

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Black, South African, Lesbian: Discourses of Invisible Lives

Dissertation presented for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in the
Department of Psychology
University of the Western Cape

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1997

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DECLARATION

I declare that **Black, South African, Lesbian: Discourses of Invisible lives** is my own work and that sources I have used or quoted have been indicated.

Cheryl-Ann Potgieter

ABSTRACT

There is a paucity of research both internationally and locally in the area of homosexuality. In addition, the limited research which does exist has been biased towards the white male and where lesbians have been the focus of research, the bias has been to document the experiences of white, middle class women. Thus, in this marginalised area of research, black gay and lesbian experiences, and specifically black lesbian experiences, have been rendered invisible. In South Africa there is not a single academic study which specifically addresses issues related to black lesbians. One of the broad aims of this research is to address this paucity and to begin to document the lives of these women who have been rendered invisible or non-existent.

The main aim of the present study is to undertake an examination of the discourses regarding lesbianism as produced by a group of black South African lesbians. In addition, the thesis explores the positions and viewpoints from which black lesbians speak, the dominant institutions which prompt their discourses, and the challenges which they offer these dominant discourses. The thesis also explores the way in which female homosexuality has been constructed within dominant discourse (for example, legal discourse, academic discourse and so on).

Certain of the key questions which the dissertation asks in respect of these aims may be outlined as follows:

- 1) To what extent do participants conform to and construct their experiences within the dominant discourses of lesbianism?

- 2) To what extent do participants resist and challenge dominant discourses of lesbianism and what alternative discourses do they draw on to make sense of their positioning as black lesbians?

The study is based within a feminist social constructionist paradigm. The data was collected by conducting nine individual interviews and ten focus groups. The texts were transcribed and translated where necessary. An additional stage of analysis, prior to the main analysis was conducted. This additional analysis focused on the group process. Investigation of features (both within and across the focus groups) was conducted. In addition, the individual interviews were compared to the focus groups. For both the analysis of the group process and the main analysis the data was analysed using discourse analysis.

The analysed text identified dominant and alternative discourses as well as minor discourses. Three broad discourse fields emerged. One was around 'gender and sexuality', another related to discourses around 'psychological intervention' and third was around 'relationship and cultural issues'.

The results indicate that women replicate, challenge as well as offer alternative discourses to the dominant ones on lesbianism. A common theme that was prominent across discourses was the participants' quest to be constructed as everyday, regular women who are located within their communities. An interesting discourse emerged which is intrinsically related to

their contextual positioning. This discourse relates to their positioning within a post-apartheid South Africa.

The final section focuses on practical suggestions for the present study as well as possible future research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the following people and institutions for their contribution to the completion of this work. However, there are a range of persons who have not directly been involved in this thesis but who throughout my academic career have encouraged me to believe in myself and at particular difficult periods convinced me that achieving a doctoral degree was not beyond my reach. One of these people is Dr. Jean Benjamin who was the first woman to complete a doctoral degree in psychology at UWC and convinced me that I could be the second.

Persons who were closely linked to the dissertation in various ways and who I would like to thank are:

The women who participated in the study;

My supervisor, Professor Anna Strebel, for her encouragement, quick and thorough reading of draft chapters, unobtrusive supervision and at times making a daunting process seem less so;

My friend, colleague and 'soulmate' Dr. Aaronette White who despite living on another continent was available for me at any time of the day or night and provided various forms of support.

Evan Theys, who provided emotional, material and at times even psychological support for a task that at times I wanted to abandon and forget I had ever embarked upon.

Rene Klink, for all issues related to printing and layout-if it was not for your assistance this dissertation might never have taken on its final form;

Funeka Soldaat and Niezaam Sampson for assistance from the start of the project.

Babara Swartz, my friend, who also happens to be the librarian responsible for psychology at the university - thanks for all the support - books and otherwise.

Librarians at the University of Missouri, St.Louis, The University of Utrecht in the Netherlands, The University of Hong Kong and the University of Melbourne. These were places that I was based at as part of staff exchanges or conference attendance while working on the dissertation and where I gathered an enormous amount of material that was not accessible in South Africa.

David De Jong for being a friend and providing whatever assistance I asked of him.

Colleagues Tammy Shefer, Nokuthula Msomi, Kopano Ratele, Linzi Fredman and Keith Ruiters for support ranging from articles to just listening to my complaints.

Ex-colleagues Marion Wertheim and Mario Smith who encouraged me to complete when I was ready to abandon ship.

My sister, Merle Potgieter for accessing the parliamentary archives for the legal material.

UWC for study leave to carry out the bulk of the work.

The Mellon Foundation for financial assistance.

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CHAPTER ONE

GENESIS AND RATIONALE

A number of events over a period of time raised my interest in the subject of this thesis. Finding that very little had been published, I decided to do research on this topic. I wanted to make a contribution to documenting the experiences of a group of women who in Western terminology would be labelled 'black South African lesbians'. The first part of this chapter explains the initial 'pre-academic' genesis and rationale for this dissertation. The second part explains the second, more 'academic' phase of the project.

Although I outline in a systematic way the genesis and the rationale for the thesis, there are a range of other events which led to its writing. These did not take place in the 'absolute sequence' as presented. I also work from the paradigm that our stories or narratives are socially constructed and how they are presented is determined by the audience which is being addressed. As Polkinghorne (1988, p. 154) commented 'the story about life is open to editing and revision'.

The question could be asked as to why is it necessary to present a rationale and genesis for the thesis and also why there is a need to present it in a 'systematic' way. There is no one answer but Polkinghorne's (1988) statement that 'a self needs a story in order to be', and Erikson's (1975) observation regarding the need to reconstruct life through narratives so that life outcomes take on the appearance of having been planned, capture part of the reason for the research.

'PRE-ACADEMIC' PHASE

POLITICAL WOMEN'S GROUPS

The idea for this dissertation developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s when I was part of a political organisation whose primary aim was to contribute to the demise of the apartheid state. Some anti-apartheid organisations had women's 'sections' which focused on the relationship and contribution of women to the national liberation struggle. In my experience, most of the participants' time was taken up with overtly 'political' issues like, for example, why it is 'politically correct' for women to organise separately.

Although it was seldom articulated as being in keeping with the notion that 'personal is political', space was created for women to speak about more 'personal' issues. Sometimes this sharing happened spontaneously. In this way women became friends and began to see each other outside the political group meetings. A common outflow of these friendships were reading groups to which we could bring other interested women. In psychology or feminist literature these would be labelled 'support groups' or 'consciousness-raising groups'. We read and discussed literature relevant to women in struggle in South Africa and in other countries where national struggles were being fought, for example, in Guinea-Bissau.

We discussed and debated race and gender oppression in the group. We also discussed class oppression because a lot of the readings had a Marxist orientation. The issue of gender oppression was mostly discussed as a function of racial capitalism. The way in which men (both black and white) benefit from patriarchy was rarely discussed. What was often

mentioned was that it was necessary to understand that black men were oppressed as a result of their race and class and their abuse of black women was the result of the abusive treatment they received from the white bosses.

THE SILENCE ABOUT SEXUAL ORIENTATION

During one of these group meetings, a discussion took place regarding lesbianism. We all 'knew' that a member of the group was 'lesbian' and that she was having a relationship with another activist known to members of the group. Both these women were black (in South African racial categorisation, she was 'African' and her partner 'coloured'). When she said that she needed to speak about her experiences as 'a woman who loved other women' there was very little response (supportive or otherwise) from the group.

The issue of oppression as a result of sexual preference, orientation or choice was not an issue that had been discussed in these groups although women in the group read novels by Alexander Kollontai regarding 'free love'. However, the content of these novels was not discussed. At the time, to read Kollontai was to send out the message that you were 'a good activist and Marxist' who 'understood the principles of dialectical materialism'. Discussing issues related to the personal was labelled as 'bourgeois decadence' - 'how could you be discussing such issues when the two-phased struggle in South Africa has not yet been fully discussed?' Thus sexuality (generally) was not a topic formally on the agenda.

This is similar to what Tanya Chan-Sam experienced in the reading groups to which she belonged. She describes her experience of how issues of sexuality were silenced within

'progressive' discussion groups during the apartheid era:

We had once encountered Marx talking about sexual freedom, and they said, 'We'll just skip that part'. And they went on to the more economic issues and 'big things'. It was then that I started to think. I couldn't understand what the hassle was with discussing personal freedoms. I wanted to work through, and finally come out with, a sexual freedom and sexual orientation. For them [reading group members] it was okay to read it and quote it but it wasn't okay to discuss it (Chan-Sam, 1993, p. 159).

This was similar to the way the people in my group 'knew' about this issue but refused to discuss it. When Chan-Sam's brother was told she was a lesbian, he responded, 'Ag, man, I knew, everybody knew' (Chan-Sam, 1993, p. 159). When she informed her grandmother she had a similar response 'Oh, my child I've known for a long time'(p. 159). She explains that her brother was a high level political activist who influenced policy in a socialist organisation which, at the time of her writing, did not address homosexuality or gay rights. The argument used by her brother (and probably others in the organisation) was that 'it's not important, it's not on the agenda. You do not understand the political issues of the day' (Chan-Sam, 1993, p. 160).

The member of our reading group who raised the issue of lesbianism did so by saying she would like 'this sickness to be cured'. At that time I had recently completed an honours degree in psychology and was aware that homosexuality was not a diagnostic category. I told the group that psychology did not see people who were gay/lesbian as sick people in need

of a cure. I thought a lot about the discussion but mainly from the viewpoint of a dedicated psychology student who had been schooled in traditional psychological theories and methods. Psychology did not see homosexuality as a sickness, so what could the problem be?

A few years later while teaching an undergraduate class in social psychology and dealing with a section on oppression a male student raised his hand and said (what he thought was a compliment) 'Ms. Potgieter, this section on the different forms of oppression is interesting and important but I want to add that you have no reason to be a lesbian.' My response was to ask 'why, what is your understanding of a lesbian?' Views in the class ranged from 'we do not know' to 'fat white women who can't find men'.

The male student in question was a fairly high profile political activist and it was clear that the issue of sexuality was still an issue that political organisations had not yet started to deal with.

LABELLING AND GAY/LESBIAN IDENTITY

In 1989 I did some work in Khayelitsha, the fastest-growing and largest peri-urban area in Cape Town in which most of the residents live in shacks (Cooper, Mnguni & Harrison, 1992). I came across women who were referred to as 'man-women' (nongayindoda). I asked 'F', a woman I knew fairly well who lived in the area and was involved in political organisation, if these man-women were 'lesbian'. She was hesitant in her response - 'I think they could be that, but here they are not'.

I did not know what to make of the response. This is in keeping with what has been found by Kendall (1995, p. 1) in her study of women in Lesotho:


When I left Lesotho two and a half years later, I hadn't found a single Mosotho who identified herself as a lesbian. However I had found widespread, apparently normative erotic relationships among women in conjunction with the absence of a concept of this behaviour as 'sexual' or as something that might have a name.


Approximately 18 months later I met F again. At the time she was a member of a Cape Town-based gay and lesbian organisation and was trying to 'organise women in the township who were gay, but did not label themselves lesbian or who did not even know that there were other women in the world like them' ('F', personal discussion, July 1992). She later became the assistant researcher for the present research.

After much discussion with F and her partner I realised that there were many women in the township who engaged in affectional relationships with women but did not term themselves 'gay/lesbian' (or use any label, for that matter). I was also struck by what F's partner said to me: 'I was always loving women and maybe everybody or some people knew about me, but now [F] came to organise us and tell the community about us – now the community thinks we have sex like a man and a woman when we only love each other very much'. This is also similar to what Kendall found in Lesotho: she notes that women denied having sex with other women as it was 'impossible'. 'M', whom Kendall gained a lot of her information from, and who, in Western terms, would be labelled 'lesbian', notes 'It's impossible for two women to share the blankets...You can't have sex unless somebody has a *koai* (penis)'

(Kendall, 1995, p. 3). This was exactly what F's partner was saying to me – they do not 'have sex'. She considered sex as something which only happens between a man and a woman.

At this stage I had not yet read Kendall's paper and I had very little theoretical knowledge about how to make sense of what I was hearing. What I did realise though, was that what in Western society is labelled 'homosexuality' might not be labelled as such, or labelled at all, in other societies.

The following comment by Greenberg (1988, p. 484) illustrates that labelling, and thus the construction of identities, differs from one society to another: 

Homosexuality is not a conceptual category everywhere. To us, it connotes a symmetry between male-male and female-female relationships....When used to characterise individuals, it implies that erotic attraction originates in a relatively stable, more or less exclusive attribute of the individual. Usually, it connotes an exclusive orientation: the homosexual is not also a heterosexual; the heterosexual not also homosexual. Most non-Western societies make few of these assumptions. Distinctions of age, gender, and social status loom larger. The sexes are not necessarily conceived symmetrically'. 

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST LESBIANS

F also talked to me about the discrimination and oppression she suffered in the Transkei (where she grew up) when she told her mother and others that she wanted to marry her woman friend. Consequences ranged from her being taken to a sangoma by her mother to be 'healed' so that she could be a girl and not a boy, to the police barging into her house and harassing her for not wanting to be a girl. She spoke about individual police officers who used their power to carry out this invasion because she did not like men. What was also interesting (and once again similar to Kendall), was that her mother was aware of her 'loving women' but as soon as she spoke about marriage, which her mother equated with a male and sex, she was seen to be sick.

Chan-Sam, who labels herself as a black South African but indicates that under apartheid she was classified as 'coloured', also talks about her mother's response. Her mother did not attempt to intervene, but was totally shocked that her eldest daughter had let her down: 'Ek kan dit nie glo nie, nee, jy's my oudste kind, ek kan dit nie glo nie!' (I can't believe it, you're my oldest child) (Chan-Sam, 1993, p. 159). Her mother never spoke to her about it again and she relates how removed she has become from her family.

THE SEXUALITY OF BLACK WOMEN

I then decided that I wanted to do research around black women's sexuality, stemming (partly) from my interest in childhood sexuality and particularly how girl children's sexuality is constructed (see Fredman & Potgieter, 1996; Potgieter & Fredman, 1997). I started

reading broadly in the area of sexuality, especially what psychology had to say about women and sexuality. I found very little about the sexuality of girl children. I also found no South African psychology journal articles which said anything about lesbians, or any writings which documented the lives of black South African lesbians.

I was able to find a 1988 article in the *Journal of Southern African Studies* by Moodie, Ndatshe & Mpande which documented experiences of homosexuality between black men on the gold mines. In 1993 the book *The invisible ghetto* was the first South African 'commercial' publication which attempted to document the lives and experiences of gay and lesbian people in South Africa. This was in the form of poetry, interviews, fiction and personal stories of all gays and lesbians irrespective of class or colour. According to the editors: 'This book is the first of its kind to have emerged in South Africa' (Berman, 1993, p. xi). I had already started initial work on the present research, and this book further convinced me that the research I intended to do was indeed necessary.

GENESIS AND RATIONALE: 'ACADEMIC' PHASE

Once I started reading widely, collecting the data and generally being involved in the research process, the rationale for the present research developed further in a more 'academic' way.

THE SILENCES IN PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

In documenting the trends and silences in psychology in South Africa between 1948 and 1988, Seedat highlights the manner in which 'oppressive discourse historically informed and continues to inform the research agenda, practices and theoretical concerns of many South African psychologists' (Seedat, 1992, p. xvi).

Traditional areas within the discipline such as psychometry, developmental psychology, social psychology and educational psychology have been prioritised as important research areas. Social issues, the psychology of women, the psychology of oppression and human sexuality have received very little attention. The category that received the very least attention is human sexuality – 0,3% (Seedat, 1992).

Although Seedat (1992) does not distinguish between homosexuality and heterosexuality in the South African psychological journals, my reading of the literature indicates that researchers have focused on heterosexuality most of the time, not stating it as such, but working from the premise that this is the only form of human sexuality which exists.

This paucity of research regarding sexuality in general and women's sexuality specifically is almost 'understandable' if one notes the remark by Levett that 'sexuality is traditionally the most taboo aspect of women's condition – there are conventions which preclude aspects of sexuality' (Levett, 1988, p. 10).

