of what she believes to be the new woman - independent (from men), self-defined (not male-defined), and women-identified (not male-identified). She may appear as a 'typical dyke' to society but the fact that she is a woman goes beyond society's definition and expectations of her. This irony is implicit in her role.

The radical lesbian believes that lesbianism is her ultimate 'political choice' as a woman. For her, society is divided into two classes, men and women. Because of this fact, all women must organize politically and autonomously from men and, therefore, develop a separate power base or 'politics' from men. Viewing herself as a revolutionary, she seeks to destroy a "patriarchial system" which oppresses all women - lesbian, straight, or bisexual. Her lesbianism is not only an integrated part of her life but, also, her only way of life. She attempts to create new alternatives for women in lifestyle, living situations, employment, culture, behaviour, and sexual politics. The radical lesbian is very concerned with helping other women to become aware of their revolutionary potential as women. Therefore, she tends to be consistently 'open' about her lesbianism in most social situations. However, for a variety of reasons some radical lesbians do remain closeted in certain contexts (the most common one is with family). Generally, radical lesbians have a 'minimal' stake in the system, if at all, and disclosure of their lesbianism does not present any immediate difficulties. Radical lesbians do not consider themselves deviant and actively work towards the goals of

the women's liberation movement in various group contexts. They may have casual social relationships with men, but they do not desire to have any sexual relationships with men. In their lives, they cultivate the image of a 'dyke' (in dress, appearance and behaviour) as a direct challenge to what society expects of all women (appearance-wise), and ultimately of a lesbian (in terms of their definition).

### Lesbian Separatist Role

At the core of the women's liberation movement, there exists a group of lesbians who desire to remove themselves totally from men. The separatist role brings with it a whole series of behavioural expectations in light of an individual lesbian's lifestyle. By the very fact that one is a social individual, one can neither exist in a vacuum, nor reject the existence of men. Separatists reflect the contradiction of living in a society which they term as being male-dominated, while orientating their lives totally towards women. Through the separatist role lesbians actively negate all relationships with men. Furthermore, they tend to find it difficult to relate to some women who relate to men. Therefore, they set up distinct social boundaries in terms of who they relate to and where these social relationships take place. The result is that the separatist role insulates itself from the 'male' society by developing positive alternative social relationships with other separatists. Some separatists expressed to me that the separatist role is not "as negative" as it appears to be.

Basically, separatists desire not to relate to men because their primary motivations are directed towards women. In this way they create a "women's culture" totally for women. For them, any relationship with a man, any man, would endanger this development and cause energy (possibly "negative energy") to be directed away from their primary source of energy



direction - women. For separatists, women are a priority - the priority, and the creation of a women's culture becomes their ultimate goal. In terms of the various layers of interaction within the ghetto, the separatist creates for herself along with other separatists a "ghetto within a ghetto". However, she believes that she is creating new alternatives for all women.

### 'Political' Lesbian Role

This particular lesbian role is characterized by those lesbians who actively participate in political lesbian social organization, but who do not necessarily uphold all of the beliefs, expectations, ideologies or structures which exist for members in other lesbian political groupings. As a result, their particular lesbian role tends to be more flexible, more fluid ... than other lesbian roles, by a close examination of political social organization. However, political lesbians tend to interact in definable areas of the ghetto and usually experience varying degrees of contact with lesbians involved in other roles. For a variety of reasons (personal, 'political', or social) they chose to be less defined by their espousal of a particular lesbian or feminist ideology than their other activities. Their role definitions stem from strong political beliefs or 'persuasions' which they may or may not relate to their lesbianism. In political social organization, political lesbians are the counterparts of the self-governed lesbians in non-political social organization. Political lesbians chose to define themselves and are 'mavericks' in the living out of their lesbianism. They are 'independent lesbians' who have a tendency to reject the lesbian label as an all-encompassing label in favour of a more personally desirous, or politically advantageous, label (i.e., revolutionary socialist, Marxist feminist, socialist feminist ...).

Therefore, political lesbians tend to be involved in other social movements, groups or organizations which take priority over and above their

participation in lesbian political activity. As a result, they are frequently criticized by other lesbians who are involved in lesbian 'politics' because they are "not taking their lesbianism seriously". For the political lesbian, however strong these criticisms may be, she continues to 'de-ghettoize' herself by participating in wider social movements. In this way, she creates what she believes is a fuller, more meaningful, 'political' life for not only herself, but also society at large.

Lesbian Social Organization: Marginal Areas of Activity  
and Roles on the "Fringe"

In both types of lesbian social organization, we can identify the emergence of three lesbian roles: the bisexual, the celibate, and the lesbian mother. Participation in these roles is distributed throughout all areas of the lesbian ghetto. I term the above roles as fringe roles, or marginal roles, because regardless of the degree to which one participates in lesbian relationships, or lesbian experiences, a lesbian, nonetheless, identifies and defines herself as being primarily bisexual, celibate, or a mother. Furthermore, these roles are marginal in terms of one's participation in, what I have previously termed, "the Lesbian Experience", the "social-gay identity".

Within the area of lesbian social interaction in the ghetto, the roles of the bisexual, as well as the celibate, may cause considerable confusion or misunderstanding for the 'committed lesbian'. The former does because for some lesbians a woman is (or rather should be) either heterosexual or homosexual, straight or gay. The latter role does because a woman (as society tells us) is a 'sexual' being and should engage in a certain amount of sexual relationships. Lesbian mothers have, oftentimes, held a low status within the context of the lesbian ghetto. Lesbian mothers, like all mothers, have obvious priorities -

their children. They may also have certain material disadvantages which are not shared with other lesbian roles. As a result, a lesbian mother's participation in any area of lesbian social organization may be limited by the very fact that she is a mother and not by the fact that she is a lesbian.

### The Bisexual Role

The bisexual woman exists as a threat to the straight woman and to the lesbian alike. Her very existence may bring out fears of heterosexuality in lesbians, as well as fear of lesbianism for straight women. The bisexual role appears in all areas of the lesbian ghetto and in all areas of lesbian social organization. I have heard some lesbians term women who act out this particular role as being "women in transition". One lesbian discussed her attitude towards bisexual women:

I don't think women are fucking other women when they are bisexual. I look on it as a transition period, a sort of stepping stone, but then they might step back - It's sort of a testing ground. They don't quite dare leap... Then I think that they are just as capable of stepping backwards, you know, if the water is too cold then of stepping across.

Some lesbians feel that this role is a "cop out" because "bisexuals still need men" and "define themselves in terms of men". Other lesbians say that it is the only way some women will experience other women sexually and, therefore, for that reason it is "a positive experience".

In general, for most bisexuals, their role is difficult to maintain in any area of the lesbian ghetto. Because of the threatening nature of her role, the bisexual must create her own means of emotional support within the ghetto. There she may find sympathetic lesbians (who at one time were themselves bisexuals) and other bisexuals. Outside of the ghetto she may find straight friends who are open to the questioning nature of her sexuality, and who realize her ambivalent status in the straight world.

The bisexual role is an enigmatic one. As we have seen, the bisexual woman must deal with a certain amount of negativeness and social approbation, both within the ghetto and without. Not only is she 'deviant' in the lesbian ghetto, but also she is deviant in a 'straight' society. In other words, her very presence creates a role which challenges behavioural expectations and approved sexuality in the ghetto for lesbians and in society (in terms of its image of traditional lesbian role). Although a bisexual woman is not willing to take upon herself the role of a lesbian-totally, she may receive varying degrees of emotional rewards which are attached to the lesbian role and which may follow from her relationships with women in a somewhat supportive context. However, because she rejects this label, she is, oftentimes, criticized for not being either completely "committed to women" or "totally lesbian" (depending upon how the criticizer perceives the bisexual status).

In a real sense, this role propels a woman into a 'state of limbo' - being neither here nor there, neither straight nor gay, or neither in society nor in the ghetto. Undoubtedly, it is a difficult role to maintain and demands personal struggle.

### The Celibate Role

The celibate role for the lesbian questions society's image of a lesbian as an excessively or explicitly 'sexual' woman. Because she is 'sexually unacceptable', or sexually 'deviant', a lesbian is focused upon as being primarily sexual. Within society, the lesbian is denied total personhood. "She is a lesbian", some say, or "Oh, she sleeps with women". Celibacy challenges this image of the lesbian. During the past four years, I have met some lesbians who were celibate. A lesbian who becomes celibate does so for a variety of reasons - loss of lover, fear of sexual involvement, illness, or personal choice. The last factor proved to be very interesting analytically. At one time, I discovered that some lesbians

who were celibate, met regularly to discuss the difficulties and emotional problems which, for them, were peculiar to celibacy. They explored the nature of a celibate lifestyle and the resultant complexities of taking this stance within the ghetto.

Celibate lesbians, like other celibates, are living examples that sex is not the 'essential' factor of social lives. All individuals are socialized to need sex. Furthermore, women's sexuality revolves around her biological, reproductive function. There exists a 'taken-for-granted' attitude that this function should operate in every woman's life. If a woman does not fulfil her 'natural' mother right to reproduce, she is seen as unnatural. In society's eyes, her image as a real woman becomes distorted. (Even if she does not reproduce, she should at least have this desire.)

In order to better understand the existence of the celibate role in the ghetto, we must recognize the above as dynamics which operate in and through lesbian celibacy. Two dynamics emerge and challenge society's assumptions about the lesbian role, in particular, and women's role, in general. Firstly, society expects the lesbian to be an excessively sexual being, as I stated previously. The celibate counters the all-encompassing sexual definition of a lesbian. Secondly, society assumes that a woman's role and purpose in life is to have children. The celibate, by denying sex altogether and further, sexual relationships with men, takes upon herself a 'deviant role'. She is unacceptable in light of society's expectations of not only her lesbian role, but also her role as a woman.

A lesbian's participation in the celibate role varies from lesbian to lesbian. This role may be permanent (for a lifetime), temporary (for a period in one's life), or never experienced by some. In this context, I recall the case of a 53 year old lesbian who felt herself to be lesbian since 14. However, for a variety of reasons, which she did not disclose

to me, she did not have any lesbian sexual relationships until she was 50. Her celibacy lasted 36 years!

The following is a poem, "Coming Out Celibate", written by a woman. It does not necessarily relate specifically to the celibate lesbian role, but it illustrates some of the feelings which are experienced by the celibate lesbian.