In addition, the limited research which exists regarding homosexuality has been biased towards the white male and, where gay women have been the focus of research, the bias has been to document the experiences of white women (Chan, 1989; Greene, 1994; Hill, 1987). Hill says: 'Within the comparatively small amount of published studies on female homosexuality, the samples tend to be exclusively white, predominantly well educated, and upwardly mobile. Thus, in this marginalised area of research, black gay people's experiences and specifically black gay women's experiences have been rendered invisible' (Hill, 1987, p. 215). Chan, Hill and Greene comment mainly on research relating to the experiences of African-American and Asian-American gays and lesbians in the USA.

Berman expresses a similar sentiment as regards the South African context. She states that: 'Apartheid, and the privileges of whites in South Africa, have given disproportionate exposure to the presence of white gay and lesbian community' (Berman, 1993, p. xx). This exposure has not been 'positive exposure', according to her, but has contributed 'to the belief held by many black South Africans that homosexuality is an un-African, white, Western phenomenon' (Berman, 1993, p. xx).

The need to research issues related to black female homosexuality is strongly advocated by others, internationally and in South Africa (Blyth, 1989; Clarke, 1995; Kitzinger, 1987; Peplau, Cochran & Mays, 1997). In suggesting what kind of research needs to be conducted in South Africa, Blyth (1989, p. 285) comments:

'Black' lesbians - particularly 'black African' lesbians - are the most invisible of minorities....But their lives and experiences remain undocumented and invisible and,

until they become visible, they will not be able to demand recognition, or be accepted within any community.

Greene recognises that contemporary academic literature on psychological well-being has recently extended its scrutiny into the part played by, for example, culture, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation on the mental health and service delivery to women. She acknowledges that this has led to academic psychology (in North America) scrutinising the repercussions which racism, sexism and heterosexist bias have on the psychological development of black women. She is concerned that 'lesbian women of colour, however, often still find themselves and their concerns invisible in the scholarly research of both women of colour and of lesbians' (Greene, 1994, p. 389).

Researchers also caution that it is important to note the differences, mainly as a result of socio-political conditions, between the experiences of black and white lesbians (Berman, 1993; Blyth, 1989; Clarke, 1995; Cornwell, 1983; Greene, 1994; Lorde, 1984; Swigonski, 1995).

Lorde (1984), Greene (1994) and Clarke (1995) all emphasise that both race and gender are relevant to the lives of black lesbians. Lorde highlights the difficulty of possessing a number of 'oppressed' identities: 'of.... constantly being encouraged to pluck some one aspect of yourself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying other parts of the self' (Lorde, 1984, p. 120).

Noting the differences, it is imperative to note that while there is no one uniform gay or lesbian experience, there is no singular black gay or lesbian experience either. Nevertheless despite their heterogeneity, black people in South Africa, particularly black women, share a common oppression as a result of apartheid.

Thus black lesbians similarly share many commonalities as a function of race, class, gender and sexual orientation in an environment that has historically contributed to the oppression of all women (because of gender) and black women (because of their race).

BLACK, GAY AND AFRICAN: A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS?

In South Africa, Section 9 of the Constitution prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. It could thus be argued that Cornwell's (1983) sentiment that it would be difficult to imagine anyone more oppressed than the black lesbian in America is not presently relevant in South Africa. In addition, certain leaders of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) have come out in support of lesbian and gay rights. ANC politician Reverend Makhenkisi Stofile, current premier of the Eastern Cape, is on record as saying: 'We want people of South Africa to see that human interaction cannot be forced into narrow, religious, ceremonial relationships. There are other valid forms of partnership than the traditional, Christian heterosexual marriage.... If we are talking about a rainbow nation, we must also accept rainbow norms'(public meeting, 1994).

Recently, Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu has also voiced public support for gay and lesbian rights:

I have found this official position of the church illogical, irrational and frankly un-Christlike, totally untenable. Our church [the Church of the Province of South Africa] teaches that sexual orientation is morally neutral, neither good nor bad. What the church regards as morally reprehensible is homosexual activity, specifically genital activity, it then advises gays and lesbian persons to be celibate. Now this begs many questions.....how can we in all conscience want to exclude a whole segment of humankind from this life-enhancing experienceIf the church, after the victory over apartheid, is looking for a worthy moral crusade, then this is it: the fight against homophobia and heterosexism (foreword to Germond & de Gruchy, 1997).

Tutu has also called for the ordination of practising homosexuals (Cape Times, 26 April 1996).

This public 'pro-gay' discourse by certain politicians and ministers like Tutu, Germond and Corbett (see Germond & de Gruchy, 1997) exists alongside public discourse (by politicians and Christian church ministers) which contradicts or challenges the 'pro-gay' discourse.

In this respect it is important to note the argument that was put forward by George Bizos, a leading human rights lawyer, in the defence of Winnie Mandela. Mandela was accused of murdering a youth activist. Her defence argued that she had in fact attempted to rescue the youth from his involvement with a white Methodist minister and used homophobic rhetoric linking paedophilia to gay sexual orientation. A detailed discussion of the trial and its nuances is beyond the scope of this document – the reader is referred to Holmes (1994) for more information. According to Holmes (1994) the discourse of public homosexuality used

by the defence in this visible trial put forward the argument that gay and lesbian sexual orientation is not found in black culture per se, but rather that the existence of black gay men and lesbians can be explained by these people having been 'tainted' by homosexuality from 'white culture'. The discourse of homosexuality being un-African has also been constructed by two prominent African politicians, namely former Pan Africanist Congress politician Khoisan X (previously known as Benny Alexander) and Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe.

In an interview with the Cape Town-based newspaper South, X was quoted as follows: 'Homosexuality is un-African. It is part of the spin off of the capitalist system. We should not take the European leftist position on the matter. It should be considered as a whole from our own Afrocentric position' (South, 13-17 June 1992).

Mugabe has not been as 'subtle' in his public discourse regarding homosexuality. He has equated homosexuality with immorality, condemning it as 'an abhorrent Western import' and has said he finds it 'extremely outrageous and repugnant that such immoral and repulsive organisations [as that of homosexuals] should have any advocates' (Mail & Guardian, 4-10 August 1995).

Although the Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, none of the existing laws which criminalise homosexuality have been removed from the statute books. The Minister of Justice is presently opposing an application by the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality, supported by the Human Rights Commission, challenging the constitutional basis of certain statutes and common laws which criminalise consensual

homosexual acts (Cape Times, September 1997). The coalition has argued that the laws are in direct violation of sections of the Constitution protecting human dignity, privacy, freedom of association and control over one's body. A person representing the justice minister is on record as saying 'the minister is not opposed to gays and lesbians practising their constitutional rights, but has opposed the application to highlight some of the legal implications that may arise' (Cape Times, September, 1997). What these implications are, have not been explained, but another official has previously indicated that the issue and the concern of the ministry has to do with safeguarding children's rights and 'striking a balance between the public and the gay community'. This position, implying that gays and lesbians are child abusers while other people are not, is not in keeping with the sentiment of the Constitution.

These examples suggest that there are multiple public discourses on homosexuality. This thesis will explore how black lesbians may position themselves (in multiple ways) to the multiple and varied dominant discourses on homosexuality.

At this stage it is necessary to locate the theoretical premise of the dissertation. In order to meet this aim it is imperative that certain 'controversial' issues and debates regarding the theoretical paradigm are raised, debated and possibly clarified. These, as well as other issues are addressed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

This thesis is located within a feminist social constructionist framework. The data is gathered using a qualitative method and is analyzed qualitatively using discourse analysis.

For the purpose of clarity this chapter is divided into four sections. The first section locates the thesis theoretically by focusing on the controversy regarding essentialism and social constructionism in respect of human sexuality, specifically homosexuality. In the discussion a specific focus on 'how' researchers and theorists working within a social constructionist paradigm would approach sexuality and lesbianism is regularly referred to. The section also provides a general discussion on both essentialism and social constructionism and then focuses on the appropriateness of these perspectives for researching issues relating to sexuality. Implicit in this discussion is the rationale for the present research being based within a social constructionist framework.

The second section focuses on the social construction of the lesbian or lesbianism or, as Weeks phrases it, 'the history and invention of the lesbian and lesbian identity' (Weeks, 1986, p. 31). Here a brief history of the social construction of this category will be provided. Secondly it will be illustrated that the lesbian or lesbianism is a product of many influences and social interventions – it does not exist outside of history, but is a historical product (Kitzinger, 1987; Weeks, 1986, 1987).

The third section of the chapter addresses how feminists have constructed or 'defined' the lesbian. Because the term 'discourse' has been used loosely and frequently in the previous chapter and crops up in the present chapter as well, a discussion on discourse and discourse analysis has also been included.

ESSENTIALIST AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST PERSPECTIVES ON SEXUALITY

Being 'an essentialist' is out of date – a label that not many would want to be associated with (Vance, 1989, p. 14). However she makes a very appropriate point by recognising that 'we have all been brought up to think about sexuality in essentialist ways'.

Essentialism usually takes various approaches to the study of sexuality. General beliefs held by essentialists would be that human behaviour is natural. They would further argue that human behaviour is predetermined by genetic, biological or physical mechanisms and therefore fixed and not subject to change (Szesnat, 1997; Vance, 1989). Essentialists further hold that human behaviours which are similar in form are the same across time and culture. These behaviours are a consequence of human drives, instincts or tendencies. As Szesnat (1997) points out, human beings would, in the essentialist view, have an in-built sexual essence of being. This internal essence would include a natural predisposition to a particular sexual orientation, which would be shaped differently by various material circumstances (environments), which accounts for the variety of sexual behaviours in different societies.

Essentialists would generally assume that the categories 'homosexual' or 'heterosexual' are indicative of intrinsic differences within the individual. They would view homosexuality as a human attribute which varies from one person to another and from one culture to another. However, it is an intrinsic quality, just as heterosexuality is an intrinsic quality. Of relevance to this argument is the issue of sexual identity or orientation. Essentialists would argue that sexuality (homosexual or heterosexual) is part of the innermost core of being human and thus a 'given' sexual identity shapes who we are.

As regards the present day concept of sexual orientation, essentialist theorists would most likely look for culture-independent, objective and intrinsic properties which 'determine' sexual orientation. The assumption would be that the categories of 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual' are reflective of real intrinsic differences (Epstein, 1987). To take this argument to its logical conclusion would be to view sexuality as a 'natural' part of the innermost core of human beings. What is also viewed as given in the latter type of perspective is the notion of a sexual identity which supposedly shapes 'what we really are' (Weeks, 1986, 1987).

Weeks, theorising from a social constructionist perspective has a different view on sexuality. He states that 'identity is not a destiny but a choice' (1987, p.46). However, writers on social constructionism have used the term in various ways (Vance, 1989). It is not a unitary and singular approach and not all writers share the same paradigm. As Vance (1989, p. 19) points out, social constructionists 'show a gradual development of the ability to imagine that sexuality is constructed'. She uses the work of Katz (1976) to

illustrate that there are different degrees of social constructionism. For example, in his earlier work, Katz documented the lives of 'gays' and 'lesbians' in earlier centuries. His work acknowledged that sexual acts like sodomy reported in documents of the 17th century might not be equivalent to present-day homosexuality, but labelled same-sex acts of previous centuries as evidence of 'gay' or 'lesbian' persons. In his later work these 'sexual' acts were not evidence of gay or lesbian persons but were 'jumping-off points for a whole series of questions about the meanings of these acts to the people who engaged in them and to the culture and time in which they lived' (Katz, 1983).

This example illustrates that there are various degrees of social construction, and that work which is labelled as social constructionist may have elements of essentialism. Vance (1989) states that this is evidenced in the work of many others. I have personally co-authored an article and a chapter in a book on childhood sexuality from a social constructionist perspective. However, in looking at it again, I see elements which radical social constructionists would label 'essentialist'. (See Fredman & Potgieter, 1996 and Potgieter & Fredman, 1997.)

The 'radical' constructionist theory argues that there is no essential, undifferentiated sexual impulse, sex drive or lust which resides in the body due to physiological functioning and sensation. Sexual impulses itself is constructed by culture and history. In this case, an important constructionist question concerns the origins of these impulses, since they are no longer assumed to be intrinsic or, perhaps, even necessary.

This position contrasts sharply with more middle-ground constructionist theory (see Fredman & Potgieter, 1996 and Katz, 1976) which implicitly accepts an inherent sexual impulse which is then constructed in terms of acts, identity, community and object choice. The contrasts between middle ground and radical positions makes it evident that constructionists may well have arguments with each other, as well as with essentialists. Each degree of social construction points to different questions and assumptions, possibly to different methods, and perhaps to different answers.

Vance (1989) however suggests that certain characteristics capture what we could term the minimum conditions of social constructionism or alternatively points of departure which are generally agreed on by social constructionists. I follow Vance's suggestions in the following section and also draw on issues raised by Weeks (1986; 1987; 1990).

In general, the social constructionist view on sexuality maintains that sexuality is a social construct. Sexuality is not an independent category, objectively definable in every cultural and historical context. Weeks (1987) points out that this perspective sees sexuality as intricately related to society and social relations.

Categories and concepts employed in different cultures (such as sexuality, love and desire) are thus not objective, universal notions, but represent socio-cultural attempts to organise human experience. Social relations in all their diversity (even within a single culture) significantly shape the human experience, organisation and perception of sexuality. However, as Weeks argues, this is a very complex process, far from a

simplistic 'society moulds sexuality' idea. For the social constructionist there is no necessary or 'given' relationship between a particular pattern of sexual behaviour and the taking on of a particular pattern of sexual identity...what is crucial is the meaning that individuals ascribe to their feelings, activity and relationships.(See Vance, 1989; Gergen, 1985; Weeks, 1986;1987).

The issue of social construction and biology is a point that is raised regularly. The social constructionists do not place primary importance on biology in their understanding of sexuality. However, the importance of biology is not completely denied – it provides the preconditions for human sexuality, but it does not cause patterns of sexual life.

Social constructionism suggests that a critical position be taken regarding the 'taken for granted' ways of viewing and understanding the world. It challenges the idea that conventional knowledge and understanding is based upon an objective, unbiased observation of the world. It therefore challenges positivism and empiricism in traditional social science research. It also challenges the assumption held by positivists that the nature of the world can be revealed by observation so what exists is what we perceive to exist. Social constructionism is ever suspicious of the assumptions about how the world appears to be. This means that the categories and divisions with which human beings apprehend the world do not necessarily refer to 'real' divisions. For example, social constructionists would argue that just because some people are classified or labelled 'homosexual' and others 'heterosexual' does not mean that this is a reflection of naturally-occurring categories (Kitinger,1987; Vance, 1989; Weeks, 1986; 1987).

Social constructionism negates the idea that knowledge is a direct perception of reality. All forms of knowledge are culturally and historically relative and the notion of the 'truth' becomes problematic (Burr, 1995; Vance, 1989; Weeks, 1986,1987). There is thus no concept as 'an objective fact'. For example the 'fact' that homosexuals are sick or sinners or, alternatively, that they are a third sex, are all 'facts' which are culturally and historically specific. Since the world, including people in the world, is the product of social processes, a tenet of social constructionism is that there are no 'essences' inside people that make them what they are. Thus there are no 'essences' inside lesbians which lead to 'lesbianism'.

Social constructionists also point out that knowledge or 'facts' or 'truth' go together with social action. Put differently, the varied and multiple ways in which knowledge is constructed lends itself to different forms of action from the particular society. For example, a society which sees female homosexuality as a sin and perhaps a crime, would treat female homosexuals differently to a society which views homosexuality as a sickness. The social action appropriate to the 'homosexuality as sin and crime' viewpoint would be to convince homosexuals that they should confess to God and, if they do not, throw them in jail. They are thus responsible for their actions. The social action appropriate to 'homosexuality as a sickness' would be to offer medical treatment, not to punish homosexuals for actions which they are not in control of. Different constructions of the world would therefore sustain some patterns of social action and exclude others.

Social constructionists focus on everyday interactions between persons and see these as actively contributing to forms of knowledge which are often taken for granted. Thus,

when people talk to each other, the world is constructed. Language is seen as a form of action. It is therefore argued that when the world is constructed through language (discourse) this has an effect on the identity of people (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1985; Weeks, 1986; 1989).

Thus, because 'constructions' happen all the time, the sense of identity that people have is constantly being contested and validated through language.

As Gergen (1985, p. 266) points out, the 'social constructionist inquiry is principally concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live'.

A relevant question to the preceding discussion has been raised by Durrheim (1997, p. 181):

What in short, does social constructionism propose to psychology as a science? ... social constructionist account of meaning demands an alternative approach to psychological research. The aim of the investigation cannot be truth....in moving from an empiricist to a social constructionist epistemology, psychological researchers must also reject the mechanistic, dualistic, and individualistic understanding of their object of study.