### Coming Out Celibate

like men  
so many women cannot imagine  
friendship  
creativity  
existence  
without sexuality

or what passes for sexuality  
so that when I say

I am celibate  
smiles of embarrassment appear  
and the subject is quickly changed  
I am awarded  
pity or contempt or simply bewilderment  
that I should not do  
and what's worse say I do not do  
sexual things with and to another person  
preferably of the other gender  
but anyway with someone for God's sake  
since it's  
abnormal-unnatural-undesirable- and especially immature  
not to be dependent on someone  
some of the time  
for sexual satisfaction:  
masturbation like celibacy  
must be kept undercover  
of course

I'm celibate from lack of opportunity surely:  
it couldn't be my very own consciously taken decision  
could it?

because sleeping alone  
like living alone  
is kinky  
isn't it?

especially if I like it that way -  
I just had to meet the right person  
don't I?

we must all be seen in  
couples  
families, even "broken families"  
collectives  
some sort of relationship

all our lives  
whether we like it or not

anything but as individuals being glad in our one-ness  
 CELIBACY IS MORE ABOUT AUTONOMY THAN SPECIFIC SEXUALITY  
 CELIBACY IS ABOUT CHOOSING ONE'S OWN

life style  
 friendships  
 ways of

working  
 doing  
 being

and putting them all together  
 at different times  
 in different ways

imagine an epidemic of AUTONOMOUS INDIVIDUALS  
 and you're on your way to  
 realising a few feminist fantasies

POEM BY ASTRA

### Lesbian Motherhood

Increasingly, more and more lesbians expressed to me their desire to have children. Unfortunately, society places grave restrictions upon those lesbians who not only have children and want to keep them, but also desire to mother a child ... (19% of all of the lesbians in the survey questionnaire (see Chart 10.1) desire to have children at some future time in their lives). Whether or not they want a child or children in the family context, a supportive household or on their own, depends upon a particular lesbian's attitude towards motherhood. As we will see, to be a lesbian mother carries with it its own problems and difficulties. Most lesbians become aware of this fact during the course of their lifetime if they are not aware of it when they initially take the lesbian role.

In our society, women who raise children on their own or without men challenge the normative concept of the nuclear family vis-à-vis the dual roles of wife and mother for women. In addition, the lesbian mother has to cope with her rejection of society's image of the 'real' mother, as well as with the fact that she is a lesbian.

Some lesbians discover that they are lesbians, as they say, "when

CHART 10.1

FUTURE MOTHERS

Question: "Do you ever want any children?"

	Total	Non-Political	Political
N.A.	(45) 22.4	(13) 17.8	(32) 25.0
Yes	(39) 19.4	(11) 15.1	(28) 21.9
No	(117) 58.2	(49) 67.1	(68) 53.1
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	(201) 100	(73) 100	(128) 100
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>



it is too late". As mothers, some live within well-established nuclear family units. (see Charts 10.2 and 10.3).

Lesbian mothers who have families and husbands either choose to continue their lives in that context or leave that supportive context. Ultimately, the latter choice may bring with it a court case with a legal battle. In this instance, the lesbian mother may or may not gain custody of her child or children. Obviously, her lesbianism may be used as evidence in the case and militates against her position as a suitable mother. It is a risk which some women who are lesbian mothers may or may not take.

Lesbians who desire children outside of the family context within the lesbian ghetto have to look for means of becoming pregnant. There are various methods which do prove useful. One method is AID (artificial insemination), a method by which a doctor gives sperm to the future lesbian mother. She may either have the doctor inject her with the sperm or she may store it for a friend or lover to do for her. In London there are four known cases of lesbians who became pregnant and mothers in this way. Another method is to have sex with a man or a "stud" (as lesbians call him in this context). One lesbian who did get pregnant in this way (after having intercourse once) explained to me that she knew the man and felt that she could "handle the experience". However, problems do arise for those lesbians who desire children and who are not able to get pregnant by either method. They may wish to carry on a relationship with a man with possible emotional complications for both parties. These lesbians who want to be future mothers may also become totally frustrated in terms of fulfilling a role or possibly a right (as some do believe) which is theirs as a woman. Her thwarted attempts may cause her to consider that she is being punished by society for being a lesbian and operating outside of acceptable social contexts

CHART 10.2

LESBIAN MOTHERS

Question: "Do you have any children?"

	Total	Non-Political	Political
N.A.	(5) 2.5	(2) 2.7	(3) 2.3
Yes	(27) 13.4	(11) 15.1	(16) 12.5
No	(169) 74.1	(60) 82.2	(109) 85.2
	<u>(201) 100</u>	<u>(73) 100</u>	<u>(128) 100</u>

CHART 10.3

NUMBER OF CHILDREN OF LESBIAN MOTHERS

Question: "How many children do you have?" Maximum number of children = 3

	Total	Non-Political	Political
1 Child	(12) 6.0	(5) 6.8	(7) 5.5
2 Children	(8) 4.0	(3) 4.1	(5) 3.9
3 Children	(7) 3.5	(3) 4.1	(4) 3.1
	<u>(27) 13.4</u>	<u>(11) 15.1</u>	<u>(16) 12.5</u>

which are instrumental for child-bearing and child-rearing.

The occurrence of lesbian motherhood spans across all areas of the lesbian ghetto. This role brings with it negative reactions not only from society at large, but also from the lesbian ghetto where children are considered by some lesbians to be a "burden", and "added responsibility", or an "unwanted challenge". "After all", as one lesbian said to me, "one of the reasons why I became a lesbian was because I did not want children". However, gradually, the lesbian mother role is achieving a certain amount of status in the lesbian ghetto. Lesbian mothers are meeting with each other to discuss their problems with this particular role. Several groups have been organized (in both areas of social organization) by lesbian mothers for lesbian mothers. These groups provide lesbian "mums" with an increasing amount of social support. In this atmosphere the role of lesbian mother becomes more defined and lesbian mothers become better equipped to cope with their roles.

#### A Lesbian Framework: Social Interaction and Attitudes

Previously we saw how various lesbian roles are created within a ghetto and how they help a lesbian to build up meaningful interactional frameworks. Now we will be looking at the general area, lesbian social interaction, in order to analyze the nature and context of social interaction within the ghetto, the negative ascription of the lesbian role, the varying degrees of "outness" vis-à-vis society's reaction to the lesbian role, lesbian's attitudes towards others and her responses to the lesbian gay and feminist media's representation of lesbian role.

## Lesbian Social Interaction

### The Nature of Social Interaction

37.8% of all the lesbians in the survey responded that they associated with other lesbians "some of the time", in their social lives. (See Chart 11.0) It is interesting to note that a large percentage (36.7%) of the political lesbians socialized with other lesbians "most of the time", while 21.1% did "all of the time". (The latter percentage probably reflects those political lesbians who make up the "ghetto within the ghetto".) These findings point out clearly the relationship between lesbian social interaction and lesbian social organization which establishes some varying levels of commitment to the lesbian role. Presumably, a lesbian who has taken a political stance finds it necessary to interact with other lesbians on a regular or somewhat consistent basis (57% do). This necessity for frequent social interaction among political groups in the ghetto is established as lesbians work out together a 'political front', in whatever form it may take. As I mentioned previously, in another context, the quest for lesbian solidarity runs high within lesbian political social organization. Continuous interaction builds up a complicated network of friendships, associations, and relationships. Those politically orientated lesbians (35.2%) who have less frequent contact than others in the ghetto, usually have a tendency to organize their lives around an interactional framework which may be mixed (men and women), women orientated (straight and lesbian), or both. However, for those lesbians their particular interactional framework tends to accommodate their peculiar lesbian ideology, role, or identity. (For example, a 'political lesbian' who is active in the socialist movement or the organized left.)

A large percentage of non-political lesbians (42.5%) socialized with lesbians "some of the time" in their lives, while 31.5% had little

to do with other lesbians. Here, we can see that many non-political lesbians do interact socially with other lesbians, but they do not tend to organize all or even most of their social relationships around their lesbianism. They may see lesbianism as a primary role. However, they do not organize their social lives totally, or even predominantly, around this respective role. When they were outside of the lesbian ghetto, many non-political lesbians, as I discovered during the course of my research, socialized with either family, friends from work and school, or old acquaintances.

#### The Social Context of the Lesbian Role

At this time, you may well ask yourself, "Where do lesbians interact with other lesbians?" A close analysis of Chart 11.1 reveals that lesbians meet with each other at lesbian bars, lesbians' clubs, lesbian meetings, mixed gay bars, mixed gay clubs, demonstrations which concern women or gays, and discos. (This last area does not appear on the chart. I discovered the existence of lesbian discos two months after the questionnaires were distributed and, therefore, I was unable to find out approximately how many lesbians do frequent discos.)

From a closer look at the Chart, we see that there appears to be a similar attendance at lesbian clubs, mixed bars, and mixed clubs for both non-political and political lesbians. Political lesbians frequent lesbians' bars more than non-political lesbians (40.6% as opposed to 27.4%). This fact is probably because within the ghetto some of these bars do tend to have more of a political emphasis than lesbian clubs. There exists a marked difference between the attendance of political lesbians at political meetings and demonstrations (women or gay orientated) and non-political lesbians at these areas in the ghetto. 61.7% political lesbians attended political meetings while 11.0% of the non-political did.

CHART 11.0

LESBIAN SOCIAL INTERACTION: HOW OFTEN?

Question: "How often do you associate with other lesbians?"

	TOTAL	NON-POLITICAL	POLITICAL
All of the time	(32) 15.9	(5) 6.8	(27) 21.1
Most of the time	(61) 30.3	(14) 19.2	(47) 36.7
Some of the time	(76) 37.8	(31) 42.5	(45) 35.2
Hardly at all	(30) 14.9	(23) 31.5	(7) 5.5
N.A.	( 2) 1.0	-	(2) 1.6
	<u>(201) 100</u>	<u>(73) 100</u>	<u>(128) 100</u>

CHART 11.1

LESBIAN SOCIAL INTERACTION: WHERE?

Question: "Where do you associate with other lesbians?"

	Total	Non-Political	Political
<b>Lesbian Bars</b>			
A Tick	(72) 35.8	(20) 27.4	(52) 40.6
N.A.	(129) 64.2	(53) 72.6	(76) 59.4
	<hr/> (201) 100	<hr/> (73) 100	<hr/> (128) 100
<b>Lesbian Political Meetings</b>			
A Tick	(87) 43.3	(8) 11.0	(79) 61.7
N.A.	(114) 56.7	(65) 89.0	(49) 38.3
	<hr/> (201) 100	<hr/> (73) 100	<hr/> (128) 100
<b>Lesbian Clubs</b>			
A Tick	(85) 42.3	(32) 43.8	(53) 41.4
N.A.	(116) 57.7	(41) 56.2	(75) 58.6
	<hr/> (201) 100	<hr/> (73) 100	<hr/> (128) 100
<b>Mixed Gay Bars</b>			
A Tick	(69) 34.3	(25) 34.2	(44) 34.4
N.A.	(132) 65.7	(48) 65.8	(84) 65.6
	<hr/> (201) 100	<hr/> (73) 100	<hr/> (128) 100
<b>Mixed Gay Clubs</b>			
A Tick	(96) 47.8	(33) 45.2	(63) 49.2
N.A.	(105) 52.2	(40) 54.8	(65) 50.8
	<hr/> (201) 100	<hr/> (73) 100	<hr/> (128) 100
<b>Demonstrations (Women)</b>			
A Tick	(102) 50.7	(13) 17.8	(89) 69.5
N.A.	(99) 49.3	(60) 82.2	(39) 30.5
	<hr/> (201) 100	<hr/> (73) 100	<hr/> (128) 100
<b>Demonstrations (Gays)</b>			
A Tick	(80) 39.8	(9) 12.3	(71) 55.5
N.A.	(121) 60.2	(64) 87.7	(57) 44.5
	<hr/> (201) 100	<hr/> (73) 100	<hr/> (128) 100

69.5% and 55.5% of the political lesbians attended demonstrations concerning women and gays respectively, while 17.8% and 12.3% of the non-political lesbians did the same. This finding is accounted for by the expressed political nature of the social interaction in meetings and demonstrations. They seem to appeal more to the political lesbian than the non-political lesbian.

As I mentioned previously, one important area of social interaction which has not been statistically analyzed is the 'lesbian disco'. The lesbian disco is a somewhat recent phenomenon in the London area and I became aware of its existence only after talking with lesbians in my interviews. However, from my attendance at these discos which were held throughout the London area, I saw visible differences between the actual organization of these discos. Where these discos were held was a crucial variable. In other words, if a disco was held in a working class pub, it tended to attract lesbians from that general area. If a disco was held in the "ghetto within the ghetto", it tended to attract those lesbians who actually lived in this ghetto. From an impressionistic account I would say that all types of lesbians attended these discos. In other words, both political and non-political lesbians went to discos to varying degrees and depending upon the level of political emphasis which was involved.

#### Negative Ascription of the Lesbian Role

It is obvious that the 'negative' or deviant nature of the lesbian role does affect a lesbian's perception of herself in relationship to others. If a lesbian does reveal herself to others, then she is up against a whole series of social biases and expectations which affect her self image and the ascription of this somewhat negative role. Her role is 'deviant' and carries with it a certain amount of negativity on the social level. Therefore, however a lesbian may deal with these negative



ascriptions, must be dealt with on the individual level.

56% of all the lesbians in the survey felt that they had experienced this negative ascription and had felt deviant, perverse, evil, sinful ... when others (people in society) had known them to be lesbian. (See Chart 12.0) It was in the general areas of family and straight friends where many lesbians experienced negative responses (26% and 30% N = 201). However, it is interesting to note here that in no one area did a majority of lesbians (in the total sample, non-political or political) experience this negative response from those who knew them to be lesbian. This finding could be a result of a liberal society's gradual acceptance of the "gay" role and the resultant decrease in a negative response to it. However, as we all know, it is also difficult in some situations for an individual to perceive a negative response from another with regards to their personal status. As some lesbians recounted to me, "It's usually such an embarrassing situation anyways and after that, who knows?"

Usually, I have found that when a lesbian reveals herself to others she exposes herself, her 'deviance', initially to those who have a prior knowledge of her, in whatever context (work, family, friends ...). These significant others may see her as a social individual with a personal 'deviant' label rather than as a total social 'deviant'. In other words, the revelation of one's lesbianism to others presupposes a certain amount of trust on the relational level. Usually, the 'significant others' tend to have a more open position in terms of their acceptance of a particular lesbian than others who do not know her. They are, therefore, able to maintain a "positive predisposition" which reduces the possibility of a negative response. However, during the course of my study, I have heard that some lesbians who reveal themselves to family, friends ... do receive hostile responses. So, the results vary.

Chart 12.1 is a representation of a lesbian's perception of how

CHART 12.0NEGATIVE ASCRIPTION OF LESBIAN ROLE

Question: "Were you ever made to feel 'bad', 'deviant', 'Perverse',  
'evil', 'sinful' ... by those who know you to be a lesbian?"

	Total	Non-Political	Political
N.A.	(6) 3.0	(1) 1.4	(5) 3.9
YES	(114) 56.7	(36) 49.3	(78) 60.9
NO	(81) 40.3	(36) 49.3	(45) 35.2
	<u>(201) 100</u>	<u>(73) 100</u>	<u>(128) 100</u>
<u>Question:</u> "By Whom?"			
Family			
A Tick	(54) 26.9	(17) 23.3	(37) 28.9
N.A.	(147) 73.1	(56) 76.7	(91) 71.1
	<u>(201) 100</u>	<u>(73) 100</u>	<u>(128) 100</u>
Straight Friends			
A Tick	(62) 30.8	(19) 26.0	(43) 33.6
N.A.	(139) 69.2	(54) 74.0	(85) 66.4
	<u>(201) 100</u>	<u>(73) 100</u>	<u>(128) 100</u>
Straight Sisters in Movement			
A Tick	(19) 9.5	(2) 2.7	(17) 13.3
N.A.	(182) 90.5	(71) 97.3	(111) 86.7
	<u>(201) 100</u>	<u>(73) 100</u>	<u>(128) 100</u>
Religious Authorities			
A Tick	(27) 13.4	( 8) 11.0	(19) 14.8
N.A.	(174) 86.6	(65) 89.0	(109) 85.2
	<u>(201) 100</u>	<u>(73) 100</u>	<u>(128) 100</u>
Legal Authorities			
A Tick	(24) 11.9	( 5) 6.8	(19) 14.8
N.A.	(177) 88.1	(68) 93.2	(109) 85.2
	<u>(201) 100</u>	<u>(73) 100</u>	<u>(128) 100</u>
At Work			
A Tick	(39) 19.4	(10) 13.7	(29) 22.7
N.A.	(162) 80.6	(63) 86.3	(99) 77.3
	<u>(201) 100</u>	<u>(73) 100</u>	<u>(128) 100</u>
Counsellor or Psychiatrist etc.			
A Tick	(26) 12.9	( 4) 5.5	(22) 17.2
N.A.	(175) 87.1	(69) 94.5	(106) 82.8
	<u>(201) 100</u>	<u>(73) 100</u>	<u>(128) 100</u>
Other			
A Tick	(23) 11.5	( 4) 5.5	(19) 14.8
A.N.	(178) 88.5	(69) 94.5	(109) 85.2
	<u>(201) 100</u>	<u>(73) 100</u>	<u>(128) 100</u>

CHART 12.1REACTIONS TO LESBIANISM

Question: "How do most people react to you when they know you to be a lesbian?"

	Total	Non-Political	Political
Accepting	(131) 65.2	(44) 60.3	(87) 68.0
Indifferent	(39) 19.4	(15) 20.5	(24) 18.8
Hostile	(17) 8.5	(6) 8.2	(11) 8.6
N.A.	(14) 7.0	(8) 11.0	(6) 4.7
	<u>(201) 100</u>	<u>(73) 100</u>	<u>(128) 100</u>

Question: "What about at work or school?"

Accepting	(64) 31.8	(24) 32.9	(40) 31.3
Indifferent	(59) 29.4	(20) 27.4	(39) 30.5
Hostile	(33) 16.4	(13) 17.8	(20) 15.6
N.A.	(45) 22.4	(16) 21.9	(29) 22.7
	<u>(201) 100</u>	<u>(73) 100</u>	<u>(128) 100</u>

Question: "What about your family's reaction?"

Accepting	(79) 39.3	(27) 37.0	(52) 40.6
Indifferent	(32) 15.9	(7) 9.6	(20) 15.6
Hostile	(45) 22.4	(23) 31.5	(27) 21.1
N.A.	(45) 22.4	(16) 21.9	(29) 22.7
	<u>(201) 100</u>	<u>(73) 100</u>	<u>(128) 100</u>

people, when they are aware of her lesbianism, react to her. There were three main areas of concern: people in general, work or school, and family reaction. From a study of the Chart, we see that, generally, lesbian's perceive that most people are accepting of their lesbianism or indifferent to it. (65.2% and 19.4% respectively) Both samples revealed this belief (60.3% and 20.5% of non-political and 68.0% and 18.8% of political). At work, lesbian's perceived a lesser degree of acceptance (around 30.0%). It was in the area of the family that lesbian's did perceive a greater amount of hostility than with people in general, or at work or school. (22% of the total survey, 31% of the non-political lesbians and 21% of the political lesbians.) If we look objectively at the three areas of concern: family, work or school and people in general, we see that a lesbian may pose more of a threat to her family relationships than to the other two areas. She not only represents a rejection of the family situation for her life, but also confuses the 'nature' of traditional sex roles which are an essential part of family life and which she should have learned in that context.

#### Lesbian Social Interaction: The Varying Degrees of 'Outness'

If a lesbian perceives that her lesbianism may negatively affect other's perception of herself, then she usually will not disclose her lifestyle, herself, to others (sometimes, this includes other lesbians). If she accepts society's definitions of lesbian for herself (i.e., as a 'deviant'), she tends to translate that definition into her own life. As a result, she may confine herself to a 'closet' or possibly a marginal degree of outness.

As I stated earlier, my study has an in-built bias in that it is concerned with lesbians who participate in lesbian social organization and who are, therefore, somewhat open about their lesbianism, if only with other

lesbians. Charts 13.0 and 13.1 present the primary areas of interaction in which a lesbian 'comes out' and the degrees of outness.

From Chart 13.0 we see that for the majority of lesbians in the survey, most or some of the people that they interact with do know them to be a lesbian. However, for 70% of the political lesbians most people know them as lesbians, while 37% of the non-political lesbians are known to be lesbians by most of the people they interact with. This finding is explained by the expressed belief in lesbian political ideology that to come out is a positive experience. An emphasis is placed upon the experience as a challenge to social norms in the proclamation of oneself as a lesbian - an out lesbian. This finding reveals that all political lesbians are not totally out. However, it does suggest that there exists a certain degree of status which is connected with an out political lesbian within certain political contexts, as well as within society at large. This status does exist to a certain extent for non-political lesbians. However, the importance of coming out does not receive as much emphasis in non-political areas of interaction as in political ones. For both groups, to come out is a courageous event. For the political lesbian, it is perceived as a personal-political event in confrontation with the social, while for the non-political lesbian, it is perceived as a personal event which enables one to cope with lesbianism as an individual or personal problem. Because (as we discovered earlier) lesbianism tends to be considered as a sexual preference in non-political circles, it is also perceived within a sexual and individualistic context. For a non-political lesbian, it is courageous to be 'out' to the extent that it facilitates her coping with her lesbianism on that level - the personal.

From the charts we see that more political lesbians than non-political ones have a tendency to be out at work or school. 65% of the political lesbians were known to be lesbians by "most" or "some" of the

CHART 13.0O U T N E S S

Question: "Of the people with whom you associate, how many know you are a lesbian?"

	Total	Non-Political	Political
Most	(117) 58.2	(27) 37.0	(90) 70.3
Some	(56) 27.9	(27) 37.0	(29) 22.7
Very Few	(20) 10.0	(13) 17.8	(7) 5.5
None	(7) 3.5	(6) 8.2	(1) 0.8
N.A.	(1) 0.5	-	(1) 0.8
	(201) 100	(73) 100	(128) 100

Question: "What about at work or school?"