A social constructionist perspective thus has implications for the way in which the world is viewed and made sense of, something which often affects the way in which research is conducted.

HOW WOULD SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM PROBLEMATISE LESBIANISM?

The focus of this research on female homosexuality already implies the notion that there is indeed 'a sexuality'. However, a radical social constructionist perspective would not assume that there is 'a sexuality' and, following from this position, it would not assume that a sexuality is natural, albeit socially constructed. In addition, the fact that different cultures do not have a homogenous understanding of what 'sexual' or 'sexuality' is, has implications for the present research. The question could thus be posed: 'how, from a social constructionist perspective, would lesbianism be problematised?' Or alternatively from a social constructionist perspective more appropriate questions would be: 'what is sexuality', 'why is it so important', 'why accord it a particular status?'

These are issues which have been raised very often by writers who could be seen as working from a feminist social constructionist framework. (See Blyth, 1989; Kitzinger, 1987; Vance; 1984).

A range of feminists have, for example, questioned the centrality given to genital sexuality in defining the 'erotic' content of women's relationships.

Many have tried to unpack at what point the existence or the need for intimate bonds between women (and this did not necessarily mean genital contact) became eroticised and a basis for lesbian identity (Faderman, 1978; 1981; Jeffreys, 1985; 1989).

Hence Faderman (1981) identifies the 'focus of the sexual' inherent in most studies of the subject as a product of the modern medical model that limits a vast spectrum of emotions to a single focus – the sexual. She also questions the validity of the notion that lesbian history is restricted to women who 'had sex', however that is to be defined by other women. Consequently she defines the term 'lesbian' as one describing 'a relationship in which two women's strongest emotions and affections are directed toward each other. (For a more detailed discussion as to 'how' feminists have defined lesbian see the appropriate section in this chapter).

A question that has often been posed in relation to the social constructionist perspective is how the 'history' of 'gays' and 'lesbians' has been documented. Critics of social constructionism have at times argued that social constructionism runs the risk of depriving gays, lesbians and women (and other minorities) from a history. This history could for example be used to support campaigns which could secure rights for the said group. Activists have often used essentialist arguments in their political campaigns (Weeks, 1977; 1981; 1985) because using social constructionist arguments would in a sense 'eliminate' their history and thus not provide supportive arguments for securing political gains.

Recently a number of theorists have begun to reflect on the usefulness of the essentialist-social constructionist debate while continuing to be anti-essentialist. The following sentiment expressed by Vance (1989, p.15) is indeed a valid one:

Social constructionism is not a dogma, a religion, or an article of faith. If and when in the course of these discussions it becomes reified, its value is lost. Social construction theory does not predict a particular answer: whether something we call 'gay identity' existed in the 17th or 19th century, in London or in Polynesia, or whether 19th century female romantic friendships or crossing-women are properly called 'lesbian', is a matter for empirical examination. Contemporary gay identity might exist in other times and cultures or it might not; its construction could be the same as we know it know, or radically different.

In line with Vance's sentiment, it could be argued that ontologically and aetologically, a social constructionist approach might in the future be demonstrated to be an inadequate tool for analysis. However the answer would not be to fall back on an essentialist perspective of analysis.

I believe that a social constructionist perspective is the most appropriate as it safeguards against the universalising ideology implicit in essentialist perspectives. In addition, social construction theory offers many possibilities in the theorizing about sexuality (Vance, 1989; Kitzinger, 1987; Weeks 1985; 1986; 1987;).

In conclusion, the following point is appropriate: 'Social construction theory strives for uncertainty through questioning assumptions rather than seeking closure. We need to tolerate ambiguity and fluidity. The future is less closed than we feared, but perhaps more open than we hoped' (Vance, 1989, p. 30).

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE LESBIAN

Regarding lesbianism, the term, as well as the 'sexualised lesbian identity', was first used towards the end of the nineteenth century to stigmatise certain behaviour (Wolfe & Penelope, 1993). The latter writers argue that the reason for labelling this behaviour was to control women and particularly their sexuality. Thus behaviour that had always taken place was now branded with negative connotations. Faderman (1981) and Jeffreys (1985) suggest that this labelling came about at this particular point in history because of the increasing possibility that women could live independently of men. They further argue that this was as a result of the nineteenth-century women's liberation movement that threatened male hegemony and the institution of marriage that bound women to men in mandatory heterosexuality. As (Faderman, 1981, p. 237) asserts: 'If they [women] gained all the freedom that feminists agitated for, what would attract them to marriage? Not sex drive, since women were not acknowledged to have one.' For the male psyches threatened by economically independent and politically active women, the sexology theories which labelled sexual behaviour emerged at a convenient time to popularise arguments that a woman's desire for independence meant that she was not a 'real' woman, she was in fact a lesbian (Faderman, 1981).

A consequence of this negative labelling was that space was created for the law, the medical professions, religion, the media and culture to control women (Faderman, 1981; Wolfe & Penelope, 1993). Another consequence of the label was a radical alteration of public discourse around sexuality. Wolfe & Penelope (1993) assert that this labelling coincided with the first wave of women's liberation. Women were 'getting out of control', challenging patriarchy and thus needed to be controlled.

Faderman (1981) further suggests that the development of the sexualised lesbian identity constituted a concerted effort on the part of sexologists to divide women, thus severing emotional and affectional bonds which bind all women against men. Thus, the sexologists were applying a 'divide and rule' strategy.

Weeks (1986;1989), however, does not agree totally with Faderman's viewpoint about the reason for the social shifts or what these social shifts reflected. He argues that the emergence of homosexual identities was a product of struggle against prevailing norms. He asserts that sexologists were confronted by a new reality: people appearing in courts for certain behaviour (homosexual activity), and these people presenting themselves to the sexologists 'for help, largely as a result of a new politically motivated zeal to control or manifestations of sexual desire' (Weeks, 1986, p. 34). The definition of homosexuality (or lesbianism) as a 'distinct perversion' was an endeavour to, in some way, deal with the new reality. According to Weeks, it 'produced an inevitable response in the urge to self-definition' (Weeks, 1986, p.34).

What is clear from this discussion is that, at a particular point in Western history, sexual activity was beginning to define a certain type of individual (the lesbian, the gay, the bisexual and so on). In addition, people were starting to define their sexuality in terms of these categories.

EXCLUSION AND INCLUSION IN THE CATEGORY 'LESBIAN'

Western definitions of 'the homosexual' or 'the lesbian' generally fall into two categories: those which refer primarily to overt sexual relationships, and those which include desires and emotions.

Defining both male and female homosexuality in terms of sexual activity between people of the same sex is problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, in many societies, people engage in same-sex activity without assuming a gay or lesbian identity (Kendall, 1995; Gay, 1985; Greenberg, 1988). These people engage in erotic activity with other people of the same sex without using a label to classify their behaviour. In certain parts of the world, homosexuality is institutionalised (See Devereux, 1937; Evans-Pritchard, 1970; Whitehead, 1981). For example, among the Swahili people in Mombasa, a high percentage of men and women live as homosexuals at some time during their lives (Shepherd, 1987). Another example is in New Guinea among the Sambia. In this society boys traditionally have sexual relations with older boys who take on the role of the active partner. In late adolescence roles are reversed and the (now) older adolescents become the active partners. This behaviour supposedly ends when these males marry and father children (Herdt, 1981). Clarke (1981, p. 129) remarks: "There is no one kind of lesbian,

no one kind of lesbian behaviour, and no one kind of lesbian relationship...Not all women who are involved in sexual-emotional relationships with women call themselves lesbians or identify with any particular lesbian community'.

What is significant as regards the previous examples is that the persons involved do not assume a gay or lesbian identity. This is also similar to the research conducted in Lesotho by Kendall (1995) which has been referred to in Chapter One.

Classifying lesbians purely by their engagement in same-sex erotic activity is assuming that a lesbian has 'something' (perhaps an instinct or inner characteristic) which makes her lesbian without her even knowing it (Kitzinger, 1987; Wolfe & Penelope, 1993).

In her interviews with college women, Golden (1987) found that many women identify as lesbian although they had been, or were currently involved in, a heterosexual alliance. In addition Weeks (1986; 1987) points out that certain individuals identify as gay or lesbian, are part of the gay and lesbian community, yet abstain from homosexual erotic activity. This again illustrates that the presence or absence of 'homosexual behaviour' does not automatically correspond to an identity.

Generally it is assumed that persons can be slotted into certain sexual compartments: heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual and asexual. It is assumed that people are heterosexual and, if not, they will be slotted into the homosexual group. According to Golden (1987), when a person's conduct corresponds to one of these categories, it is assumed that the individual embraces a sexual identity to match or complement the

behaviour. In addition, it is assumed that a person who engages in heterosexual sexual behaviour will assume a heterosexual identity – that is, the person would define herself as heterosexual. The same correlation between homosexual behaviour and identity is assumed.

Certain writers caution that the relationship between sexual behaviour and sexual identity is not simple. Sexuality may be one variable of an identity that is not static, but rather fluid and variable (Golden, 1987; Weeks, 1987).

It should be clear that, in keeping with the notion that the category of lesbian is socially constructed in relation to the specific historical conditions, no consensus about the 'exact' definition of a lesbian is possible. The discussion about how and why certain women have been excluded from the category 'lesbian' is further explored in the methodology chapter.

HOW FEMINISTS HAVE "DEFINED" LESBIANS

Given that feminists are not a homogenous grouping, they have 'defined' the lesbian in various ways. Certain white Western feminists identify lesbians across various cultures and time-periods as 'women who love women' (Cavin, 1985; Faderman, 1985; Hoagland & Penelope, 1988; Rich, 1979).

Rich (1979, p. 225) states 'Before any kind of feminist movement existed, or could exist, lesbians existed: women who love women, who refused to comply with behaviour demanded of women'. African-American feminists have also drawn on the 'women who

love women' construction of the lesbian (see Cornwell, 1981; Lorde, 1984;1988). Lorde (1988, p.248) states: 'When I say I am a Black Lesbian, I mean I am a woman whose primary focus of loving, physical as well as emotional, is directed to women'.

Another perspective popularised by Adrienne Rich proposes that instead of using the term 'lesbianism', thought should be given to a 'lesbian continuum'. Highlighting the fact that, transculturally and transhistorically, women have been fundamentally committed to other women in diverse ways, she uses the term 'lesbian continuum' to allude to these experiences (Rich, 1980).

According to Rich, a woman who has had, or who 'desires commitment to women' is merely in a particular place along a continuum. By viewing lesbianism in this way, a wider range of primary intensity can be included than would be possible with a restricted definition which includes only sexual activity. For Rich a woman does not have to define or identify herself as lesbian in order to be considered to be one. By defining lesbianism as primary intensity between women, she is providing space for women from previous historical periods to be considered as lesbians even though, at the time, there may have been no cultural conception of lesbianism (Rich, 1980; 1984). This viewpoint has not been without its critics.

Ferguson et al (1981) have, for example, asserted that defining lesbianism in this way erroneously overlooks the significance of sexual feelings and behaviour. Furthermore, she argues that it is not meaningful to talk about a woman as a lesbian if she doesn't acknowledge herself to be one. She advises that, because before the twentieth century

there was no cultural conception of lesbianism, one cannot and should not attempt to consider women to be lesbian if they did not consider themselves as such.

Ferguson (1982, p. 155) offers the following alternative definition: 'A lesbian is a woman who sees herself as centrally involved with a community of self-identified lesbians, whose sexual and erotic-emotional ties are primarily with women, and who is herself a self identified lesbian'. Without de-emphasising the role of sexual behaviour, she argues that her definition includes both celibate and bisexual women as lesbians, as long as they identify themselves as lesbian.

Clarke (1981, p. 128), writing as an African-American, states: 'I for one identify a woman as a lesbian who says she is'. Greene, who has written extensively on issues affecting lesbians of colour, says 'those who consider that their primary romantic/sexual attractions are to women are considered lesbian' (1984, p.389). Lorde (1988, p. 248) states: 'When I say I am a Black Lesbian, I mean that I am a woman whose primary focus of loving, physical as well as emotional, is directed to women'.

An approach developed by Grahn (1984) purports that gayness is linked to a universal gay social role. This view holds that women who reverse societal accepted gender roles - 'mannish' women and those who cross-dress - are examples of lesbians. She believes that societies where such options are institutionalised for men and women, for example, in Native American cultures, are more 'permissive' towards homosexuality.

This idea of lesbianism is similar to that of Wittig (1984). In her essay *One is not born a woman*, she argues that the potentiality of lesbianism is a challenge to the category 'woman' as it is constructed by structures and systems of compulsory heterosexuality. Lesbian as a category thus challenges the essentialism of the belief in the universal masculine versus the universal feminine. However, although it challenges heterosexuality, it does not have a fixed content in itself.

Wittig (1990) has been criticised by Ferguson for the following reasons:

- * The notion that lesbian is used in a normatively negative way implies that it does have a denotation in Western society and that lesbians are not 'invisible' members of society
- * While agreeing that Wittig might be correct in arguing that compulsory heterosexuality reinforces patriarchy by advancing a gender dualism that makes the concept of lesbian a challenge to the concept of woman, this might not be relevant to 'other historical types of patriarchy, compulsory heterosexuality and gender dualism'.

She argues that the Native American culture which has forms of institutionalised homosexuality does not have concepts that are equivalent to Western concepts of lesbian or gay. 'If so, any deconstructive and hence patriarchy-challenging use of that concept in our society does not necessarily carry over to those and other non-Western societies' (Ferguson, 1990, p. 74).

Another group of feminists argue that 'lesbian' is an identity which is not simply reducible to homosexual sexual practices. Lesbians thus need to 'come out', identify as lesbians and work actively against heterosexism and patriarchy (Jeffreys, 1990;1993; Kitzinger, 1987). It could be argued that one of the limitations of this approach is that it defines out of existence those women whose sexual and affectional preferences are for other women but who do not identify as lesbians.

Zimmerman (1993) suggests that one way of answering this question would be to decide how inclusively or exclusively lesbianism is defined. Here it is suggested that women who define themselves as lesbian are lesbian, that is, self identification will decide the issue. Others also suggest that this identifying title be confined to women who acknowledge that their sexual experience is predominantly with other women, although they might not use the word 'lesbian' to define themselves. This would prevent women who engage in heterosexual activity from being included, as well as men who, for whatever reason, might label themselves as lesbian.

In Southern Africa, especially with regard to black women, the issue of self-identified lesbian communities and self-identified lesbians is a bit more complicated (see Gay, 1985; Kendall, 1995). Firstly, many black lesbians in Southern Africa are not part of 'self-identified lesbian communities' and, secondly, many do not label themselves 'lesbian' although the majority of their sexual and emotional experiences are with women.

Feminists, including Kitzinger (1987), Ferguson (1990) and Vance (1989) have debated the merits and shortcomings of the inclination in gay politics and research since the early 1970s to affirm a distinct gay and lesbian identity.

While acknowledging that there is some danger of falling into a kind of essentialist trap because of the tendency of identity politics and research to stress a fixed pathway to positive identity formation at the expense of a more pluralistic conception of the homosexual experience, they also acknowledge that the concern with gay identity is justified because it is both a political and a personal issue.

It is important for certain groups of people to define themselves as this may be the only way for their voices to be heard. This is especially important for groups that are oppressed or discriminated against, as history has shown that a collective group identity and political strategy has contributed to certain victories for dominated groups.

Two things are clear: the question 'who is lesbian?' is not one that can be resolved in absolute terms (especially from a social constructionist point of view), and feminists have not achieved consensus on the issue.

DISCOURSE AND DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

People working from a social constructionist framework often use certain terms that have come to be associated with their work. Two of these terms, namely 'discourse' and 'discourse analysis', have cropped up increasingly in the work of people who work from

a social constructionist perspective (Burr, 1995). However, according to Burr, these terms have rather different meanings depending upon the theoretical tradition the writers are using, and this, in turn, depends upon the particular issue the writer needs to address.

Discourse analysis has been enthusiastically adopted by many social constructionists as an approach to research. However, as Burr (1995) points out, it is necessary to note that a social constructionist position does not necessarily mean that one must use a discourse analytical approach or that to use a discourse analytical approach one must be a social constructionist. Social constructionists may validly use other qualitative or even quantitative methods in their research. And as Burman & Parker (1993) observe, researchers who are not social constructionists may discover that they have been doing discourse analysis without labelling it as such.

Durrheim, argues that discourse analysis is an appropriate social constructionist methodology as it deals with the problem of empiricist science and empiricist psychology: 'By rejecting truth, representation, and objectivity and the idea that meaning is derived from individual sensory experiences or mental operations, discourse analysts have a different conception of what a psychological investigation is and what it aims to do' (Durrheim, 1997, p. 181).

It is thus appropriate to engage in discussion around both discourse and discourse analysis. However, before addressing the question 'what is discourse and what are its characteristics?', a digression is necessary in order to contextualise and focus the discussion.

FOCUSING THE DISCUSSION ON DISCOURSE

In the present study, the definition of 'discourse' is in keeping with that of Thompson (1994, p. 133): 'language realised in speech or in writing'.

Certain writers like Van Dijk (1987, 1991) and Duncan (1993) point out that it is through discourse produced and disseminated by the media, academia, families and so on that racism, for example, is justified. In South Africa and in America racism was not only justified, but legalised. Essentially what Thompson (1984) terms 'relations of domination' are produced through discourse.

Duncan (1993, p. 53) points out that 'quite a lot of research has thus far gone into the study of 'racist' discourse (that is, discourse which espouses the notion of racial differences, superiority and inferiority),... not much research has been conducted on people's discourses on racism'. He further points out that very little research has been conducted on the 'meanings' given to (or discourses on) racism.

In terms of this dissertation, the question at this stage is 'how does this impact on the present study?' A premise of the study is that discourse produced by a group of black lesbians both reflects and challenges the discourses on homosexuality by the dominant groups (for example, the authorities, the law and academics). In the same way that studies on racism have focused on 'racist' discourses, research on homosexuality has focused on 'homophobic' discourses (for instance, discourse which advocates the idea that homosexuality is a sickness, homosexuals have smaller brains, and so on). Academic

research has not accounted for the way in which people (both lesbians/gays and others) represent, write or speak about homosexuality. Put differently, research has not focused on the ways which the dominated as well as the dominant groups represent, write and speak about homosexuality – academics have not accounted for the 'meanings', constructions or discourses on homosexuality.

One of the aims of the present research is thus to explore the discourse on homosexuality produced by certain dominant groups as well as by a group of black lesbians.

ASPECTS OF DISCOURSE

The previous section's definition of discourse as language realised in speech and writing is appropriate, but a number of writers indicate that this is not all. Parker (1992a, p. 5) circumspectly provides a working definition of discourse as 'a system of statements which constructs an object'. Burr (1995) remarks that it is extremely difficult to provide a 'watertight' definition of discourse: 'a discourse refers to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images that in some way produce a particular version of events'.

Discourses regarding what is lesbian or lesbianism have been constructed by psychology, the law and other groupings as illustrated in the next chapter. The things that people say or write are examples of discourses. However, the same word, phrase, or expression may be used in a number of different discourses of different individuals or groupings, each contributing to a different narrative. Duncan (1993) explains this point when he illustrates how, because of the creative use, the shifting nature and multiple meanings of phrases

and words such as 'safeguarding the character of each racial group'; 'democracy', and 'peace', apartheid was justified. As he continues 'This juxtaposition of words which, in the South African context, have over the years acquired a predominantly negative character, for example words like 'race' and 'plural', with words which have predominantly positive or at least, neutral connotations, for example 'peace', 'democracy' and 'character', has enabled ruling class discourse not only to justify, but also to dissimulate, the relations of domination which it sought to maintain' (Duncan, 1993, p.55-6). Thompson (1984) remarks that it is this creativity with which discourse is produced and used, as well as the multiple meanings of words, which contributes to the functioning of dominant groupings' ideologies like racism.

Thus, although discourse differs from one group to another, there are no natural boundaries (MacDonnell, 1987). Discourses of different groups often reflect similar words or phrases. Consider in this regard, for example, the term 'dykes' referring to lesbians. This term was initially used in a derogatory manner. Certain groups of lesbians now use the term to refer to themselves (see, for example, Trebilcot, 1990). It is argued that they, as a group, have 'reclaimed' the word and they use it in a positive sense. Similarly, words such as '*moffie*' and 'queer', initially derogatory terms for gay men, have also been reclaimed. In spite of this, these words are still used by dominant groupings in a derogatory manner.

Essed (1987) is another writer who makes the point that, although the discourse of the 'dominant' and 'dominated' might be similar, this does not mean that the intention is the same. Given that the discourse of both groups is sometimes similar, the following statement is appropriate:

The material character of meaning does not lie in its being determined by linguistic elements (signifiers). Nor does the meaning of a word exist 'in itself'. Instead, meaning exists antagonistically – it comes from positions in struggle, so that 'words' change their meaning according to the positions from which they are used (Essed, 1987, p. 47).

DISCOURSE, POWER AND RESISTANCE

It is thus clear that discourse is not merely an instrument of communication, but is linked to power. The relationship between power, discourse and resistance has been given a lot of attention by the French philosopher Foucault who was also a psychologist (Burr, 1995). The discussion which follows draws on the work of Foucault (1972; 1976; 1979) as well as interpretations of Foucault by Burr (1995) and Fillingham (1993).

Foucault pointed out that as discourse is permeated with power, different groups have different power to entrench their discourse. For him, power is not something which some people have and others are deprived of, but rather it is an effect of discourse. To define the world or people in a way that allows you to do certain things is to exercise power. When we represent or construct 'something' in a particular way, we are in fact producing

a particular 'knowledge' which in a sense 'has power'. For example if we construe lesbians as women who hate men and live in separate communities and those who like men and interact with them on a daily basis but merely have intimate relationships with women because 'she was born that way' - we are producing a particular 'knowledge' and creating a power inequality 'within' the group (lesbians). Foucault would thus see this 'knowledge' as power - the power to define others.

As there are always a number of discourses operating around a particular event, each possibly having an alternative view, it follows that the dominant or prevailing discourse is constantly being challenged and resisted. Power and resistance are two sides of the same coin - the power which is implicit in a particular discourse is only apparent from the resistance implicit in another.

Any version of events has the potential to become entrenched in social practices, for acting in a particular way, and for marginalising alternative positions. According to Foucault (1972;1979) power is exercised by drawing upon discourses which allow our discourse to be presented in a favourable light.

Power does not reside in a particular group or institution (for example, the law, men, and others) but in fact resides 'everywhere'. A consequence of this position is that power is available to all persons and 'exercising' this power can be used to change ourselves and consequently our lives (Burr, 1995; Foucault, 1979). (Foucault, 1972;1979) also argues that in recent history there has been a shift from sovereign power to disciplinary power. With sovereign power the individual is controlled mainly by the sovereign - essentially by

force. However, disciplinary power has the effect of individuals controlling and monitoring themselves; and being monitored and controlled by willingly subjecting themselves to the control or scrutiny of experts (for example, psychologists).

Essentially 'controlling' is synonymous with being 'normal', operating as society expects people to. As Burr (1995, p. 67) comments: 'this is essentially what we mean today by 'self discipline'.

An important point raised in the above section is that the discourses which provide structure to people's lives in present day western society are a form of social control. However, they are not recognised as such. Taking the point to its logical conclusion, if people were aware that they were being controlled, they would resist. Foucault saw this as central to the way power functions: 'Power is tolerable only on condition that it masks a substantial part of itself' (Foucault, 1976 p. 86).

Foucault (1979 p.105), in theorising about sexuality and power, comments as follows:

'Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct'

Using Foucault's understanding of discourse and power and relating it to discourses on homosexuality, it could be argued that lesbianism is not being controlled by the state (sovereign power and punishment), but lesbians are in fact subject to disciplinary control

(the need for psychological counselling). However, these discourses would constantly be challenged.

Other theorists like Gergen have also debated the issue of discourse and power and which or whose discourse becomes entrenched in society. According to Gergen (1989), all groups are motivated by the desire to have their version of events heard or, to use Gergen's terminology, to 'warrant voice'. However, some discourses 'warrant' more 'voice' than others because groups which hold powerful positions have both the authority and the resources to make their discourses legitimate. People in authority have more power to legitimate their version of events, that is to 'warrant voice'. For example, psychologists, being in a position of authority, are more powerful when it comes to diagnosing homosexuality as a sickness than gay/lesbian people who may have a different discourse.

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This idea that those in power warrant more voice is shared by Billig (1976) and Thompson (1984; 1990). Theorists like Campbell and Le Vine (cited in Billig, 1976), also argue that the discourses of dominant groups are the ones which gain dominance and extensive endorsements because of their power and control over ideological apparatus such as academic institutions. These 'ideological apparatuses' contribute to guaranteeing the endorsement of the dominant discourses. 'It thus follows that human subjectivity of the individual is shaped and given reality in particular ways in medical, psychiatric, legal, educational, political and psychological discourses - these reverberate in other fields of discourse related to gender, race, nationality, age, class' (Levett, 1988 p. 184).

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If the impression has been created that dominant groups' control over ideological apparatus is accepted without challenge by the dominated group, then Foucault's point that power and resistance always operate together is extremely relevant. As Reboul (translated and cited in Duncan, 1993, p. 57) appropriately comments, 'an oppressed class has within its means to appropriate the oppressor's discourse or even to 'valorise' its own discourse (so as to oppose the oppressor's discourse)'. Certain discourses are generated when, for example, dominant groupings try to control dominated groups in one way or another. Consider for example the following statement by a black drag queen at the 1994 Johannesburg Gay Pride march:

Darling, it means sweet motherfuck all. You can rape me, rob me – what am I going to do when you attack me? Wave the Constitution in your face? I'm just a nobody black queen ... But you know what? Ever since I heard about the Constitution, I feel free inside (Visser, 1995, page not numbered).

Although the statement does not explicitly refer to any dominant groupings' discourses on gays, it can be seen as a declaration against the South African legal discourse which for years criminalised homosexuals as 'sinners', 'bad people', and so on. It is also interesting to note that the discourse also contains elements of dominant groupings' discourse regarding homosexuality, for example, 'I am just a nobody black queen'.

Another important point that needs to be stressed in relation to discourse is that discourses are ideologically positioned and that they are never neutral (Macdonell, 1987). In addition, discourses are never static, they are always changing. Thus multiple,

contradictory, fragmented discourses exist 'alongside each other' (Foucault, 1979; Macdonnell, 1987). Discourses can thus be labelled 'action oriented' in the sense that they always occur in relation to other discourses (Burr, 1995; Duncan, 1993; Macdonnell, 1987).

A final point that needs to be made about discourse (and one which is relevant for this thesis): 'A key issue (as regards discourse) has become that of accounting for the positions and viewpoints from which people speak and the institutions which prompt people to speak...and which store and distribute the things that are said' (Macdonnell, 1987, p. 3).

The present thesis explores the positions and viewpoints from which black lesbians speak, the institutions which frame or impact on their discourses, and the challenges which they offer to these dominant discourses. These discourses are interpreted and analyzed using discourse analysis. In the analysis and discussion of these, I used the understandings of power and resistance which have been discussed in this section.

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

It is apparent to researchers who associate themselves with social constructionist positions on, for example, the role of language in identity, the relationship between individuals and society as well as the historical and cultural specificity of traditional psychology and social psychology, that research aims and practices have to be transformed (Burr, 1995). Burr further argues that it would not be 'appropriate' to do research based on 'old'

assumptions and practices, especially since this traditional approach (which often focuses on internal psychic processes such as attitudes and personality traits) is not in keeping with the theoretical premise of social constructionism.

She stresses that new research practices or what Strelbel (1993) refers to as 'new paradigm developments' have to take language as their focus of interest, since the uses and effects of language are of central importance to social constructionists. Interest in these matters has contributed to new paradigm developments in social psychological research and 'a flurry of research activity in what is often referred to as 'discourse analysis'' (Burr, 1995, p. 158).

Van Dijk (1985) points out that the field of discourse analysis is not new – it has its roots in classical rhetoric. However, it gained popularity in the work of linguists and anthropologists in the 1960s. In the 1970s it started to 'take off' across disciplines and its focus was broadened to include both written and spoken discourse (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Van Dijk, 1985).

Levett (1988) comments that confusion exists regarding the use of the terms 'discourse' and 'discourse analysis'. She attributes this confusion in part to the customary divisions between academic disciplines in which the terms are used, and the differences regarding methodology.

Burr cites discourse analysis as 'an approach to research'. She is hesitant to refer to it as a method or technique because discourse analysis is not like conventional methods of

research and is therefore impossible to describe in 'recipe-type' terms. Discourse analysis is thus seen as an 'umbrella which covers a wide variety of actual research practices with quite different aims and theoretical backgrounds' (Burr, 1995, p. 163).

There are some guidelines to discourse analysis. Potter and Wetherell (1987) point out that the method best suited for a specific project is the one 'tailor-made' especially for it. The methods developed by Billig (1988), Thompson (1984; 1990), Van Dijk (1985), Holloway (1989), and, closer to home, Levett (1988), Duncan (1993) and Strelbel (1993) all contributed to the method used in the present study.

Although there is no one understanding of discourse analysis, Burr and others point out that all discourse analyses share certain common assumptions (see Burman & Parker, 1993; Parker, 1990; Willot & Griffin, 1997). These assumptions include the following:

- * traditional notions of objectivity cannot be accepted, as no person can step outside of his or her humanity and view the world from no position at all
- * there is no one truth; there are, however, various discourses that occur in relation to other discourses. These discourses are not static but multiple, fragmented and contradictory
- * all discourse analyses take language as important and therefore use interview transcripts, recordings of 'natural' conversations, extracts from newspapers, journals and other print media as basic material.

NB - Burman & Parker to SC

Many of these assumptions are those of the social constructionists discussed in a previous section. However, it should be pointed out that taking a social constructionist theoretical position does not necessarily mean that the researcher would use a discourse analytic approach. Neither does adopting a discourse analysis approach or method mean that the researcher identifies with social constructionism.

This discussion illustrates that, although discourse analysts share some common assumptions, it is not possible to provide a concise definition of 'discourse analysis', or to provide a 'how to' manual of this method. Billig (1988, p. 207) recommends that discourse analysts should read widely in order to 'gather up clues which can nudge the search one way or another... (researchers) have to feel their way around their library and archival sources, backing hunches as they proceed'.

Potter and Wetherell (1987) remark that this is more like riding a bicycle than baking a cake from a recipe. My personal experience of learning to ride a bicycle is long forgotten and I have not found following a cake recipe very easy. I had to follow hunches during my research. In the journal which I kept, I mention that discourse analysis has been like my recent attempts at roller-blading – just when you have practised daily, followed hunches to keep balance, watched others, new blades, approaches to blading and blading 'experts' appear on the block.

To conclude this discussion, a pertinent point is made by Marshall & Wetherell (1989, p. 108): 'A number of definitions could be given but, broadly speaking, discourse analysis covers the investigation of all types of written texts and spoken interaction, with particular

emphasis on the functions served by language and the implications of particular linguistic constructions'.

FOCUS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The main aim of the present study is to undertake an examination of the discourses regarding homosexuality as produced by a group of black lesbians. An auxiliary aim is to explore the way in which homosexuality and specifically female homosexuality has been constructed in the discourse of dominant groups. Attention will thus be given to the legal, cultural, social and psychological construction of homosexuality. In examining the discourses of the group of black lesbians, the ways in which their discourses both reflect and challenge the dominant discourses will be explored. The following chapter examines the discourses on homosexuality as constructed by certain dominant groupings.

CHAPTER THREE

IMAGES OF LESBIANS AS PRESENTED IN LEGAL, SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC DISCOURSES

As has been mentioned in the previous chapter, an auxiliary aim of the present study is to explore the way in which homosexuality, and specifically female homosexuality, has been constructed and represented in psychological, legal and cultural discourse. When analysing the discourses of the group of black lesbians the way in which they challenge as well as reflect these groupings discourses will be explored.

THE LEGAL CONSTRUCTION OF HOMOSEXUALITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Early legal sanctions

Gays and lesbians have historically been the victims of discriminatory laws and prejudices. The Roman Dutch law, which due to Dutch imperialism has had an influence on the South African legal system since the 1800s, criminalised a range of sexual relations between adults. Under Roman Dutch law, any sexual act (whether homosexual or heterosexual) was a crime if it did not lead to procreation (De Vos, 1995). All forms of 'unnatural lust contrary to the order of nature' were classified as an offence.