Most	(55) 27.4	(13) 17.8	(42) 32.8
Some	(63) 31.3	(20) 27.4	(43) 33.6
Very Few	(40) 19.9	(18) 24.7	(22) 17.2
None	(42) 20.9	(22) 30.1	(20) 15.6
N.A.	(1) 0.5	-	(1) 0.8
	(201) 100	(73) 100	(128) 100

Question: "What about your family?"

Most	(75) 37.3	(26) 35.6	(49) 38.3
Some	(31) 15.4	(9) 12.3	(22) 17.2
Very Few	(37) 18.4	(13) 17.8	(24) 18.8
None	(58) 28.9	(25) 34.2	(33) 25.8
N.A.	-	-	-
	(201) 100	(73) 100	(128) 100

(Continued)

CHART 13.1LEVELS OF OUTNESS

	Total	Non-Political	Political
1.	(92) 45.8	(19) 26.1	(73) 57.1
2.	(24) 11.9	( 7) 9.6	(17) 13.2
3.	(25) 12.4	(12) 16.4	(13) 10.1
4.	(32) 15.9	(16) 21.9	(16) 12.5
5.	( 1) 0.5	( 1) 1.4	-
6.	(19) 9.5	(12) 16.4	( 7) 5.5
7.	-	-	-
8.	( 7) 3.5	(6) 8.2	( 1) 0.8
N.A.	( 1) 0.5	-	( 1) 0.8
	<u>(201) 100</u>	<u>(73) 100</u>	<u>(128) 100</u>

N.B.:      Level 7 is omitted in the Chart on Structure of the Ghetto

people in this area of interaction, while 54% of the non-political lesbians were known to be lesbians by "very few" or "none" of the people concerned.

In the family context, 55% of the political lesbians and 47% of the non-political lesbians were out to "most" or "some" of their family relations, while 43% of the political lesbians and 51% of the non-political ones were known lesbians by "very few" or "none" of their family. Here again, we see the difficulty of a lesbian's interaction in the family context which presents a more threatening area for a lesbian to come out in.

#### Levels of Outness

Chart 13.1 presents us with a general idea of the varying degrees of outness that lesbians experience as lesbians in society. The 8 point graduated scale was developed in order to generalize from the previous chart which relates to people, family and work or school. It was set up to analyze the categories of openness and closedness in terms of how any particular lesbian answered the questions in Chart 13.0. If a lesbian responded that most people, most people at work and most of her family knew her to be a lesbian, then she scored 111 on the scale and was categorized in Level 1 on Chart 13.1. If a lesbian responded that none of the people in general and at work and in her family knew her to be a lesbian, then she scored 444 and was categorized in Level 8 of Chart 13.1. 64 possible responses were coded according to a lesbian's score in the previous chart and they were divided into 8 groups from numbers 1 - 64. The chart reflects the bias of the survey (45% of the total survey were out). However, it does reflect differences between the two samples of non-political and political lesbians. A much larger percentage of political lesbians were in Level 1 than non-political



lesbians (57% as opposed to 26%). 8% of the non-political lesbians were totally closeted, while only .8% of the political ones were. The chart reveals what was to be expected in terms of the tendency of political lesbians to be more open or "out" about their lesbianism than non-political lesbians. I have found through my research that political activity, or lack thereof, does not only affect a lesbian's perception of herself, but it also affects the entire coming out process and one's confrontation with deviancy in society. Unless a lesbian lives in a vacuum (which is an impossibility as a social individual), she remains affected by society's perception of her role.

### Lesbian Attitudes

It is generally believed by society that the 'typical lesbian', or further, that the majority of lesbians are hostile to men. 26.9% of the total survey expressed this attitude, while the majority of the survey (67.7%) felt either indifferent or accepting of straight men. (See Chart 14.0) However, it is interesting to note the differences between non-political lesbians and political lesbians in this context. 35.2% of political lesbians as opposed to 12% of non-political lesbians, felt hostile to men. This difference could be accounted for by the current anti-men ideology within certain lesbian political circles. This ideology tends to polarize the differences between the sexes and often-times, a high level of hostility emerges. In light of this finding, we should also consider the effects of separatism which operates in political areas of lesbian social organization. Here again, we find a general hostile reaction to men. However, it must be noted that political lesbians do not necessarily commit themselves to an anti-men stance. 32% of the political lesbians felt accepting of straight men. Usually, in light of my research experience, I have found varying degrees of hostility

CHART 14.0LESBIAN'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS OTHERSQuestion: "What are your attitudes towards?"

	Total	Non-Political	Political
<b>Bisexual Women</b>			
Hostile	(24) 11.9	( 9) 12.3	(15) 11.7
Indifferent	(34) 16.9	(17) 23.3	(17) 13.3
Accepting	(131) 65.2	(47) 64.4	(84) 65.6
N.A.	(12) 6.0	-	(12) 9.4
	(201) 100	(73) 100	(128) 100
<b>Straight Women</b>			
Hostile	( 3) 1.5	-	( 3) 2.3
Indifferent	(37) 18.4	(18) 24.7	(19) 14.8
Accepting	(152) 75.6	(55) 75.3	(97) 75.8
N.A.	( 9) 4.5	-	( 9) 7.0
	(201) 100	(73) 100	(128) 100
<b>Gay Men</b>			
Hostile	(14) 7.0	( 1) 1.4	(13) 10.2
Indifferent	(45) 22.4	(14) 19.2	(31) 24.2
Accepting	(133) 66.2	(58) 79.5	(75) 58.6
N.A.	( 9) 4.5	-	( 9) 7.0
	(201) 100	(73) 100	(128) 100
<b>Straight Men</b>			
Hostile	(54) 26.9	( 9) 12.3	(45) 35.2
Indifferent	(59) 29.4	(28) 38.4	(31) 24.2
Accepting	(77) 38.3	(36) 49.3	(41) 32.0
N.A.	(11) 5.5	-	(11) 8.6
	(201) 100	(73) 100	(128) 100
<b>Bisexual Men</b>			
Hostile	(78) 38.8	(30) 41.1	(48) 37.5
Indifferent	(74) 36.8	(32) 43.8	(42) 32.8
Accepting	(37) 18.4	(11) 15.1	(26) 11.3
N.A.	(12) 6.0	-	(12) 9.4
	(201) 100	(73) 100	(128) 100

towards men in both non-political and political contexts.

Let us look at some of the attitudes towards straight men which were expressed in the interview setting:

... I do feel as a human being we have power to relate in lots of different ways to different people. I think of myself as just a human being and I think of men as human beings.

... I'm a bit scared of them, oh they're fine at a distance ... You know they are all right as long as they don't want to do what all men do which is to come on sexually, and to dominate sexually, and put you down and um ... they insist that you play these roles and not to know what to do with you if you don't. Once they start that sort of Mickey Mouse well, then I just don't want to be bothered. I don't have the time for it. I just have too much to do.

... I don't feel I can relate to them very much at all. Obviously, I mean they are going to relate to me in terms of how I relate to them. I mean they are going to relate to me in terms of how they want me to relate to them rather than in terms of how I relate to them. I can't relate to them in a way that I want to relate to them.

... Straight men, I like straight men. I don't dislike men. Just because I'm a lesbian, doesn't mean that I dislike men.

38.8% of the lesbians in the survey felt hostile to bisexual men. In the course of the interview context, I found that some lesbians were generally hostile to the bisexual role. These lesbians expressed that they saw the bisexual as "getting the best of two worlds" or "confusing the issues between a straight society and the gay society". Lesbians tended to be more hostile towards bisexual men than straight men and bisexual women (who they were more accepting of - 65% felt accepting).

One lesbian expressed her attitude towards bisexuality, in general, by saying:

... the bisexual woman or bisexual man is half a completed person. You know I don't consider it in any way related to homosexuality, as such, at all. It's a very unfortunate thing, and I have sympathy and understanding. I'm very sorry for bisexuals because they are the ones who will never be happy. They can't be. How can they be? They leave a trail of broken hearts behind. Eventually you know if

they stay in one place they'll find that they become ostracised because people know what they are and people are more frightened of them - in a way, more than they are of lesbians.

Another lesbian expressed a certain amount of hostility that she felt when she thought of a particular type of bisexual women which she believes exists in society. She says:

... what I detest is ... What I really detest - Those are very strong words for me. I detest women who allow men to use them to gain control over two women ... um ... by letting a man manipulate their relationship with another woman. I intensely detest the prudent and voveristic power hungry attitudes of sexually weak and immature men and also women's stupidity in using their bodies by pandering to a man that way. To the extent that these women call themselves bisexual I find it offensive beyond words. One of the very few things I get very unhappy about or I'm disgusted when Playboy has a picture of two women making love on it. Things of that sort I don't have any gut tolerance for, as much as I can tolerate most things, it's bad enough to be subjugated to as yourself but to screw around with another woman that way is just uh ... so that sort of bisexuality Ugh!

66% of the lesbians in the total survey felt that they were accepting of gay men. 79% of the non-political lesbians felt that they were accepting, while 58% of the political lesbians felt likewise. This difference between the two samples in their acceptance of gay men may be accounted for by the fact that non-political lesbians tend to socialize more in mixed gay clubs and bars together with gay men. Although a higher percentage of political lesbians (49.2%) than non-political lesbians (45.2%) tended to associate in mixed gay clubs, an equal percentage of both groups (34%) associated in mixed gay bars. In these settings there tended to be more interaction between non-political lesbians and gay men than between political lesbians and gay men (see Chart 11.1). In the mixed bars and clubs, political lesbians tended to 'stick together' and form a tight group amongst themselves, while non-political lesbians experience more of an ease in relating to the gay men who were present. As a result, they appeared to be more accepting of

gay men and from the above finding they generally are.

Here are some responses that lesbians, in the interview setting, had to gay men:

... Well I don't like what I term as queens, but gay men, I like most gay men that I meet. I just don't like theatrical gays and again I don't like role playing. But the everyday gay I like.

... I don't have anything to do with gay men. I'm not particularly interested in having much to do with gay men ... um ... I think some gay men might be definitely questioning their roles as men in society. And if they are doing that, great! ... Um ... But, I think some male homosexuals epitomize male chauvinism to an even more extent than other men because they're sleeping with them. I mean they hate women so much that they will have nothing to do with their bodies.

... I love them, I love them and they too I think are getting far better and I'll explain that in a minute ... I can only take a little while I'll use the word, "puffy" ones, the lispy ones and the camp ones but you see that's going out and there again ... you've got to be careful here because a lot of those really effeminate ones are transvestites at least and possibly transsexual. You've got to draw such a firm line between real, true homosexuality and the rather psychiatric and psychological cases. There is nothing psychological about being a true male homosexual. They are born that way and that is it, but the others ... that's very sad.