'Unnatural acts' were punished because these did not lead to offspring, and because 'these offences were regarded as so abhorrent to all ideas of decency that they ought to be punished' (Rex v. Gough & Narroay, 1926). Unnatural offences or crimes against nature included both male and female sodomy, engaging in sexual relations with animals

and sex between males (Cameron, 1994). Sex between women did not escape being labelled a crime against nature. According to the Criminal Ordinance of Emperor Charles V, 'if human being behaves unchastely with an animal, or male with male, or woman with woman, they have forfeited their lives, and they shall, according to the usual custom, be condemned to be burned to death' (quoted in Rex v. Gough and Narroway, 1926). Solitary masturbation was also a crime in terms of the law. Although these sexual offences were cited as law, since the beginning of the 20th century most of them, when occurring between consenting humans, were no longer implemented or enforced by law (Cameron, 1994). However, male-male sexual relations remained (and still remain) a criminal offence on the statute books.

De Vos (1995) speculates that sodomy and other sexual acts between males were not decriminalised because legal, medical and psychological discourse no longer outlawed all sexual activity which fell outside the boundaries of legal (marital) heterosexual sexual activity and which did not lead to the production of offspring. Thus, certain laws had to remain to control (police) certain outlaws like gay men for example.

Courts described same-sex conduct as indecent, immoral, and disgusting (see Rex v. Gough and Narroway, 1926, and Rex v. Baxter and another, 1928). Mr Justice C.J. Solomon stated that he personally found 'acts of indecency' which took place between consenting adult males 'of so a disgusting nature that I refrain from repeating them' (Rex v. Baxter and another, 1928, p. 431). The courts branded homosexuals as a 'specialised and extraordinary class'.

Being branded 'different', 'special' or 'extraordinary' usually translated into being legally, socially and economically discriminated against in the South African apartheid state that existed after 1948.

In the South African law, being different and extraordinary also had the implication of being in need of psychiatric attention. Members of the legal profession who argued from the 'in need of psychiatry' approach usually assumed that this was a more enlightened and liberal approach than the 'punishment' course of action. 'Liberal' judgments imposed fines instead of prison sentences, pointed out that gay culture (in terms of clubs) was common, and even went so far as to discuss whether sodomy actually constituted a crime when it was conducted in private. The accused were charged with indecent assault instead of sodomy (see *State v. Matsemela en 'n ander*, 1988).

However, the discourse that homosexuality is abnormal, inappropriate and shameful behaviour is still entrenched and sanctioned. The reader is referred to *Van Rooyen v. Van Rooyen* (1994) which provides a recent example of these viewpoints.

Legislation after 1948

In 1957 the government passed the Immorality Act and the Sexual Offences Act which aimed to eliminate immoral behaviour. 'Immoral behaviour' included sex between different 'races' as created by the apartheid state, prostitution, 'cruising', and immoral or indecent acts committed by a man older than 19 years with a man younger than 19. Initially, sexual acts between women were not constituted as crimes. However, in 1988

the Act was extended to outlaw 'immoral or indecent' acts between women and girls under 19. The media contributed to legitimising and entrenching the homophobic scare in its coverage of the first case under the extended legislation with headlines like 'Women who prey on girls' (Sunday Times, 19 November 1989). *media*

Cameron (1994) points out that the under-age prohibition is discriminatory as the age of consent for heterosexual sexual acts is 16. He further points out that the heterosexual age restriction is only applicable 'to acts involving intercourse and to soliciting or enticing an under-age boy or girl to the commission of an immoral act' (Cameron, 1994, p. 92). The law pertaining to homosexuality however includes any immoral or indecent act.

Translated into practice, this means that committing or intending/attempting to commit a heterosexual sexual act without intercourse with a 'child' is only deemed a crime when there is soliciting or enticement.

The link between the control of sexuality, 'white' civilisation and the apartheid state is highlighted by the passing of a section of the Sexual Offences Act which forbids 'any male person from committing with another male person at a party any act which is calculated to stimulate sexual passion or to give sexual gratification' (Section 20A, Sexual Offences Act, 1957). The definition of a party is 'any occasion where more than two persons are present'.

A specific incident led to the legislation being passed: a house was raided in Forest Town in Johannesburg in January 1966 where the police discovered 'a party in progress, the like of which has never been seen in the Republic of South Africa. There were

approximately 300 male persons present who were all obviously homosexual ... Males were dancing with males to the strains of music, kissing and cuddling each other in the most vulgar fashion imaginable. They also paired off and continued their love-making in the garden of the residence and in motor cars in the streets, engaging in the most indecent acts imaginable with each other' (South Africa. Parliamentary Select Committee, 1968, p. 11). This led to the passing of the 'men at a party' law cited above, as well as to the Minister of Justice of the time asking a Select Committee of Parliament to investigate the matter further. The minister felt very strongly that homosexuality could not remain unchecked as it would lead to the demise of the South African nation. (I assume he meant 'the white nation'.) The following is an impassioned plea that the Minister of Justice at the time, J Pelsler, made during a parliamentary debate in 1967:

And who can deny that this was also the cancer that afflicted the Biblical Sodom? No, Sir, history has given us a clear warning and we should not allow ourselves to be deceived into thinking that we may casually dispose of this viper in our midst by regarding it as innocent fun. It is a proven fact that sooner or later homosexuality instincts make their effects felt on a community if they are permitted to run riot ... Therefore we should be on the alert and do what there is to do lest we be saddled later with a problem which will be the utter ruin of our spiritual and moral fibre' (South Africa. Parliament: House of Assembly, 1967, Debates, cols. 1405-6).

The records indicate that this view was not challenged by the 'liberal' parties in Parliament. The United Party which was viewed as a white liberal party, debated with the

National Party the necessary procedure that should be taken to contain the 'perversion'. Retief (1994, p. 102) is correct when he comments that 'liberal voices – pointing out that anti-gay laws constituted a serious infringement of fundamental human rights – were either silent or simply missing'.

The Select Committee investigation into homosexuality was clearly divided between 'conservatives' and 'liberals'. The conservatives believed that adults were abusing teenagers, something which led to the increase of homosexuality. They believed that prison sentences had to be imposed. The liberals argued that homosexuality was a ingrained psychological disorder which had to receive the necessary medical attention (and not prison sentences) in order for it to be eliminated (South Africa. Parliamentary Select Committee, 1968, p. 63).

The recommendations of the Select Committee had the following consequences: sexual acts between men 'at a party' were banned, the age of consent was increased, and the manufacturing of any aids for use in 'unnatural' sexual acts was banned.

A noticeable characteristic of the report is that the homosexual is seen to be a white male – lesbians both black and white, and black gay men are only mentioned in passing. Black lesbians and gays were only discussed in relation to keeping the white nation 'pure' – should homosexual acts across 'race' lines be banned? (South Africa. Parliamentary Select Committee, 1968, p. 36). The committee pondered whether interracial relationships did exist in homosexual relationships. Lesbians were assumed to be the exception rather than the rule – in the minds of the committee members, there were fewer of them than there

were gay males, and they were constructed as evil women because they did not produce children (South Africa. Parliamentary Select Committee, 1968, p. 34).

The law and lesbianism

It is interesting to note that sexual activity between two women has never been outlawed in South Africa. According to De Vos (1995), the courts have never had to decide whether sexual acts between women would be punishable by law. This could be an illustration of the marginalisation of women as well – how could women not need men? I further suggest that it is possible that female homosexuals both black and white were, in terms of the law and the National Party, not important enough to warrant any laws or, alternatively, they were seen to be a mere figment of the imagination: 'there was no evidence that lesbianism is being practised in such a way that it in itself justifies criminal sanctions' (South Africa. Parliament: House of Assembly, 1969, Debates, col. 4803).

According to De Vos (1995), the word 'lesbian' has only been mentioned in two reported cases in South African courts. One of the cases ruled that it was derogatory (defamatory) to refer to a woman as lesbian (see Vermaak v. van der Merwe, 1981). The argument presented in the case was that to be called a lesbian constitutes an insult which diminishes a woman's name and reputation in the 'eyes of right-thinking persons'.

The fact that the word 'lesbian' has only been mentioned twice could possibly indicate that lesbianism is denied and overlooked (as indicated in a previous section) or alternatively that when women embarked on these 'activities' there were other ways of

dealing with them – for example, communities and individual men could take various actions from physical abuse to being ostracised and marginalised. The case which ruled that lesbianism is a derogatory term clearly indicates that to 'own' that identity or for the identity to be imposed on a woman is not viewed in a positive way by certain members of the legal profession. Ruling against the person that called the defendant a lesbian in a sense thus restores the defendant's credibility in the community. As Foucault (1972;1979) would argue, this discourse (that she is not lesbian) presents her in a positive light, and thus the discourse of the dominant group is entrenched.

The extension of laws prohibiting immoral or indecent acts between boys and men under 19 to such acts between women and girls was the first time that lesbian behaviour was recognised by the South African Parliament. Lesbians have been marginalised and stigmatised: a recent example of this is a judgment where the court had to decide on a lesbian mother's access to her children who were in the care of their father. Access was granted on condition that the mother and her female partner have separate beds when the children visited over weekends and, when the children visited for longer periods, her partner was not permitted to sleep in the house (Van Rooyen v. Van Rooyen, 1994). It goes without saying that this judgment would not have been passed (with these conditions) had the couple been heterosexual. The court constructed homosexuality as 'abnormal', 'damaging to children' and 'wrong'. The judge expressed his view as follows:

What the experts say is to me self evident ... even without them, I believe that any right thinking person would say that it is important that the children stay away from the confusing signals as to how the sexuality of the male and of the female

should develop ... the issue simply comes down to the fact of the style of living, the attitude towards living, the activities, the behaviour or whatever else is involved in living from minute to minute, all that in the context of the lesbianism. (Van Rooyen V Van Rooyen 1994, p.325).

Psychologists and the law

The role that psychologists and psychiatrists played in justifying the legal construction of homosexuality in South Africa is clear if one focuses on evidence provided by them to the courts and/or certain government commissions as well as the amount of value attached to that evidence. The following extract highlights the point: 'It must be noted that the evidence (regarding homosexuality) was submitted by the most eminent authorities in this field in South Africa including professors from the well known universities and the Government departments'(South Africa. Parliament: House of Assembly, 1969, Debates, col. 4804).

Various police officers also looked towards the psychological profession for assistance (see Memorandum of Psychologists). The South African psychological study by Liddicoat (1956) was referred to, as was the work of Kinsey (1948; 1953) and others. The conclusion reached was that homosexuality was usually the result of a personality or genetic abnormality. However, it could not be excused and, with the necessary psychological intervention, spiritual guidance, and ban on the sale of certain sexual objects, this social evil could be eradicated. They felt that even the 'most hard-baked homosexual would give anything to live a normal life'; given that 'help was at hand',

they felt 'that the existing statutory sanctions should remain' (South Africa. Parliament: House of Assembly, 1969, Debates, col. 4804).

Race, class and gender

It is clear that the South African law regarding sexual conduct and identities is intrinsically linked to race, class and gender or, to put it differently, to the entrenchment of the apartheid ideology. De Vos (1995, p. 19) comments: 'Apart from the law's inactivity regarding female same-sex conduct, the contribution of the law in the construction of sexual identities has also been affected by the pre-existing social formations of race, class, age and/or gender in South Africa'. He refers to the blind eye being turned to same-sex relationships of miners (the majority of whom are black) on the South African mines (see Moodie, Ndatshe & Sibuyi, 1988, for a detailed discussion).

The courts definitely took into account the race and age of parties when making decisions regarding sentences (de Vos, 1995). In *State v. K* (1973, p. 88 cols. E-F) it is stated: 'it must be remembered that...the complainant was a humble African domestic servant, of 21 years of age, the sort of man who would be likely to yield easily to persuasion of this sort'. The legal system also dealt differently with female and male same-sex activity. In *State v. Matsemela en 'n ander* (1988, p. 258, col. E) doubt was expressed about whether homosexual acts can take place between women: '...of dit tussen vrou en vrou gepleeg kan word, is wat ons gerapporteerde regspraak betref nog 'n onuitgemaakte saak' (whethere this [homosexuality] can happen between woman and woman is, as far as our case law is concerned, not yet decided). De Vos correctly concludes that from the early

years of the present century, the South African legal system has 'treated the group of homosexuals differently and has been an important source of stigmatisation of both gay men and lesbians' (1995, p. 20). He further cautions that these attitudes are still held by certain judges in post-apartheid South Africa.

With regard to black women and men, the state had many laws at its disposal to harass them. It could therefore be argued that the state did not have to have specific laws to use against gay women. The Immorality Act of 1957 contained prohibitions against interracial sex, prostitution, cruising and immoral or indecent act(s) committed by a man older than 19 with a man younger than 19. This does not mean that white women were 'allowed' to live happily as lesbians.

Although they were not subjected to the same laws as black women, merely 'being' lesbian contributes to 'some of us, in fact quite a lot of us, white or black, thinking of ourselves as criminals' (personal discussion with black lesbian). In a discussion with friends, one of them said 'I remember, in the old South Africa when you see a police van you run or feel like they are looking for you because you are black and then maybe they will even know that you are a lesbian. Now sometimes I think they are looking for me because I am illegal'. This clearly indicates that although lesbianism was not criminalised in the same way as male homosexuality was (and still is), the lives of lesbians were still controlled by the legal discourse.

The constitution and legal reform

Prior to the enactment of the new South African Constitution, homosexual behaviour still constituted the basis of a range of criminal offences. While lesbian sexual acts and activity were not given the same attention or criminal status as those of gay males, since 1988 women are criminally liable if they partake in sexual activities with women under the age of 19 years.

But things may be changing. South Africa is the first and only country in the world to explicitly outlaw discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. Section 9 of the Constitution guarantees every person the right to equality before the law and to equal protection of the law. This section states, among other things:

The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth.

No person may unfairly discriminate against anyone on one or more grounds in terms of subsection (3) (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996).

Cameron (1994) argues that adequate constitutional protection of people currently discriminated against because of their sexual orientation would at the least achieve the following:

- * Decriminalisation: This would mean doing away with the unnatural sexual offence, the common law crime of sodomy. Section 20A of the Sexual Offences Act of 1957 (the 'men at a party' law). In addition, the age of sexual consent would have to be made the same for both hetero- and homosexual acts
- * Legislative enforcement of non-discrimination: This would be directed at places of employment, provision of public resources and insurance
- * Rights of free speech, association and conduct: This would include the right to disseminate information and views, as well as equal rights of commercial association. The right to dress in drag would have to be included
- * Permanent domestic partnerships: Non-discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation would have to include the official recognition of permanent domestic partnerships. Partner benefits should include pension, medical aid and insurance. No further discrimination should be permitted regarding foster care and adoption.

In addition, I would argue that maternity leave should be granted to lesbian couples who choose to adopt or to bear children. Constitutional protection from discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation is definitely an indication that there is a commitment to protecting the rights of all citizens in South Africa. However, the question remains whether this is enough. We should not over- or underestimate the role which constitutional protection can play. De Vos (1995) states that the inclusion of the

protection of sexual orientation in the 1993 'interim' Constitution (the forerunner of the final Constitution which was adopted in 1996) is a major victory for gay men, lesbians and bisexuals in South Africa. However, he cautions that it poses novel questions regarding the relationship of these groups to the law and the strategies they should use to protect themselves. It is not the focus of this paper to discuss the latter issue – this would best be left to the legal profession. However, the following statement by a black drag queen bears repeating, this time regarding the potentially liberating effect of the Constitution:

Darling, it means sweet motherfuck all. You can rape me, rob me – what am I going to do when you attack me? Wave the Constitution in your face? I'm just a nobody black queen ... But you know what? Ever since I heard about the Constitution, I feel free inside (Visser, 1995, page not numbered).

It should be noted that at the present time the Constitution provides protection from being discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation, but laws which criminalise the accompanying sexual behaviour have not yet been removed from the statute books.

THE SOCIO-CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF FEMALE HOMOSEXUALITY

As has been indicated by a number of scholars, while male homosexuality has received very little attention, female homosexuality has been even more marginalised, thus rendered invisible. This applies even more strongly to black South African lesbians, a very marginalised and 'invisible' group.

Working from a social constructionist paradigm I am very aware of the fact that behaviour in 'other' societies and historical periods which resemble present day 'homosexual activity' cannot be labelled as such and we cannot label the persons who in engaged in the behaviour as 'gay' or 'lesbian'.

An argument that has been used by individuals and groups who have a history of opposing racial oppression, but who do not support the rights of gays and lesbians, is that homosexuality is un-African or that it is part of a corrupt Western society (Potgieter, 1997). This section looks at the construction of female homosexuality within non-Western societies prior to certain of the societies being colonised, particularly to counter the argument that homosexuality is a Western import. In the section which looks at the cultural construction of female homosexuality in Africa the discussion focuses on both certain societies in Africa and certain communities in South Africa.

Several points need to be made:

- * The overview is incomplete and partial as documentation and thus historical accounts of female same-sex affiliations have been suppressed or overlooked by individuals who were documenting life in these societies.
- * The issue of language or terminology presents a difficulty: homosexual activity without persons labelling themselves as 'homosexual' is still commonplace, something which was confirmed in the present research.
- * The label, and thus what some would argue is the social construction of 'the homosexual', can only be traced to the recent past.

- * Finally, the examples which follow do not 'prove' that a social constructionist perspective is correct, but do illustrate that it is a useful analytical tool in cross-cultural research.

Native American societies

Although there are not many sources which provide documentation of same-sex behaviour in Native American culture, accounts by Devereux (1937), Whitehead (1981), Williams (1986) and Tafoya (1997) have proved helpful.

A number of these accounts of same-sex unions describe the *berdache* custom among Native Americans. The native American *berdache* is a person – either male or female – who departs from his or her socially constructed gender role, taking on certain of the traits and obligations of the other sex. According to Callender & Kochems (1985), the *berdache* does not cross gender lines so much as mix them. Many Native American cultures considered *berdaches* to be a third sex. Interestingly, in traditional societies *berdaches* married individuals of the same sex and these marriages were recognised by Native American laws. Williams, (1986), for example, observes that *berdaches* have been condoned and valued as part of the cultures of a majority of Native American communities.

Although most academic attention has focused on male *berdaches*, female ones have constituted an equally important institution in these communities. Similar to the gender 'crossing' of the male *berdache*, their female counterparts would assume many of the

tasks traditionally performed by men, including hunting and heading a household.

Marriage for a female *berdache* would be to another woman (Williams, 1986). An in-depth study by Blackwood (1984) indicates that female *berdaches* and female marriages were essential to the status of women in most Native American societies.

Native American beliefs about sexuality are reflected in the marriage system. Theorists such as Rubin (1975) have implicated marriage as one of the mechanisms that enforce and define women's sexuality. According to Rubin, the division of labour may be viewed as a taboo against sexual arrangements other than those containing at least one man and one woman, thus supporting and entrenching heterosexual marriage. Homosexual behaviour occurred in contexts within which neither individual crossed gender lines nor were such individuals seen as expressing cross-gender behaviour. Furthermore, through the cross-gender role, women could marry one another. Native American ideology disassociated sexual behaviour from the concepts of male and female gender roles and was not concerned with the 'gendered' identity of the sexual partner (see Tafoya, 1997, for a detailed discussion of this phenomenon). The status of the cross-gender female's partner is telling in this respect. She was always a traditional female, that is, two cross-gender females did not marry. Thus, a woman could follow the traditional female gender role, yet marry and have a sexual relationship with another woman without being stigmatised for doing so (Blackwood, 1984).

Like other scholars (Allen, 1986; Grahn, 1984), Blackwood does not claim that the Native American Indian communities did not impose subordinating roles and positions onto women, but instead suggests that the space allowed to enter into same-sex marriages increased their options.

Asian societies

In this section I provide a concise overview of same-sex unions in China. A tradition similar to the *berdache* tradition in Native American cultures, companionate same-sex marriage and the transgenerational tradition of boy wives have been documented in Asian societies (Hinsch, 1990; Murray, 1992). As with documentation on other cultures, the literature has focused mainly on male same-sex relationships.

Literary sources from the Zhou Dynasty (1122-256 BC) contain examples of public affection between men. According to official histories, ten of China's Han Emperors between 206 BC and 220 AD had one or more male lovers, pursuing open same-sex liaisons similar to those enjoyed by their contemporary Roman counterparts (Hinsch, 1990). The emperors married women to bear them heirs.

Hinsch (1990) is of the opinion that Han society's tolerance of same-sex male relationships, the custom of male pair bonding and its celebration in poetry and other literature, and men's incorporation of their male concubines into their households are pointers to the genesis of same-sex marriages.

A review of Hinsch's work makes it clear that much less information is available regarding female same-sex unions in previous centuries. However, Hinsch does acknowledge the existence of woman-woman unions, which he considers to have been marriages, formed during the Qing Dynasty. The first well-documented unions were those associated with the 'marriage resistance movement' (Topley, 1975) in the nineteenth and early twentieth century southern China. The development of China's international silk industry during this period helped many women to attain economic independence. After acquiring this newly-found freedom, thousands of women renounced marriage and became 'sou hei'. When a woman decided to become *sou hei*, she took a formal ceremonial vow to remain unwed for a period, moved out of her parents' house, and built a 'spinster house' with other *sou-hei*. These women formed 'sisterhoods' in which small groups of women would bond together for mutual support and affection. These relationships shared many of the characteristics of a 'marriage' and physical as well as emotional bonds developed among the women:

Within the group, a lesbian couple could choose to undergo a marriage ceremony in which one partner was designated as 'husband' and the other 'wife'. After an exchange of ritual gifts, the foundation of the Chinese marriage ceremony, a feast attended by female companions served to witness the marriage. These married lesbian couples could even adopt female children, who, in turn, could inherit family property from the couple's parents' (Hinsch, 1990, p. 177-8).

These examples of same-sex unions in the ancient world negate the idea that homosexuality is a modern Western 'evil'. The following section which focuses on same-

sex 'unions' in Africa with particular focus on Southern Africa, challenges the notion that what is presently termed homosexuality is an 'un-African' phenomenon of advanced Western capitalism.

African societies

Scholarly work which has investigated homosexuality in various African societies has tended to pay attention to mainly male homosexuality (Potgieter, 1997). For example, anthropologist Evans-Pritchard (1970) documented the institution of 'boy wives' for military men among the Azande in Sudan. Parallel institutions or customs between women have not been emphasised.

Judith Gay's study of 'mummy-baby' games among Basotho girls in Lesotho is an exception. According to Gay (1985), young girls start these games when they are still at primary (grade) school. In a mummy-baby relationship, an older girl acting as 'mummy' develops an intimate association with a younger one (the baby). Generally, the mummy presents gifts to the baby who reciprocates by obeying and respecting the mummy. The two share both emotional and informational exchanges. Although Gay's study is the most in-depth one, recently Kendall (1995) has reported on evidence of similar female-female relationships in Lesotho.

In her paper *Looking for lesbians in Lesotho*, Kendall (1995) provides an account of woman marriage and general affectional relationships between women.

However, as has been referred to in Chapter One, this group of women are not labelled as 'lesbian' or anything else in this society.

A form of same-sex union that may be peculiar to African cultures is the institution of 'female husbands' or 'woman marriage'. The institution is not paid much attention except by Krige (1974) and Krige and Krige (1943). South African examples Krige (1974) cites are:

- * Woman marriage among the Lovedu in the Northern Province, an institution by which it is possible for a woman to give bridewealth for, and marry, another woman.
- * The rain queen Modjadji, who is known to have a number of wives.
- * Woman-marriage among the Venda, although she says details about this tradition are limited.
- * Woman-marriage amongst the Zulu. There is no information about how these marriages functioned within the society.

Two examples of Zulu woman-marriages mentioned by Krige were told to her by a South African university professor who had collected the 'stories' in 1955:

Another case was that of an old widow with an only daughter, Nozinayitha...The daughter courted and married a girl and found an unrelated man to act as 'bull' (genitor) (Krige, 1974, p. 27)

Councillor Musothsha Magwazi of the Court of Paramount Chief Cyprian from Nhlophenkulu Methodist Mission, Nongoma, told of a girl who came to his father to ask for a genitor for a wife she was going to marry' (p. 28)

The early British administration in Natal frowned upon woman-marriage and women had to get past the white administrators to continue this tradition. Because colonial regulations required registration of each Zulu marriage and would not countenance a female husband, it became Zulu practice to register the genitor as the husband and the female husband as witness (Krige, 1974, p. 28).

These examples of same-gender relationships in South Africa show that the idea that homosexuality is un-African and a Western import is nonsense. Just as other customs were 'tabooed' and outlawed by colonialists, the same could be said for institutionalised homosexuality within indigenous societies in South Africa.

Another example of same-sex female relationships in African society is the story of Ifeyinwa Olinke who lived in the nineteenth century. Olinke was an industrious woman in a community where most of the entrepreneurial opportunities were seized by women, who thereby come to control much of the Igbo's tribe's wealth. Ifeyinwa socially overshadowed her less prosperous male husband. As a sign of her prosperity and social standing, Ifeyinwa herself became a female husband to other women. Her epithet 'Olinke' referred to the fact that she had nine wives (Amadiume, 1987, p. 48-9). However, Amadiume argues that she was not lesbian. It could be argued that this writer sees homosexuality in a negative light, thus the denial.

We should be wary of forcing these relationships into the Western dichotomy of 'homosexual vs. heterosexual'.

There have been recent accounts which hold that 'female homosexuality' is an indivisible part of present day black South African society. Chan-Sam (1994) documents verbatim an interview with Bongi, a 24-year old woman from Soweto who attended a boarding school for black girls in the rural town of Nelspruit. Bongi recounts the tradition of 'amachicken' amongst the girls at the school:

So you will be friends and share things. Very often this friendship can allow you to hold hands, kiss, talk in whispers: because you are sweethearts or sweeties. Sometimes it is called *amachicken*.....The *amachicken* are the younger girls who are looked after by the older ones. Many *amachicken* share rooms with the older girls. I myself had a sweetie, but my heart was broken when she had to leave school. She was very good to me. She was very tender in love.....she (the sweetheart) asked me if I was a lesbian. And that was the first time I heard the word. She said she didn't mind being friends with me, but if I was a lesbian she would be scared of me....but if we were *amachicken* she wouldn't mind (Chan-Sam, 1994 p. 186-7).

This account is similar to one documented by Gay (1985). What is significant is that Bongi was not familiar with the label or identity of 'lesbian', and her 'amachicken' would only continue the relationship if she was not 'lesbian'.

This is indicative of the negative image which 'lesbian' conjures up. At the time of the interview Bongi was active in a gay and lesbian organisation and identified herself as lesbian.

Chetty (1994), drawing on a 1955 newspaper report, documents the life of a black woman ('coloured' in the South African classification) who lived the life of a lesbian gangster in the 1950s. Gerti Williams, known as John Williams, lived the life of a man for five years. The biographical account documents how she took on the role of what she assumed was 'a real man'. She also clearly states that she did not want to be a woman. The following account illustrates the identity which she assumes:

All my gang are men, and the only feeling any regular man would have. But to be with the silly creatures all the time and to listen to their foolish chatter, I would never be able to bear. If I cannot be in the company of men, I would rather be dead. My earnest prayer each night is that God would be merciful to me and change me completely into a man. If it could be done by any operation, I would gladly risk it as no pain could be too severe if it meant the fulfilment of my desire....What is the end going to be, I don't know. There is no hope of marriage for us, and the raising of a family which I yearn for. We will have to spend the rest of our lives living like this, unless God is merciful and....let's me become a whole man.

The image of the lesbian as a man is reflected in the language used to refer to lesbians. They are referred to as 'man-vrou' (man-woman) (Lewis & Loots, 1994). The women

interviewed for the present study stated that they were commonly referred to as '*nongayindoda*', which also means man-woman. Lewis and Loots remark that '...due to the silence surrounding lesbians, the homosexual subculture tended to be restricted to males' (1994, p. 144). 'Derise and Trish', two coloured women interviewed by Lewis & Loots said the only public images of homosexuality they had access to were gay men. They felt that lesbianism is not commonly spoken about as a result of the hostility of their families. Their discourse was thus silenced and 'led them to perpetuate their own silence in order to avoid discrimination and challenge' (Lewis & Loots, 1994, p.144). I am aware that Trish and Derise both became involved in the emerging gay and lesbian activist movement in the early 1990s. Thus, as Foucault would theorise, dominant discourse is constantly being challenged and resisted. Mention has also been made of lesbian *sangomas* (Gevisser, 1994). Chan-Sam (1994) interviewed a lesbian sangoma who had a lesbian sangoma as a partner. This is an area which needs further research. A sangoma also participated in the present study.

These examples serve to underline a point made elsewhere in this dissertation: although same-sex unions are known to exist in African societies, they are not necessarily labelled as they are in a Western context.

Lancaster (1987) points out that the terminology used to provide examples of 'homosexuality' in non-Western societies is completely inappropriate for the 'phenomena'. He argues that using these Western labels, even when modified, could obscure more than it clarifies.

The final and obvious point to be made is that the preceding information negates the discourse that same-sex female relations are un-African, non-existent or an import of decadent Western society.

THE CHANGING PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTION OF HOMOSEXUALITY: SICK, SINNER, JUST DIFFERENT, A MERE CONSTRUCTION?

To understand present trends in psychological research on lesbians, a historical perspective is important. In doing this, I do not wish to succumb to what Kitzinger(1987) describes as the 'up the mountain saga'. This occurs when past research is deemed unscientific or useless, while new theories or research are deemed to be 'a step forward' or 'progressive'. The following section provides an overview of the changing conceptions of homosexuality internationally over the past five decades before focusing on psychological research in South Africa.

In reviewing South African research, I will focus on how, in the context of international trends, it has presented the homosexual as sick, in need of help, and committing a sin, and particularly how this research has historically failed to include the experiences of the black majority.

From essentialism to constructionism

The conceptualisation of homosexuality in psychology and in the social sciences in general has been marked by a shift in perspective, that is from essentialism to

constructionism. The essentialist perspective defined human sexuality as biologically rooted in a drive that sought expression in heterosexual relationships, characteristically with a procreative purpose. Any deviation from this 'natural' form of sexuality such as homosexuality was judged to be pathological.

By the late 1950s, this classic essentialist view came to be criticised, and was challenged by an alternative version of essentialism which held that the biological basis of sexuality could take various forms. Homosexuality was therefore seen to be just as natural an expression of sexuality as heterosexuality was.

Starting in the 1960s, essentialism came under increasing criticism, and was replaced to a large extent by the constructionist model. However, the constructionist model was only reflected in psychological research at a much later date. Psychological research continued at this stage to reflect homosexuality as inherently natural as heterosexuality – the line of argument being that some people were born homosexual and they should be accepted, not pathologised.

In contrast to the essentialist view of homosexuality as a medico-biological concept, constructionism holds that homosexuality is a reflection of social and historical processes (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1985; Snesnat, 1997). Because this has been explained in some detail in chapter two section dealing with the construction of the lesbian as a category, only a few points will be mentioned here.

Societal control of sexuality

According to Foucault (1979), Western society's concern about sexuality began at the end of the 18th century. At this time government administrators' dominant arguments included that the population needed to be socially controlled and regulated. What had traditionally been the duty of the religious sector of society had now become the duty of the civil society. Discourses about sexuality began to appear in connection with statistical studies of the population. Legislators were interested in controlling various social phenomena such as prostitution, the spread of disease as well as the birth rate. 'Guidelines' regarding what was appropriate sexual practice were therefore linked with power mechanisms, that is the various administrative processes established to maintain government control over the population. Thus, sexual practices that did not contribute to the birthrate, or that led to disease, were typically not deemed to be acceptable.

The medicalisation of sex

At the beginning of the 19th century, another major shift occurred in the regulation of sexuality (Weeks, 1986). Sexual discourse was now disseminated in medical terms, and this change contributed to a new consciousness about sexuality. The medicalisation of sex provided for new ways of thinking about sexuality. A sexual 'instinct' was recognised, and this generated a lot of deliberation of the pathological forms such an instinct could reveal. These trends of medical and popular concern about sexuality set the stage for the emergence of a science of sex, which appeared by the end of the nineteenth century. The pioneering sexologists advocated that the power of the scientific method could be applied

to the study of sex (Weeks, 1986). Among the discourses produced were Krafft-Ebing's work on classifying sexual practices, Havelock Ellis's (1933) consideration of the differences between men and women, and Freud's (see Freud, 1977) initial formulations about the nature of psychosexual development. Essentially, these psychological and general social science discourses, like their legislative, administrative and medical predecessors, became a significant source of power to control and regularise sexuality. Women's sexuality had to be controlled, labelled and deemed a sickness for the reasons expounded on previously by Faderman (1981) and Wolfe and Penelope (1993).