75% of all the lesbians in the survey felt accepting of straight women (75% of both samples as well). Possibly the existence of the "woman before lesbian" factor comes into play in the lesbian's acceptance of the straight woman. Because a lesbian does identify in some way with the role of women, in general, she tends to empathize with the participants in that role, even if she herself does not participate in that respective role. Also, because a lesbian's life tends to revolve more around women than men, she will usually get to know them better than men. Knowledge does not necessarily imply acceptance in the interactional setting. However, for the lesbian, knowledge of herself as a woman along with other women, tends to become important if only in a very limited context or manner (i.e., at work, socializing in straight settings).

Lesbian Relationships with Men (See Chart 14.1)

Possibly another reason for a lesbian's acceptance of straight women is the fact that she herself may have experienced at one time in her life what it was to be a 'straight woman'. 23% of all of the lesbians in the total survey were married, and 67% had sex with a man. A large percentage (73%) had experienced sexual attraction to a man. From the above findings we can see that, to a certain extent, lesbians have had similar interaction with men as have straight women. However, the lesbian does not continue with these types of straight relationships for her lifetime and does not incorporate them into her interactional framework.

Political lesbians appeared to have more experiences with men prior to becoming lesbian than non-political lesbians. 78% were attracted to a man at some point in time, while 74% had had sex with a man. For the non-political lesbians, the percentages were 63% and 56% respectively. I could not find any substantial evidence in my research which would account for these differences between the two groups. However, one vague possibility is that, of the lesbians I spoke with, more political lesbians than non-political lesbians viewed their lesbianism as having a certain amount of choice than not. As a result, they experienced more of a progression into their lesbian role than their non-political sisters. Non-political lesbians tended to see their lesbianism as a fixed fact of life (i.e., born lesbian). The result is that political lesbians may have been more open to experimentation and more willing to challenge not only their views about themselves but society's view of themselves.

CHART 14.1LESBIAN'S AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH MENQuestion: "Have you even been married?"

	Total	Non-Political	Political
YES	(48) 23.9	(16) 21.9	(32) 25.0
NO	(149) 74.1	(57) 78.1	(92) 71.9
N.A.	( 4) 2.0	-	( 4) 3.1
	<u>(201) 100</u>	<u>(73) 100</u>	<u>(128) 100</u>

Question: "Have you ever been attracted to a man?"

YES	(147) 73.1	(46) 63.0	(101) 78.9
NO	(50) 24.9	(25) 34.2	(25) 19.5
N.A.	( 4) 2.0	( 2) 2.7	( 2) 1.6
	<u>(201) 100</u>	<u>(73) 100</u>	<u>(128) 100</u>

Question: "Have you ever had sex with a man?"

YES	(136) 67.7	(41) 56.2	(95) 74.2
NO	(61) 30.3	(30) 41.1	(31) 24.2
N.A.	( 4) 2.0	( 2) 2.7	( 2) 1.6
	<u>(201) 100</u>	<u>(73) 100</u>	<u>(128) 100</u>

### Lesbian Literature (See Chart 15.0)

As lesbian social organization develops structure and form, it accumulates and presents a body of literature to its participants. Lesbian literature emerges from all of the organizational areas in which lesbians are involved.

All of the lesbians in the survey, with the exception of one, read literature which was related to the lesbian role in some way - gay lesbian or feminist. However, whether or not the literature was an adequate representation of a particular lesbian experience, it varied in terms of the type of stance the literature presented. The majority of lesbians (57%) felt that lesbian literature did not represent their own life as a lesbian. Feminist and gay literature represented their lives partially (56% and 50%).

The lesbian experience creates and recreates a media image as the lesbian social organization grows and develops. However, it is interesting to note that these images which are presented by those in the 'know', tend not to adequately represent the lesbian lifestyle for an individual lesbian.

This particular section of the thesis has been concerned with revealing the interactional framework within the lesbian ghetto. As we have seen, the creation of the lesbian ghetto is a complex process which involves not only the appropriation of meaningful roles, but also the involvement of a lesbian in an area of social interaction which is varied, as well as structured and formalized. It is hoped that this chapter has highlighted some of the important as well as interesting features which are an integral part of the creation of the contemporary lesbian ghetto.



CHART 15.0LESBIAN READING MATERIAL

Question: "Do you read any lesbian, feminist or gay literature?"

	Total	Non-Political	Political
YES	(200) 99.5	(73) 100	(127) 99.2
NO	(1) 0.5	-	(1) 0.8
N.A.	-	-	-
	<u>(201) 100</u>	<u>(73) 100</u>	<u>(128) 100</u>

Question: "Do you see the lesbian coverage of lesbianism as truly representative of your life as a lesbian?"

YES	(37) 18.4	(20) 27.4	(17) 13.3
NO	(116) 57.7	(36) 49.3	(80) 62.5
In part	(34) 16.9	(13) 17.8	(21) 16.4
N.A.	(14) 7.0	(4) 5.5	(10) 7.8
	<u>(201) 100</u>	<u>(73) 100</u>	<u>(128) 100</u>

Question: "Do you see the feminist coverage of lesbianism as truly representative of your life as a lesbian?"

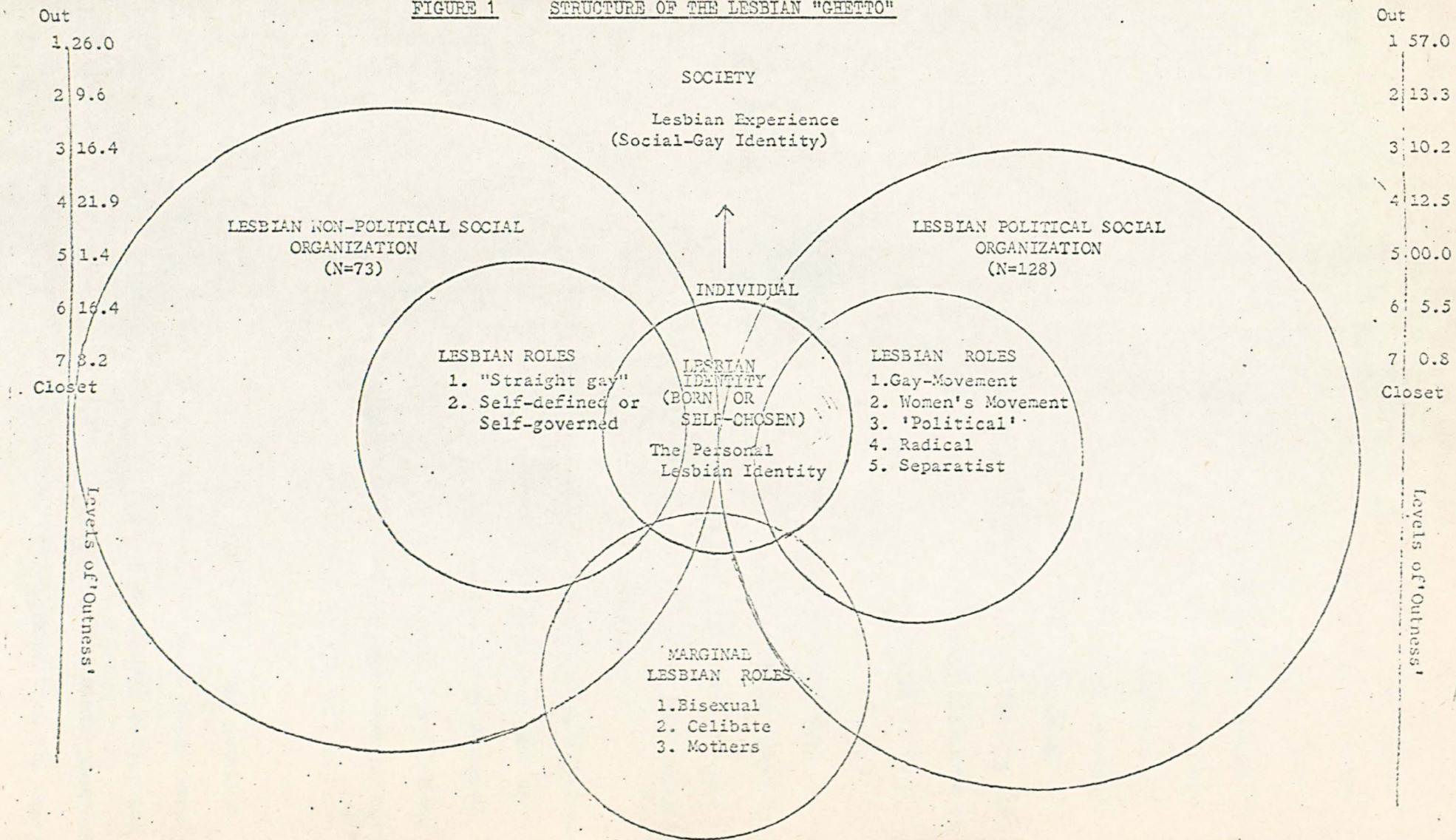
YES	(14) 7.0	(5) 6.8	(9) 7.0
NO	(63) 31.3	(32) 43.8	(31) 24.2
In part	(113) 56.2	(31) 42.5	(82) 64.1
N.A.	(11) 5.5	(5) 6.8	(6) 4.7
	<u>(201) 100</u>	<u>(73) 100</u>	<u>(128) 100</u>

Question: "Do you see the gay coverage of lesbianism as truly representative of your life as a lesbian?"

YES	(8) 4.0	(4) 5.5	(4) 3.1
NO	(78) 38.8	(31) 42.5	(47) 36.7
In part	(102) 50.7	(32) 43.8	(70) 54.7
N.A.	(13) 6.5	(6) 8.2	(7) 5.5
	<u>(201) 100</u>	<u>(73) 100</u>	<u>(128) 100</u>

THE FOLLOWING CHART REPRESENTS  
THE LESBIAN GHETTO (IN LONDON).

**FIGURE 1**      STRUCTURE OF THE LESBIAN "GHETTO"



**PART IV:     CONCLUSION**

**Chapter 9     Conclusion**

## CHAPTER 9

### C O N C L U S I O N

This thesis has presented a study of the contemporary lesbian in a large metropolitan area, London. It has illustrated that a clear understanding of lesbianism necessitates a disclosure of the subtle intricacies which are involved in the emergence of the lesbian identity, lesbian roles and lesbian social organization in a rapidly changing society. Our dualistic analysis has been concerned with presenting the contemporary lesbian as a social individual who is 'deviant' (involved in unapproved sexuality) and who is confronted with what it means to be a woman in society.

At this time I will discuss some of the problems which have arisen from the research process in terms of its methodological concerns and its theoretical perspective. It is my hope that by exposing these problems, future researchers concerned with the sociology of lesbianism will be aware of the difficulties with this type of research.

The interactionist approach of this thesis has placed well defined limitations upon my theoretical scope. In other words, it has set up boundaries between a theory which presents the lesbian self as emerging in society with all of the contingent, yet important social implications and a theory which develops broad historical statements about the existence of lesbianism, the 'nature' of sexuality, deviance, and the role of women in society.