Sexologists and psychiatrists

Among the specific focuses of discourses about sexuality, the sexologists elaborated on the psychiatrisation of perverse pleasures (Foucault, 1978). It was within this sphere that homosexuality was discussed. Unintentional as it was, the pioneering homosexual rights movement in Germany in the late 19th century played into the hands of the sexologists' inclination for classification (Weeks, 1985). While the early gay activists coined the term 'homosexuality' to identify and defend a form of sexual pluralism, the medical establishment and psychologists, most notably Krafft-Ebing and Freud, cited homosexuality as a form of sexual pathology.

In describing the nature of homosexuality, many (though not all) psychologists were guided by their essentialist outlook. Sexual expression for them was biologically regulated. While Freud acknowledged that everyone was potentially bisexual, mature psychosexual development was equated with heterosexuality. In their attempt to 'explain'

homosexuality, the early psychologists and sexologists searched for the causes, that is what factors would account for the biological regulatory system to become 'misdirected'. Towards the end of the 19th century, the common medical explanation was that homosexuality was a symptom of hereditary weakness (Bullough, 1974). The goal of the medical treatment was to enable the person to gain control over such 'perverted' urges. By the 1920s, environmental explanations became influential, especially Freud's focus on the role of family dynamics which frustrated psycho-sexual maturation.

The classic essentialist conception of homosexuality as a medico-biological phenomenon was part of a more encompassing and established world view about the nature of science, a world view which applied to both the natural and social sciences. This 'mechanistic' model reflected a Newtonian conception of the universe, concerned with the causal explanation as unidirectional, antecedent-consequent conditions (see Reese & Overton, 1970). Thus homosexuality as pathology was the result of some antecedent cause, which could be genetic, environmental, or both.

Homosexuality as a sickness

Empirical support for the essentialist view came in the form of clinical case studies which traced the antecedent conditions which resulted in homosexual symptoms. In the early 1930s, two related studies were published. These studies provide an illustration of how the classic essentialist conception of homosexuality was translated into scientific prescriptions about sexual practices. In Foucault's (1976) terms, we have an example of how scientific discourse serves as a power mechanism for regulating sexuality.

The first study was conducted by psychologist Lewis Terman (1936). In order to validate their test of masculinity-femininity (M-F), Terman and his co-researcher included a sample of male homosexuals. The purpose was to demonstrate how a group of individuals with reputed cross-gender identification would compare with the general, 'normal' population. Of their sample of 123 subjects, about half were recruited from the prison population and the other half from the local community. Each individual was given the M-F test and was interviewed to gain information about their backgrounds and sexual practices. If the subject stated that he played the male role during sexual intercourse, he was categorised as 'active'. If he took on the female role during the sexual act, he was labelled as 'passive'. The active group was made up entirely of prisoners.

The M-F scores revealed that the passive group had the most feminine scores of any of the male groups tested in the general population. In contrast, the scores of the active homosexuals were slightly more masculine than a comparison group of unselected soldiers of comparable age and background. Terman interpreted these results as supporting the notion that 'true' homosexuality, that is sexual 'inversion', was related to cross-gender identification – the passive males had high femininity scores. He identified active males as sexual 'perverts' – homosexuals whose gender characteristics were 'appropriate', but who by chance or curiosity, turned to a form of sexuality that went against their natural gender adjustment. The implication was that the pervert was not really an 'authentic' homosexual. True male homosexuality was passive and reflected gender-role deviation. Terman then drew a parallel with female homosexuality, concluding that active females were inverts and passive females were perverts.

Terman went on to determine the 'cause' of 'the homosexuality'. He concluded that although biological factors could play some role, psychological conditioning played a major role. These conclusions were supported by those of Henry (1941, vol. 2, p. 1023): 'The sex variant (homosexual) is a person who has failed to achieve and maintain adult heterosexual modes of sexual expression and is unable to meet the responsibility of establishing and maintaining a home which involves the rearing of children'.

Psychological research on female homosexuality echoed the sentiments of Terman and Henry that the homosexual person was sick, had 'bad' childrearing experiences, and lacked the ability to take on adult responsibilities. Caprio (1954), in research based on data from patients, prostitutes and fictional stories, concluded that his (lesbian) subjects were pathological. These findings were generalised to all lesbians, describing them as 'emotionally unstable and neurotic' individuals who needed to be recognised as 'sick and immature' women leading lives that 'ultimately result in frustration and loneliness' (Caprio, 1954, p. 304). Two years later Bergler (1956) described lesbians as masochists, suffering from oral regression whose lesbianism was a result of unresolved weaning problems.

Most of the psychological literature of this period described lesbianism as a form of immaturity, an ego deficit, a narcissistic condition, or developmental delay. During the period between 1939 and 1960, Psychological Abstracts cited 22 articles that mention lesbianism (Sang, 1989). The majority of these articles suggest 'curing' homosexuality through psychoanalysis or shock therapy (Sang, 1989).

Kinsey and the shift in essentialist thinking

In 1948, Kinsey's *Sexual behaviour in the human male* appeared, which was followed in 1953 by *Sexual behaviour in the human female*. Kinsey's most controversial finding was the higher than expected incidence of reported homosexual behaviour. Beyond presenting statistics that a large percentage of the population had homosexual experiences, he also took the position that homosexuality was a healthy expression of sexuality. Although he still subscribed to the essentialist notion that sexuality is biologically rooted, he held that the sexual instinct could be expressed in a variety of ways.

Kinsey's break with traditional medical and scientific thinking was the product of a number of factors. His own background contributed to this (see Christenson, 1971; Pomeroy, 1972). In addition, he began his work on sexuality during the 1930s when popular attitudes about sexual practices had, to some extent, been 'liberated' from their Victorian origins. Beyond personal and socio-historical influences, Kinsey's revolutionary views about sexuality reflected an intellectual shift that was taking place in the sciences.

Kinsey's findings and views on homosexuality expressed in both his 1948 and 1953 publications had a profound effect on the gay movement, especially in America (D'Emilio, 1983). Kinsey's position, and the resulting general shift in the discourse around sexuality in the social sciences, was reflected in the psychological research conducted on homosexuality.

Homosexuality depathologised

A lot of research surfaced comparing heterosexual women with homosexual women. Many of these studies reported that lesbians are as 'psychologically adjusted' and 'healthy' as their heterosexual counterparts (Armon, 1960; Hopkins; 1969; Saghir & Robins, 1971; Seigelman, 1972; Thompson, McCandless & Strickland, 1971). Ammon's was the first comparison study published. She used projective measures to test psychoanalytic theories about lesbians, specifically examining the areas of dependency, conception of the feminine and masculine role, disparagement of men and confusion and conflict in sexual identification, and interpersonal relations. Ammon found no significant differences between lesbian and heterosexual women and thereby concluded that homosexuality should not be considered a clinical entity (1960). A number of studies reported that lesbians and heterosexual women share the same psychological characteristics (Adelman, 1980; Beach, 1980; LaTorre & Wendenberg, 1983). Adelman (1980), for example, found that lesbians meet the same development challenges as heterosexuals, and thus the notion of homosexuality as an abnormal or arrested development had to be questioned. This dissertation further argued that future research on homosexuality should move away from models which viewed homosexuality as pathology and extraordinary development to exploring theoretical models of adjustment and adaptation (Adelman, 1980).

It should be stressed that the psychological literature is reflective, to a certain extent, of the popular culture. The period around 1970 is significant. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s articles were published which depathologised lesbianism. In 1973 the American

Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of psychiatric disorders. In North America, 1969 marks the beginning of the contemporary gay/lesbian liberation movement which was initiated by the Stonewall 'riots' in New York City. This refers to the first time gay men and lesbians responded to police harassment and publicly defended their rights (Blumenfeld & Raymond, 1989).

It can be argued that the classical essentialists, as well as Kinseyan essentialists, both promoted the medicalisation of sexuality. The term 'medicalisation' refers to two interrelated processes. First, certain behaviours or conditions are given medical meaning, that is, they are defined in terms of health and illness. Second, medical practice becomes a vehicle for eliminating or controlling problematic experiences that are defined as deviant (Kitzinger, 1987). This was definitely the case with homosexuality – homosexuals were first defined as sick, and then as 'just as healthy as heterosexuals'.

A popular method used to depathologise lesbianism was first to identify heterosexual women as the norm (regular healthy women), and then to minimise the differences between lesbian and non-lesbian women. The 'normality' of lesbians was then demonstrated. The significant and instrumental psychological research undertakings since Kinsey have dissolved or minimised the differences between lesbian and heterosexual women (Kitzinger, 1987). This is certainly true if one reviews research of the period (see Kingdom, 1979; LaTorre & Wendenburg, 1983; Muckler & Phelan, 1979; Saghir & Robins, 1971).

It has to be recognised that while this approach has certain shortcomings, it has been important in depathologising lesbianism. However, by depathologising lesbianism through the minimisation of difference, some of the important aspects of lesbian experience may have been overlooked or, in a sense, 'covered-up'.

Kitzinger (1987) is one of the strongest critics of the approach which she labels as 'liberal humanistic'. Her primary argument is that liberal humanism contributes to eliminating lesbianism from the political realm. She further argues that liberal humanism replaces 'lesbianism as personal pathology with lesbianism as personal choice of lifestyle' (Kitzinger, 1987, p. 45). The consequence is a private and depoliticised identity.

A new medicalised model The continuous influence of the medicalised discourse on psychology, and thus psychology's failure to work within the popular social constructionist paradigm, is clearly highlighted by Kitzinger's criticism of psychological research. She argues that psychology with its liberal humanist or gay affirmative approach to homosexuality has not only depoliticised especially female homosexuality, but has constructed another version of the medical model: while the early psychologists who pathologised homosexuality viewed the person who accepted that he or she was sick and in need of help as the most well adjusted or least mentally disturbed homosexual, with the liberal humanistic discourse the opposite situation prevails – the lesbian or gay man who wants to be a heterosexual is now the least well adjusted (Kitzinger, 1987). Known as ego dystonic homosexuality, this is classified as a diagnostic category in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and statistical manual of 1980. As Macdonald (1976) states, 'before you were sick if you liked being a homosexual, now you are sick if you do

not like being a homosexual' (p. 24).

Kitzinger (1987) further argues that the liberal humanist approach to homosexuality has further entrenched the 'need' for lesbians to make use of psychological services, for example, for lesbian couple counselling, for therapy which facilitates good relationships with each other and the heterosexual world. During this phase the most important role for the psychological profession is the treatment of ego dystonic homosexuality, commonly referred to as 'self-hatred' or internalised homophobia (Gatrell, 1984).

In its attempt to deal with internalised self-hatred experienced by lesbians, the psychological profession reasoned that it was contributing to the development of the 'well-adjusted' lesbian (Coleman, 1982; Masterton, 1983). Kitzinger argues that this unrelenting focus on the 'internal psychological workings of the lesbian, her need for personal growth and self-actualisation serves ... to reassert the need for mental-health practitioners' (Kitzinger, 1987, p. 55). Although the lesbian is not viewed as sick and in need of a cure as argued by the proponents of the pathological model, she still needs the help of the psychological profession to help her attain developmental maturity as a lesbian.

These arguments highlight the 'new' medicalisation of homosexuality. However, Kitzinger, while highly critical of this research, recognises that it has achieved certain gains. Other researchers have hailed it as realistic and positive.

Homophobia as a sickness

An additional shift within psychology has been from classifying the homosexual as sick to classifying persons who hold negative attitudes towards homosexuality as sick (Kitzinger, 1987). These persons are labelled 'homophobes' and are seen to be suffering from homophobia. Homophobes have an 'irrational fear or dread of homosexuals' (MacDonald, 1976). In Kitzinger's view, the sick homosexual is replaced with the sick homophobe. She sees this as another diagnostic reversal regarding homosexuality – the medicalised, pathologised discourse still being prevalent, albeit in a new form (Kitzinger, 1987).

Other researchers have also raised problems with the term 'homophobia' although not for the same ideological reasons as Kitzinger. Most of the researchers have criticised the research for, for example, its male bias (Faraday, 1981), its victimisation of individual 'homophobes' while ignoring societal structures (Plummer, 1981), or the fact that it fails to recognise that prejudicial attitudes towards gay persons may be a vehicle for expressing cultural or religious values (Herek, 1994).

Many psychological researchers are not as critical of the 'homophobic diagnosis' as Kitzinger. This is evidenced by the large number of scales and studies which have been devised to diagnose homophobia (see MacDonald & Games, 1974; Smith, 1971; Weinberg, 1972). Herek (1994, p. 207) describes the popularity of this research: 'the literature of homophobia now comprises hundreds of published papers'.

Summary of shifts in psychological research

In summary, it can be concluded that psychologists' research regarding homosexuality and specifically female homosexuality has undergone certain theoretical shifts. The shifts have been from the classical essentialist perspective where the lesbian is sick, to acceptance of the lesbian (she is just like the heterosexual), to a situation where research predominantly focuses on 'the sick heterosexual' who cannot accept homosexuality as well as the homosexual who suffers from internalised homophobia if she does not accept her homosexuality. Essentially, the shift has been to a new medicalised, depoliticised discourse of homosexuality.

Kitzinger (1987) adopts a social constructionist approach which has gained momentum in the 1990s. However, her argument that lesbianism is an important political choice for all women to make has attracted criticism from a number of lesbians. Chrystos, for instance, remarked (albeit not in direct relation to Kitzinger's work) 'I wouldn't make love with a woman who felt that she was doing her political duty' (1982, p. 24). Not wanting to debate that merits of Kitzinger's viewpoint, but rather to indicate the shift in the way in which homosexuality was conceptualised, the following section deals with the social constructionist approach to homosexuality.

The shift to social constructionism

The 1980s saw social constructionism emerging as a new approach to homosexuality (Dynes, 1992). Rather than conceiving of homosexuality as something which has an

essential, unchanging quality, the social constructionist approach views homosexuality as a historical construction, subject to change in meaning, expression, and experience as a result of changing historical conditions.

Tiefer (1992) argues that the major obstacle to the social constructionist approach to homosexuality in psychology is the domination of theory and research by the biomedical model based within the essentialist framework, as described in the previous section. The essentialist view of sexuality as a biologically-rooted phenomenon, even in its revised Kinseyan form, does not take into account the larger social and historical framework within which human sexuality functions.

The development of the constructionist viewpoint was closely linked to the revolutionary changes taking place in the gay movement, both in North America and the countries of Western Europe. Gay activism emerged in the social and political arena in the 1970s. The meaning, experience, and expression of homosexuality shifted in the context of a supportive and 'open' political climate. The impact of historical change challenged the established view that homosexuality was essentially defined by its biological character and unaffected by social and historical conditions. Ironically, the theorists who subscribed to the essentialist view, especially in its classical form, had laid the groundwork for the gay liberation movement, and consequently for the constructionist reinterpretation of homosexuality (Weeks, 1985).

The question that needs to be asked is 'how did psychological research respond to the theoretical shift to social construction?' Tiefer (1992, p. 295) sums up the response of

psychology: 'New theories, potentially explosive in their implication for our future understanding and behaviour in regard to sex [and I would add, sexuality] have been proposed, but psychology seems not to have noticed'. This is not entirely true. Kitzinger is one of the psychologists who has researched lesbianism from a social constructionist viewpoint. In South Africa, Blyth (1989) has also conducted research within this framework. Coming back to the question 'has psychology risen to the social constructionist challenge?', the answer is 'yes and no'. Some psychological research regarding female homosexuality is still predominantly based within a positivist framework while others have definitely 'taken up the social constructionist challenge'.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTION OF HOMOSEXUALITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Many authors (Billig, 1976; Chesler, 1976; Essed, 1987) emphatically asserted that 'the specific societal context has a very significant influence upon social scientists' (Chesler, 1976, p. 60). As such it is important to provide an overview of the societal context in which psychology developed in South Africa to fully comprehend the lack of research in South African journals on male and female homosexuality.