I became more and more aware of this limitation in the research process. The various historical and structural limitations which were placed upon the research along with the inherent bias towards subjective experience and micro-level concerns, became evident as the study progressed. This does not imply that this analysis removes the lesbian from the social

context. On the contrary, as we have seen, the lesbian is rooted in society. We viewed her as subjectively experiencing and emerging from objective reality which is imbued with historicity and control. The foundation of this process is based upon specific biographical knowledge, social facts and cultural configurations and is, nonetheless, a complex process. It is directly related to an historical context and this is not denied. However, my statements are made about a particular lesbian population in a particular lesbian ghetto/<sup>area.</sup> The concepts are developed concerning my specific interactional and observational framework. Further studies in large ghetto areas may reveal similar concepts and organizational roles.

Another analysis of the contemporary lesbian experience may develop along different methodological lines as well as theoretical interests. In light of the above, the following questions may be asked:

About Sexuality:

If sexuality is a social construction, to what extent does the historical reality of sexual behaviour reflect, maintain or perpetuate an ideological system of the 'sexual'?

Does the ideology of sexuality emerge from a society which bolsters up not only dominant ideologies related to sexuality but also a dominant social ideology which is perpetuated by those with influence?

Ideas of the Self:

How does one differentiate between the social self and the personal self, if the possibility is that all social definitions, beliefs and ideologies are overlaid with social forms of power?

About Lesbianism:

Is lesbianism a deviation from institutions in society or does it arise as a contradiction within society and as actively opposed to it?

Does it reflect contradictions within society between sexuality and the role of women?

To what extent does the social organization of lesbians reflect class interests (i.e., a tendency for middle class lesbians to organize)?

All of these questions illustrate the possible direction of future research into the sociology of lesbianism. This thesis, because it has been limited in terms of the particular area from which I drew my observations (London) and in light of my interactional perspective, does not address these questions. However, it is hoped that this thesis has begun to challenge traditional social beliefs concerning lesbianism. It has scratched the surface of an area of social research which is capable of further development. We have seen how an understanding of lesbianism is a complex process which necessitates a thorough analysis of identity, roles and social organization. We have seen how lesbianism, like sexuality, is socially constructed and individually experienced. This type of research is worthwhile in that we are presented not only with a unique area of social interaction, lesbianism, but also with a fuller sociological analysis of lesbianism than has previously been presented.

PART IV: CONCLUSION

Appendices (7)



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1. Sample Interview
2. Sample Letter sent with Questionnaire
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who were interviewed formally
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APPENDIX 1SAMPLE INTERVIEWLesbian Interview Questions

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

How long: \_\_\_\_\_

General

1. How would you define lesbianism?
2. Do you see lesbianism as a total way of Life? If yes, how is lesbianism a total way of life or in what ways?
3. Do you see lesbianism as a valid or viable way of life for some women in society? If yes, in what ways?
4. How do you think society views the lesbian way of life for some women?
5. How is the lesbian way of life or lesbian experience different from other ways of living open to women?

Lesbian Identity

6. Do you see the lesbian identity as a counter identity for women? In other words, does the lesbian identity exist in society as an identity contrary to what society expects of all women? (i.e., assumption of heterosexuality, wife, mother ...)  
What about woman's identity in itself, can that be viewed as a counter identity?
7. At what age did you have your first lesbian experience?
8. At what age did you first define yourself as a lesbian?

9. Was your first lesbian experience an independent experience, that is, independent of any group identity or group membership? If not, was your first lesbian experience one which came from your involvement in the gay movement or women's movement?
10. Has your definition of lesbianism changed over time? If so, in what ways?
11. What about your ideas about yourself as a lesbian, have they changed over time? Could you say that you see yourself as gradually developing a type of self awareness that is particular to a lesbian?
12. Do you see your lesbian identity as being a part of or closely linked up with your identity as a woman in society? Another way of asking the question is, can one be both a lesbian and a woman, or do you see them as contradicting one another?
13. Where do you associate with lesbians? How often?
14. Do most people that you associate with know you to be a Lesbian?  
  
Work? School? What about your family? How do they react to you?

#### Lesbianism and Feminism

15. Do you see your life as a lesbian as a type of feminism? In what ways?
16. Should lesbianism be a key issue in the women's movement?  
In what ways?  
  
in the gay movement?  
In what ways?
17. What are your attitudes towards bisexual women?  
gay men?  
straight men?

18. If you had to place yourself into a category or type of group, how would you define yourself?

Lesbian separatist

radical feminist lesbian

women's movement lesbian (came out in women's movement)

Gay movement lesbian (came out in gay movement)

non-political lesbian

APPENDIX 2SAMPLE LETTER SENT WITH QUESTIONNAIRE

2 Eldon Grove  
London, N.W.3.

Dear Sister,

This is a voluntary questionnaire which I hope you will complete and return to me. At this point in time I am completing a Ph.D. entitled, "The Sociology of Lesbianism" at the L.S.E. I am sending out this short questionnaire which will provide a general idea of attitudes, social or political activities, as well as particular lesbian experiences which may be common to all of us. I have started a series of interviews in the London area and want to interview at least 50 interviewees. If you are interested in being interviewed, please write to me at my London address or leave your name and address somewhere on the questionnaire and I'll write to you. Remember, all information is totally confidential and anonymity is a strict rule. Thanks for your help.

Sincerely,

Betsy Ettorre

APPENDIX 3SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRELesbian Questionnaire

1. Age 1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Occupation 2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Religion (if applies) 3. \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. How would you define lesbianism? (Check appropriate description  
- only one)
  - (a) a total way of life or commitment \_\_\_\_\_
  - (b) a sexual preference \_\_\_\_\_
  - (c) an alternative way of life for women \_\_\_\_\_
  - (d) a 'deviant' or counter-identity  
in a dominant heterosexual world \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. The lesbian lifestyle could be a valid or viable way  
of life for: (Check one)
 

(a) all women _____	(d) few women _____
(b) most women _____	(e) none _____
(c) some women _____	
  
6. Have your ideas about lesbianism or your definition of  
a lesbian changed over time?
 

No \_\_\_\_\_
Yes \_\_\_\_\_
  
7. If yes, why do you think this has happened?  
Through: (check one or more)
  - (a) personal experience \_\_\_\_\_
  - (b) the women's movement \_\_\_\_\_
  - (c) group therapy \_\_\_\_\_
  - (d) the gay movement \_\_\_\_\_
  - (e) individual therapy \_\_\_\_\_
  - (f) other \_\_\_\_\_

## 8. Lesbianism and feminism: (Check one)

- (a) are totally contradictory \_\_\_\_\_
- (b) do not relate to one another \_\_\_\_\_
- (c) are inseparable \_\_\_\_\_
- (d) somewhat related \_\_\_\_\_

## 9. Do you see your lesbian identity as being very much a part of your identity as a woman in society?

No \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_

## 10. How often do you associate with other lesbians? (Check one)

- (a) all of the time \_\_\_\_\_
- (b) most of the time \_\_\_\_\_
- (c) some of the time \_\_\_\_\_
- (d) hardly at all \_\_\_\_\_

## 11. Do you go to: (Check one or more)

- (a) lesbian bars \_\_\_\_\_
- (b) lesbian political meetings \_\_\_\_\_
- (c) lesbian clubs \_\_\_\_\_
- (d) mixed gay bars (gay men  
and women) \_\_\_\_\_
- (e) mixed gay clubs \_\_\_\_\_
- (f) demonstrations concerning  
women \_\_\_\_\_
- (g) demonstrations concerning  
gays \_\_\_\_\_

## 12. Should lesbianism be a key issue in the women's movement?

No \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_

## 13. Should lesbianism be a key issue in the gay movement?

No \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_

## 14. Of the people with whom you associate, how many would you say know you to be a lesbian?

Very few \_\_\_\_\_ Some \_\_\_\_\_ Most \_\_\_\_\_ None \_\_\_\_\_

What about at work or School?

Very few \_\_\_\_\_ Some \_\_\_\_\_ Most \_\_\_\_\_ None \_\_\_\_\_

14. (Continued)

What about your family?

Very few \_\_\_\_\_ Some \_\_\_\_\_ Most \_\_\_\_\_ None \_\_\_\_\_

15. How do most people react to you when they know you to be a lesbian?

Accepting \_\_\_\_\_ Indifferent \_\_\_\_\_ Hostile \_\_\_\_\_

What about at work or school?

Accepting \_\_\_\_\_ Indifferent \_\_\_\_\_ Hostile \_\_\_\_\_

What about your family reaction?

Accepting \_\_\_\_\_ Indifferent \_\_\_\_\_ Hostile \_\_\_\_\_

16. At what age did you first know yourself to be attracted to women? \_\_\_\_\_

17. At what age did you have your first lesbian experience, that is when did you first sleep with a woman? \_\_\_\_\_

18. At what age did you define yourself as a lesbian? \_\_\_\_\_

19. Was your first experience:

an independent experience \_\_\_\_\_

came from involvement in  
the women's movement \_\_\_\_\_

from gay movement \_\_\_\_\_

other (explain) \_\_\_\_\_

20. (If applies) Has your religion had any effects upon you defining yourself as a lesbian? \_\_\_\_\_

Would you say the effects were negative \_\_\_\_\_ or positive \_\_\_\_\_?

21. Do you read any lesbian, feminist, or gay periodicals?

No \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_

22. Do you see the feminist coverage of lesbianism as truly representative of your life as a lesbian?

No \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ In part \_\_\_\_\_



22. (Continued)

Do you see the gay coverage of lesbianism as truly representative of your life as a lesbian?

No \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ In part \_\_\_\_\_

Do you see lesbian coverage of lesbianism as truly representative of your life as a lesbian?

No \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ In part \_\_\_\_\_

23. Were you ever made to feel 'bad', 'deviant', 'perverse', 'evil', 'ill', 'sinful' ... by those who know you to be a lesbian?

No \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_

By whom?: (Check one or more)

- (a) family
- (b) straight friends
- (c) straight sisters in movement
- (d) religious authorities
- (e) legal authorities
- (f) at work
- (g) counsellor or psychiatrist
- (h) other (explain)

24. What are your attitudes towards:

Bisexual women	Hostile _____	Indifferent _____	Accepting _____
straight women	Hostile _____	Indifferent _____	Accepting _____
gay men	Hostile _____	Indifferent _____	Accepting _____
straight men	Hostile _____	Indifferent _____	Accepting _____
bisexual men	Hostile _____	Indifferent _____	Accepting _____

25. How do you see yourself: (Check one)

- (a) As a woman who is totally committed to women and seeks their company for social, emotional, psychological and sexual support \_\_\_\_\_
- (b) As a woman who is primarily attracted to women for emotional, social, psychological support but sometimes seeks the company of men for the satisfaction of these needs \_\_\_\_\_
- (c) As a woman who is 'equally' attracted to both women and men and seeks emotional social, sexual and psychological support from both men and women 'equally' \_\_\_\_\_
- (d) Other (explain) \_\_\_\_\_

26. Do you have any children?

No \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ How many? \_\_\_\_\_

If no, would you like to have a child at some point in the future?

No \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_

27. Have you ever been married to a man?

No \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever been attracted to a man?

No \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever had sex with a man?

No \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_

28. If you had to characterize yourself into what category would you place yourself? As a:

- (a) non-political lesbian
- (b) gay movement lesbian (more involved in or came out in this movement)
- (c) women's movement lesbian (more involved in this movement at present or came out in this movement)
- (d) lesbian separatist
- (e) radical feminist lesbian
- (f) 'political' lesbian
- (g) Other (explain)

#### APPENDIX 4

##### RATIONALE FOR SAMPLING PROCEDURES

The sampling procedure utilized probability sampling techniques, in particular stratified random sampling. The following discussion will explain the sampling procedure.

For my initial survey sample (201), I divided all the lesbians into two groupings. They were: Conference Lesbians and Lesbian Subscribers. Lesbians who attended the conference (with the probability that the majority had a tendency to be more politically orientated than not). Conference Lesbians numbered 100. Lesbians who were subscribers to Sappho (with the probability that the majority would be more non-politically motivated than not) numbered 101.

I chose to sample in these two areas of the lesbian population because I had reason to believe (from my observational research) that I would be likely to get a fairly representative sampling of lesbians who were involved in lesbian social organization of each type. As it happened, my initial inference was justified from the above division of the sample. The majority of Conference Lesbians were political (88%), while the majority of Lesbian Subscribers were non-political (61%).

The essential characteristic of probability sampling was that I was able to specify for each element of the lesbian population who were involved in lesbian social organization the probability that they would be included in the sample and thus, the sample would be a representative one.

Probability sampling involves two insurances against misleading results. They are:

1. As I mentioned above, the researcher has the ability to specify the chances that sampling findings do not differ by more than a certain amount from the true population values (in our case, lesbian population values in an organizational context).
2. A guarantee that enough cases are selected from each relevant population strata to provide an estimate for stratification of the population.

As far as the first insurance is concerned, I was primarily interested in lesbians who reflected "true values" within lesbian social organization. Both of the samples (Conference Lesbians and Sappho Subscribers) were explicitly involved in this type of organization. From this knowledge, I was able to make a further inference about the sample with regards the latter insurance. The second insurance was evidenced because from the initial sample, I was able to see from the findings that, in fact, the majority of each sample was either political or non-political.

The Conference was attended by approximately 500 lesbians. I distributed at random 400 questionnaires and 100 were returned to me. Therefore, I had a sampling of the Conference which represented 20% of the total population from the Conference.

The magazine, Sappho, which is the only lesbian magazine in Europe, had approximately 800 subscribers at that time. The distribution was random. However, in those cases where questionnaires would have been distributed to subscribers who lived outside of Great Britain, I chose not to include the questionnaire. I included it in the following subscription. 250 questionnaires were distributed at that time and 101 were returned to me. This meant that I had a sampling of 12.5% from the subscribers to the magazine. (Cost was an important factor to me at this time and I was unable to distribute as many questionnaires as I would have preferred to the subscribers.)

Because I had reason to believe that stratifying according to lesbian social organization (non-political and political) would result

in a somewhat internally homogeneous strata, I subdivided the total sample (201) according to the respective types. My beliefs were based on three factors.

1. observation in the lesbian ghetto for two years prior to the distribution of the questionnaires;
2. observation at lesbian conferences which were prior to the Bristol conference in which I passed out the questionnaires;
3. discussions with the lesbian who distributed the magazine Sappho, throughout the world.

The total sample of the lesbian social organization evidenced the requirements for a representative sample:

1. A simple random sample was taken from each stratum of those who had a tendency to be more political (Conference) and those who had a tendency to be more non-political (Subscribers).
2. A sub-sample was taken from the Total Sample (201) and divided according to those who actually defined themselves in either relevant category (see Blalock, p. 517 and Moser, p. 87).<sup>(1)</sup>

Although the actual sample reflects a "political bias", 63.7% political (N = 128) and 36.3% non-political (N = 73). I would contend that it is valid. Validity is maintained because the criterion for stratification was highly related to the variable studied (i.e., involvement in respective forms of organization was related to the actual type of lesbian involved in the form).

Therefore, my objective was to arrange the stratification so that they differed as much as possible from each other. I attempted to construct a sample so that lesbians within each group or strata (as taken from the Total Sample) were as homogeneous as possible. However, after making the division between non-political and political lesbians, I knew from my observational research that political lesbians tended to be more heterogeneous in terms of rules, roles and well-defined ideologies than non-political lesbians. In other words, it was evident to me that the

stratum of political lesbians was more mixed or variable with respect to lesbian social organization and, therefore, more difficult to represent by a sample of a given size. To remedy this situation, I utilized variable sampling fractions<sup>2</sup> in my "after" selection procedure. It was not necessary to modify the sampling results because a larger sampling fraction was already evident in the more variable stratum (political lesbian). As I pointed out earlier, there were 128 political lesbians and 73 non-political lesbians and percentagewise they represented 63% and 36% of the total sample. The utilization of variable sampling fractions not only increased precision, but also made the sample more accurate and reliable.

Footnotes - Appendix 4

1. See C. A. Moser and G. Kalton, Survey Methods in Social Investigation (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., Second Edition 1971), especially pp. 85-100, "Stratification" in Chapter 5, "Types of Sample Design" and Hubert M. Blalock, Jr., Social Statistics (New York: McGraw Hill, Second Edition 1972), especially pp. 516-523, "Stratified Sampling" in Chapter 5 "Sampling". For an informative discussion on the rationale for different types of approaches to Probability Sampling, see C. Selltitz, et al., Research Methods in Social Relations (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Revised Edition 1959), pp. 521-535.
2. This type of method is referred to as "disproportional stratified sampling". Cf. Blalock, op. cit., pp. 518-520, and Moser, op. cit., p. 87. The latter text supplies a clear explanation of stratified random sampling and disproportionate stratification.

APPENDIX 5SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF LESBIANS  
WHO WERE INTERVIEWED

Formal Interviews N = 20

	Age	Occupation	Identity	Type	Role	Life Style	Relationship with Men	
							Sexual	Married
1.	23	Student Advisor	Born	P	GML	OUT	No	No
2.	20	Student	Born	NP	SDL	OUT	No	No
3.	24	Lecturer	Self.C	P	GML	P.O.	Yes	No
4.	50	Writer	Self.C	P	PL	OUT	Yes	Yes
5.	26	Manager of Computer Prog.	Self.C	NP	BI	CL	Yes	No
6.	26	Manual Worker	Self.C	P	SEP	OUT	Yes	No
7.	28	Musician	Self.C	P	RL	OUT	Yes	Yes
8.	28	Journalist	Self.C	P	RL	OUT	Yes	No
9.	30	Primary Sch. Teacher	Born	NP	SL	P.O.	Yes	No
10	22	Publisher's Assistant	Born	P	PL	OUT	Yes	No
11	31	Student	Self.C	P	WML	P.O.	Yes	No
12	24	Grad.Student Writer	Self.C	P	RL	OUT	No	No
13	43	Communications Director	Born	NP	SL	CL	Yes	No
14	48	Doctor	Born	NP	SL	CL	No	No
15	28	Designer	Self.C	P	RL&C	OUT	Yes	No
16	37	Psychologist	Self.C	NPL	M&SDL	P.O.	Yes	Yes
17	55	Therapist	Born	NPL	SDL	P.O.	Yes	Yes
18	34	Company Director	Born	NPL	SDL	CL	Yes	Yes
19	29	Retail Trade	Self.C	NPL	SDL	CL	No	No
20	34	Artist	Self.C	NPL	SDL	OUT	Yes	Yes



Descriptions of Abbreviations

<u>Identity</u>	Born	=	Born lesbian
	Self.C	=	Self Chosen lesbian
<u>Type</u>	NP	=	Non-political
	P	=	Political
<u>Role</u>	SL	=	Straight lesbian
	SDL	=	Self Defined lesbian
	GML	=	Gay Movement lesbian
	WML	=	Women's Movement lesbian
	PL	=	Political lesbian
	RL	=	Radical lesbian
	SEP	=	Separatist
	BI	=	Bisexual
	M	=	Mother
	C	=	Celibate
<u>Life Style</u>	CL	=	Closet
	OUT	=	Out or open about lesbianism
	P.O.	=	Partially out

APPENDIX 6SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF LESBIANS  
WHO WERE INTERVIEWED

INFORMAL INTERVIEWS (N = 40)

	Age	Occupation	Identity	Type	Role	Life Style	Relationship with Men	
							Sexual	Married
1.	36	Shopkeeper	Self C.	NP	M	Out	Yes	Yes
2.	26	Advertising	Born	NP	SDL	CL	No	No
3.	24	Potter	Self C.	P	RL	Out	Yes	No
4.	27	Manual Worker	Self C.	SEP	SEP	Out	Yes	No
5.	25	Domestic Cleaner	Self C.		SEP	Out	Yes	No
6.	29	Teacher	Born	NP	SDL	PO	Yes	No
7.	28	Teacher	Self C.	P	PL	Out	Yes	No
8.	19	Musician	Self C.	P	RL	Out	No	No
9.	32	Unemployed	Self C.	P	M	Out	Yes	Yes
10.	23	Factory Worker	Self C.	P	SEP	Out	No	No
11.	28	Farmer	Self C.	P	PL	Out	Yes	No
12.	25	Civil Servant	Self C.	P	SEP	Out	Yes	No
13.	24	Primary School Teacher	Self C.	NP	SDL	PO	Yes	No
14.	27	Artist	Born	NP	SDL	Out	Yes	No
15.	27	Social Worker	Self C.	P	RL	Out	Yes	No
16.	25	Civil Servant	Self C.	P	RL	Out	Yes	No
17.	35	Lecturer	Self C.	P	PL	PO	Yes	No
18.	25	Adminis- trator	Self C.	P	PL	Out	Yes	Yes
19.	31	Writer	Born	NP	SDL	Out	Yes	Yes
20.	32	Mechanic	Born	P	GML	PO	Yes	No
21.	31	Teacher	Self C.	P	BI	PO	Yes	No

Continued:APPENDIX 6

	Age	Occupation	Identity	Type	Role	Life Style	Relationship with Men	
							Sexual	Married
22.	35	Computer Programmer	Self C.	P	BI&M	Out	Yes	Yes
23.	29	Musician	Self C.	P	RL	Out	Yes	No
24.	24	Book Distri- butor	Self C.	P	BI&C	PO	No	No
25.	25	Social Worker	Self C.	P	WML	PO	Yes	No
26.	35	Writer	Born	NP	SDL&BI	CL	Yes	No
27.	30	Community Worker	Born	NP	SDL	CL	No	No
28.	22	Domestic Worker	Self C.	P	RL	Out	Yes	No
29.	37	Printer	Self C.	P	M&SEP	Out	Yes	Yes
30.	21	Domestic Worker	Born ?	P	RL	PO	Yes	No
31.	25	Musician	Self C.	P	RL	Out	Yes	No
32.	31	Teacher	Self C.	P	WML	PO	Yes	No
33.	26	Civil Servant	Self C.	P	RL	PO	Yes	No
34.	27	Executive Secretary	Born	NP	SDL	CL	No	No
35.	25	Teacher	Born	P	GML	PO	Yes	Yes
36.	28	Computer Designer	Self C.	P	PL	PO	Yes	No
37.	19	Student	Born	NP	SDL	CL	Yes	No
38.	19	Student	Born ?	NP	SDL	CL	Yes	No
39.	29	Shop Steward	Self C.	P	PL	PO	Yes	No
40.	35	Unemployed	Self C.	P	M	PO	Yes	Yes

APPENDIX 7

SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF LESBIANS  
WHO WERE INTERVIEWED AS COMPARED WITH THOSE  
OF THE LESBIANS IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

INTERVIEWS N = 60				QUESTIONNAIRES N = 201			
Age	29.5			30	(See Chart 1.0)		
(Average Mean)							
Identity	Born Lesbian (20) 33.3% Self Chosen (40) 66.6% Lesbian			No measurement (this aspect of the lesbian identity became known after the questionnaires were distributed and the different identities became understood in the interview context)			
Type of Lesbian	Political (39) 65.0%	Non-Political (21) 35.0%		Political (128) 63.7%	Non-Political (73) 36.3%		
Life Style "Levels of Outness"	1 Out (30) 50%	4 Part Out (19) 31.6%	8 Closet (11) 18.3%	1 Out (92) 45.8%	4 & 5 Part Out (33) 16.4%	8 (see Closet (Chart 13.0) (7) 3.5%	
Relationship to Men				(See Chart 14.1)			
Sexual Relationship	(11) (49)	18.3% 81.6%	No Yes	(61) (136)	30.3% 67.7%	No Yes	
Married	(12) (48)	20% 80%	Yes No	(48) (149)	23.9% 74.1%	Yes No	
Lesbian Roles	Straight Lesbian (3) 5.0% Self-Defined (15) 25.0% Gay Movement (4) 6.7% Women's Movement (3) 5.0% Political Lesbian (8) 13.3% Separatist (6) 10.0% Bisexual (3) 5.0% Mother (4) 6.7% Celibate (2) 3.3% Radical Lesbian (12) 20.0%			No Measurement (The differentiation of lesbian social activity into 10 roles came after the questionnaires were distributed. The self defined lesbian role and the political lesbian roles as well as the fringe roles became well defined in the interview context. Also, further observational research clarified these roles.)			
	(60) 100.0%						

Continued:

APPENDIX 7

The above roles represent the primary lesbian role for each lesbian who was interviewed.

(Some lesbians had two lesbian roles - a fringe role and another role. The primary role reflects the particular lesbian role which is most important for a lesbian.)

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Affair	A lesbian sexual relationship which is characterized by a short length of time, or to have a relationship (sexual) while a lesbian is having a primary relationship with a more permanent partner.
Bar dyke	A lesbian who frequents gay bars (mixed) or lesbian bars, clubs, discos ... in order to establish social or sexual contacts.
Bisexual lesbian role	One of the fringe lesbian organizational roles which characterizes a lesbian who has sexual relationships with both men and women
"Bi"	A bisexual.
Booze up	A social event which is characterized by drinking, or to get drunk
Bop	To dance.
Born lesbian	An aspect of a lesbian's personal identity and emerges from the belief that one is born a lesbian.
Busted	To get arrested.
Butch, butchy	A relational role which reflects the more dominant or male type partner in a relationship, to be male in dress, manner, etc.
Celibate lesbian role	A fringe lesbian organizational role which involves a lesbian who does not have sexual relationships for a variety of reasons.
Circle dance	A type of lesbian dance in which a group of lesbians dance together in a circle.
Closet, closeted, closety	A lesbian life-style in which one does not tend to disclose lesbianism to others.
Come out	To tell another or others that one is a lesbian, or the process of publically declaring in one's life to others the fact that one is a lesbian.
Crash	To spend the night unexpectedly with a friend, friends, lover, etc.
Cruise	To be in a particular social context and to seek sexual encounters, to look for a pick up.

Crush	To have a sexual attraction or general attraction for another woman.
Custody case	A court case in which a lesbian mother usually seeks to keep custody of her children after a divorce from her husband.
Diesel, diesel dyke	A lesbian who is butch or very 'heavy'.
Dyke, dykey	Another word for a lesbian, to be like a lesbian in dress, manner, etc.
Divorce	To leave a former lover.
Dora	To be thick, stupid, etc. ... in straight gay terms.
Epidemiology	A science or study that deals with incidence, distribution and control of disease; concern for cure or control. (Very often in the past, lesbianism was the concern of individuals who were interested in epidemiology.)
Etiology	The study of causes or causal factors of a social or individual event. Traditionally psychologists, psychiatrists, therapists have been concerned with etiological factors of lesbianism (i.e., what is the psychological, generic or hormonal cause of lesbianism?)
Fancy	To be sexually attracted to another woman.
Feminist	To be a woman who is actively concerned with women's oppression.
Femme	A relational lesbian role in which one partner plays the submissive or female type role.
Fling	To have a fleeting sexual encounter with another lesbian; to have a series of fleeting sexual encounters.
Flirt	To make it obvious to another lesbian one's sexual attraction.
Freak, freaky, to freak	To have an emotional upheaval, one who is obviously non-conformist to the lesbian ghetto.
Gay movement	A specific social movement in which lesbians are involved and which is concerned with homosexual or gay oppression.
Gay movement lesbian role	A political lesbian organizational role which emerges from the gay movement.
Get it together	When two lesbians have a sexual encounter.

Ghetto	Any area of social activity which is characterized by lesbian activity.
Ghetto within the Ghetto	An area within the general lesbian ghetto where a group of lesbian live for mutual support and interaction.
Goblins	Another name for a male homosexual.
Have a turn	To have a bad emotional experience.
Heavy	To be somewhat oppressive in manner to other lesbians or another, to be off-putting, too butch or aggressive. (This term can be either perjorative in meaning or not pejorative.)
Heterosexual	Acceptable sexuality in society which exists between men and women.
Heterosexual bias	The social presumption that lesbians face, the idea that all women, and furthermore, all social individuals are heterosexual.
Ideology	Ideas which are created in society which justify, direct and maintain a social belief, activity, phenomenon.  (A lesbian ideology reflects the belief system which a lesbian or a group of lesbians have about themselves as lesbians in society.)
Lesbianism	A complex social phenomenon which has traditionally been looked at or viewed as a social problem, deviance, maladjustment, etc., and which exists as an alternative way of life for a woman in society.
Lesbian chauvinism	The belief that lesbianism is the best way of life for women.
Lesbian experience	The social gay identity, or social lesbian identity which represents the transformation of lesbian identity from a subjective experience to a social experience with others. It is built up as lesbians acquire meanings about themselves, knowledge, ideologies, roles ... The lesbian experience becomes formalized in lesbian social organization.
Lesbian identity	A dualistic concept which represents not only the personal lesbian identity, but also the lesbian experience, the social lesbian identity. It is a counter identity for women in society.



Lesbian roles	There are various types of lesbian roles in the ghetto. They can reflect either relationships (relational roles) or collective responses (organizational roles which include 10 roles).
Lesbian shuffle	A lesbian dance when two lesbians dance closely together in a specific way.
Lesbian social organization	The collective lesbian experience, the collective and mutually supportive response (collective reaction) of lesbians to society. There are two types of lesbian social organization - political and non-political. Both types reflect the institutionalization of lesbianism within the ghetto and society. Roles emerge from this process.
Non-political lesbianism	One of two types of lesbian social activity which emerges from lesbian social organization.
Nora	To be ugly or unattractive in straight lesbian terms.
Mixed	A social setting in which gay men or men are present.
Monogamous, monogamy	To have a primary relationship with one person alone.
Mother lesbian role	A fringe organizational role in which one is a mother.
Mrs.	Other person in a lover relationship.
Multiple relationships	To have a variety of sexual relationships.
Out	A lesbian life-style which is characterized by openness to others about one's lesbianism.
Patriarchy	The historical, social reality in which men are dominant socially and sexually and women are passive, male dominance, a male orientated society.
Phenomenon	A social occurrence, event or happening which is observable, can be described, analyzed or defined, or a complex social reality.
Political lesbianism	One of two types of lesbian social organization which is characterized by a spectrum of political activity.
Political lesbian role	A political organizational role in which one may be involved in a variety of political activity or social movements.

Primary relationship	To have a sexual relationship in which two partners take priority over others in social or sexual relationships.
Priscilla	A term for the police in straight lesbian terms.
Puffs, puffters	Another term for a male homosexual.
Queer	A homosexual.
Rave, rave up	To be outrageous in one's social setting.
Radical feminist	A feminist who is more concerned with women's oppression than with general sexual oppression.
Radical lesbian role	A political lesbian role which emerges from the women's liberation movement.
R.f.	Another term for a radical feminist.
Real lesbian	Another term for a born lesbian.
Scene	To have a sexual encounter or areas of "heightened" lesbian organizational activity.
Secondary relationship	A lesbian lover relationship which is characterized by an involvement (sexual) which takes a secondary place or secondary position in light of one's primary relationship.
Self-chosen lesbian	Relates to an aspect of a personal lesbian identity in which a lesbian believes that she has chosen to be a lesbian and is not born or biologically, genetically, or hormonally determined to be a lesbian.
Self-defined lesbian role	A non-political lesbian organizational role in which a lesbian carves out her own definitions of her self, independently, and with other lesbians who experience the same desire in non-political contexts of the ghetto.
Separatist lesbian role	An political organizational role in which a lesbian does not relate to men in any way.
Split	To leave, or to leave a lover, or a relationship.
Stars	Lesbians who are well known throughout the lesbian ghetto.
Straight lesbian role	A non-political organizational role in which one reflects traditional social patterns of relating; i.e., butch, femme, or dominant and passive.
Stud	A man.

Wank	To waste time, to masturbate.
Wankers	A pejorative term which is used to describe someone or somemen (i.e., men for separatists).
Wife	A partner in a lesbian relationship.
Women's house	A house which is occupied by women who choose to live together for support.
Women's liberation movement	A specific social movement which emerges from the women's movement and in which women are concerned with the liberation of all women from oppressive role and the radical restructuring of society.
Women's movement	A specific social movement which is concerned with women's issues and women's oppression in society.
Women's movement lesbian role	A political organizational role which emerges from the women's movement.

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NOTE:

Abbreviations:    A.S.R.    American Sociological Review  
                          A.J.S.    American Journal of Sociology  
                          B.J.S.    British Journal of Sociology  
                          R.K.P.    Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.