The section on the legal construction of homosexuality illustrates the link between the state, psychologists and the law. Psychologists who provided evidence in a memorandum to the 1968 parliamentary Select Committee investigation argued that homosexuality was a sickness, and that homosexuals could be 'cured' with spiritual and psychological intervention. In spite of this, they said that individuals should be held responsible for their

behaviour. Although it was not logically sound, this evidence was used to argue for the criminalisation and prosecution of homosexuals. Psychologists did not publicly (or in any other way) question this criminalisation.

Apartheid and racism

The absence of any kind of opposition to the criminalisation of homosexuality by psychologists is not surprising if one notes Seedat's statement that 'In the case of South Africa, psychology's roots, development, form and practices are all informed by the dominant legacy of apartheid' (Seedat, 1992, p. 50). He says that racist and oppressive political ideology and practices influenced and continue to frame the 'thinking, practice and roles' of a large number of South African psychologists.

HF Verwoerd, the architect of South African apartheid, was a psychologist. In the first half of the century psychologists were involved in various studies and tests which justified the superiority of white South Africans. See Seedat (1992) for a detailed discussion on the role of psychologists in the entrenchment of apartheid.

Regarding where the majority of South African psychologists stood regarding the question of racial separation and thus apartheid, one only needs to look at what happened in the professional organisations.

The South African Psychological Association was formed in 1948 – the same year in which the National Party came into power. For the first nine years, SAPA only had white

members, although its constitution did not explicitly exclude blacks. In 1957 an application for membership from South Africa's first black woman psychologist was refused. The first black members were only admitted five years later in 1962. This led to a large number of members resigning to form a 'whites only' psychological organisation, the Psychological Institute of the Republic of South Africa (PIRSA). By 1976, PIRSA had 500 members against the 338 of PASA. This clearly shows the position of psychologists towards apartheid (Bishevel, 1976; Cooper, Nicholas, Seedat & Statman, 1990).

Psychological research on homosexuality

The question that logically follows is 'what did psychologists' academic discourse have to say about homosexuality?' This is particularly relevant given the role of psychologists in supporting the doctrine of 'keeping the races separate' and thus supporting the apartheid regime. As far as I have been able to determine, up until late 1996 not a single publication of the official academic journal for psychologists has ever published an article on female homosexuality. At this stage the article by Blyth and Straker (1996) on intimacy, fusion and frequency of sexual contact in lesbian couples is still the only article published. In 1984 Theron published an article on the differences of opinion towards the American Psychiatric Association's decision to delete homosexuality from its list of psychiatric disorders. He argued that the decision was controversial because homosexuality had been accepted as abnormal in psychiatric circles for more than 100 years. In addition to creating differences of opinion among professionals, this decision also created a dilemma for the psychotherapist who was now faced with the decision to 'either try to change his (sic) homosexual clients sexual orientation or to help him to

accept it' (Theron, 1984, p. 106). The article further argued that the different perspectives on homosexuality should be critically assessed – while the writer seems to support the notion that homosexuality is not abnormal, this is not stated explicitly.

Whether the paucity of articles on both male and female homosexuality can be attributed to a complete absence of manuscripts on the topic, or the unwillingness of journals and other publications to publish such submissions, is unclear. It is probably a combination of both factors.

I have already said I do not wish to succumb to what Kitzinger (1987) describes as the 'up the mountain saga' by rejecting past research and quickly embracing newer ideas as 'progressive'. Therefore, I will refer to the research conducted in South Africa on homosexuality by focusing on how the research, in the context of international research trends, has presented the homosexual as sick, in need of help, and committing a sin, and particularly how this research has failed to include the experiences of the black majority.

Early research

As early as the early 1950s, the first theses and dissertations about homosexuality were completed, mainly at the Afrikaans universities. In 1951, Loedolff's study drew attention to the possible dangers of homosexuality and recommended treatment intervention that would lead to homosexuals being 'cured'. He stressed that treatment was necessary for lesbians and gay men, because he erroneously believed that homosexuals were sexually attracted to children and were therefore dangerous to society (Loedolff, 1951).

In 1956 Liddicoat completed a dissertation which Blyth (1989) commends as presenting a balanced view of homosexuality. However, both Loedolff (1951) and Liddicoat (1956) ignored the experiences of black people. It is also significant that both these research reports were used as evidence in the 1968 parliamentary Select Committee investigation into homosexuality referred to earlier in this chapter.

Botha (1975) argued for a compassionate and patient attitude towards homosexuals, and for the treatment of homosexuality, based on Christian beliefs. However, his sample consisted only of white men. One wonders if his argument would have been similar had he focused on or included black men. Given the attitudes of the psychological profession and the state toward black people at the time – money would probably not have been spent on researching them on the grounds that they are 'beyond help' – these arguments for compassion and patience could be seen as representing a kind of faith in the redemption of whites.

This is wholly consistent with the established views of the state according to which the homosexual was deemed sick, a threat to the South African Christian society, and a result of faulty personality factors. Despite arguments that homosexuality should be criminalised, most officials were not in favour of imposing heavy prison sentences against gay men. At the same time, black people in general and certain white activists were being given the heaviest prison sentences possible.

Researchers such as Jacobs (1975), Kotze (1974) and Prinsloo (1973), all working from the 'homosexuality as pathology or deviance' model, focused on gaining insight into the

phenomenon and eventually 'curing' the white gay South African male. Once cured, this male would, in keeping with the logic and rationale of the time, take his rightful role in building a nation that reflected the principles and aims of the apartheid regime.

In 1975 Woolfson conducted research on aetiological and personality factors of homosexual behaviour in women. This work was used by white activists in Natal in the 1980's to campaign for an end to the repression of homosexuals (Gevisser, 1994).

Between the 1950s and the 1980s, there was not much research on lesbians or lesbianism. Redlinghuys (1978) and Cronje (1979) both made comparisons between lesbians and heterosexual women and both studies suggested that 'disturbed' roles within the family and generally problematic family relationships were contributing variables to female homosexuality. Once again, the experiences of black women were overlooked in these studies.

More recent research

From the mid 1980s more liberal, gay affirmative research has been completed at historically white liberal universities. Some research focused on lesbians and their children and challenged court decisions that deemed lesbians to be unsuitable mothers (Tucker, 1986). Blyth (1989) explored the identities presented by gay women and Knight (1989) contributed to affirmative research with a focus on female couples. These research projects were completed at the University of Cape Town and the University of Witwatersrand respectively, the country's foremost historically white liberal universities.

Although this research can only make a positive contribution to building a gay rights culture in South Africa, the experiences of black women were not a part of these studies. Blyth (1989) recommends that the experiences of black gay women be researched and documented to create a more accurate context for understanding sexual orientation.

In 1981 a sociological study was published by Schurink which investigated the lifestyles of a group of lesbians. One of her conclusions was that lesbians have a high self-image as well as a high level of self-acceptance. Once again, however, the research was based on interviews with only white lesbians.

Another recent focus of academic psychology theses has been attempts to determine psychologists' attitudes towards homosexuality. Tarrant (1992) examined the attitudes of 15 psychologists towards homosexuality and their approaches to therapy with gay clients. She found that most of these practitioners did not view homosexuality as being pathological per se, but there was a general lack of familiarity with the more recent literature and findings in the field. While these psychologists did not condone discrimination against gay men and women in any way, an active role for combating heterosexism was not advocated. The move towards gay affirmative models of psychotherapy, which has occurred in other parts of the world, was not reflected in the attitudes of the research group.

Tarrant's study (1992) does not indicate how many of the therapists interviewed were male and how many female, nor does it indicate how many of the participants were white and how many black. This seems to be in keeping with the idea that data collection

should not reflect racial categories to support the building of a unified South African nation at all levels. I do not support this view – if we are serious about addressing past inequalities, it is necessary to track racial and gender categories as part of a political empowerment strategy. Tarrant's (1992) research does not refer to, or demonstrate an awareness of the race, gender and class differences amongst gay and lesbian South Africans and their diverse experiences. These issues cannot be overlooked if we are serious about addressing the heterosexist bias within therapy, as well as in university curricula that are used in the training of future psychologists.

In concluding this section, it is fair to say that issues pertinent to gay and lesbian South Africans, particularly black gays and lesbians, are not popular within the corridors of South African academia. Although articles regarding lesbian and gay issues have been published in alternative South African journals – for example, *Agenda* – there is a 'deafening silence' regarding these topics in mainstream psychology journals. Interestingly articles have been published in the South African sociology journals (for example, Duckitt, 1984; Kritzinger & Van Aswegen, 1994; Schulze, 1991). Organised psychology in South Africa launched the new or post-apartheid psychological organisation in January 1994. The new society has discussed the launch of a women's section in the organisation, but at this stage a gay and lesbian section has not even been hinted at (Potgieter & De la Rey, 1997).

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

This chapter illustrates the way in which dominant groupings have constructed homosexuality and the consequences of these representations. The chapter illustrates the link between the state, the academic discipline, culture and the professional practice of psychology in the construction of 'the homosexual'. What is also relevant is the relationship between race, class and gender in the entrenchment of the particular discourses. Another point to be made is that these discourses presented by the dominant groupings are neither static nor are they monolithic.

The chapters which follow describe in detail the actual research procedures, analysis and interpretation of the data. Part of the process will be to explore how the constructions and representations of homosexuality as reviewed in this chapter are reflected in, as well as challenged, by the discourses produced by black lesbians.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This chapter provides information on the Central Study which is concerned with the discourses on homosexuality produced by a group of black South African lesbians. However, before providing information on the participants and the processes involved, it is necessary to explain why a feminist qualitative methodology was the most appropriate method for the present research.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND FEMINIST RESEARCH

There is a large amount of literature which speaks to the topic of what constitutes feminist social research (Devault, 1990, 1993; Maynard, 1994; Mies, 1983). The view that feminism has a method of conducting social research which is specific to it has been questioned in recent years (see Harding, 1987; Reinharz, 1992; Stanley & Wise, 1990). However, this view was popular in the early stages of second wave feminist scholarship and is still one that is advocated (see, for example, Bhavnani, 1994; Lather, 1988; Reinharz, 1983; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1995).

In the 'early days' of feminist research, the arguments advocated by feminists defended a qualitative approach to research versus a quantitative method of enquiry. Recently, however, feminists have recognised that a qualitative method of enquiry is not the only 'politically correct' method of conducting research and that feminist research need not

necessarily always be equated with a qualitative approach.

As Maynard (1994, p.12) comments:

With hindsight, however, it can be seen that this approach, which proved so beneficial to feminists in their early work, gradually developed into something of an unproblematised orthodoxy against which the political correctness, or otherwise, of all feminist research could be judged. It began to assume that only qualitative methods, especially the in-depth face to face interview, could really count in feminist terms and generate useful knowledge.

Maynard points out factors which contributed to feminists reconsidering their position on method. First, there is the need to acknowledge that the qualitative techniques that have tended to dominate are not in and of themselves specific to feminism. Secondly, a number of researchers have drawn attention to the way in which the polarisation of quantitative versus qualitative impoverishes research and there have been calls for the use of multiple methods to be used in a complementary rather than a competitive way. Although feminists have used and advocated a range of research techniques, the tendency to equate feminist research with a qualitative approach has persisted.

I draw attention to these issues because it is commonly assumed that to conduct feminist social research is to adopt a qualitative approach. Secondly, although it is widely accepted by feminists that there is a feminist mode of enquiry, there is by no means agreement on what this might mean or involve (see Maynard, 1994).

Given that this research is based within a feminist paradigm, I attempt to address the question of what constitutes feminist research by asking what distinguishes it from other forms of research.

Although there is no one particular model of what feminist research is, recurring themes appear throughout the literature:

- * Most writers refer to assumptions underlying feminist research, highlighting the myth of value-free research (see, for example, Cook, 1986; Mies, 1983; Nebraska Feminist Collective, 1983; Ring, 1987).
- * There is the focus on women's experiences, and the concern for ethical questions which guide the research practice (Bannister et al, 1994; Harding, 1987; Hooks, 1981; Sherin, 1987).
- * According to Maynard (1994, p. 21), feminists are 'concerned with countering scientific philosophy and practice which is often associated with it'.
- * Data collection is not seen as a value free, neutral process of gathering information. Rather, it relies on valuing the experiences of the participants and not having an indifferent, disinterested, alienated attitude towards the research participants. It is concerned with meanings which participants attach to experiences and recognises the links and complexity between knowledge and the social context (Cook, 1986; Sherin, 1987; Strebel, 1993).
- * The relationship between the researcher and the researched is given attention. In this regard, power issues between researcher and participants are acknowledged (Kitzinger, 1987; Reinharz, 1992; Stanley & Wise, 1990).

- * Some authors refer to the outcome of research. Mies (1983, p. 123) suggests that research has a history of serving the interests of the powerful whereas feminist research should attempt to serve the interests of the 'dominated, exploited and oppressed groups especially women'.
- * Overall, the aim of feminist research has been to transform women's lives. However, what constitutes feminist research has not been static (Code, 1991; Maynard, 1994; Stanley & Wise, 1990).

The characteristics of feminist research are similar to those of qualitative research, except that qualitative researchers who are not labelled or who do not label themselves as feminist, would not necessarily view the transformation of women's lives as a 'characteristic' of their research. Qualitative researchers also point to the assumptions or the philosophy which underlie the approach as well as the fact that there is no single theory that is associated with the discipline.

For example, Denzin & Lincoln (1994, p.3) point out that 'qualitative research, as a set of interpretative practices, privileges no single methodology over another'. No theory or paradigm can be associated exclusively with qualitative research methods and strategies – from constructivism and cultural studies to feminism and Marxism. Qualitative researchers highlight the socially constructed nature of reality, the intrinsic relationship between the researcher and what is being researched, as well as how the context shapes the inquiry (Berg, 1989; Carspecken & Apple, 1992; Strauss, 1987).

Denzin & Lincoln (1994) further state that qualitative researchers point out the value-laden nature of any research undertaken while, in contrast, 'quantitative studies emphasise the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes'.

Qualitative researchers point out that qualitative research methods permit a considerable amount of flexibility (Griffin, 1986; Willis, 1980). Griffin (1986, p. 182) for example reflects on how the use of qualitative methods created the space for her to look at more sensitive issues such as sexuality and domestic violence. Van Manen (1979) points out that qualitative data, with its emphasis on people's 'lived experience', is fundamentally well-suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, processes and structures of their lives; that is their perceptions, assumptions, prejudgments, presuppositions and connecting these meanings to the social world around them.

Miles & Huberman (1984) highlight the point that a major characteristic of most qualitative research is that, when collecting data, the focus is naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings so that the researcher has a strong idea of what 'real life' is like. Thus the influence of the local context is not stripped away, but taken into account. Billig (1978, p.203) argues that a quantitative methodology in his study of contemporary British Fascism would only have 'revealed the surface characteristics of that group's ideology'.

Bannister et al (1994) state that reflexivity is possibly the most distinctive characteristic of qualitative research. At the most basic level this entails disciplined self reflection (Wilkinson, 1988). The researcher is encouraged to continuously reflect on and evaluate

the research topic, the research process and research design as well as the role of the researcher.

Reflexivity is thus about acknowledging the integral role of the researcher in knowledge construction, acknowledging that all findings are constructions which are continually changing and 'being' reconstructed (Bannister et al, 1994; Dubois, 1983). Certain of the reasons for my opting for a qualitative study working within a feminist social constructionist paradigm is in line with the characteristics which I have discussed and outlined regarding social constructionism, feminism and qualitative research. The following discussion by Bannister et al (1994, p. 142) also provides some insight into my choice:

Qualitative research recognises a complex and dynamic social world. It involves researcher's active engagement with participants and acknowledges that understanding is constructed and that multiple realities exist. It is theory generating, inductive, aiming to gain valid knowledge and understanding by illuminating the nature and quality of people's experiences. Participants' accounts are valued, emergent issues within the accounts are attended to. The developing theory is thus firmly and richly grounded in personal experiences rather than a reflection of the researcher's a priori frameworks. In this way insight is gained to the meanings people attach to their experiencing.

Research using qualitative methods has regularly been criticised for not being able to stand the traditional tests of reliability and validity. Responses to this criticism have been

varied. In the following section I address issues of reliability and validity in relation to qualitative research.

QUALITATIVE METHODS AND THE RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY ISSUE

Mishler (1986) argues that the four R's associated with quantitative methods, namely Reactivity, Representativeness, Reliability and Replicability could be contested.

Qualitative researchers have challenged the 'scientific objectivity' of quantitative research and have, in fact, questioned what is meant by 'objectivity'. In addition, they have argued that representativeness, which usually entails a large sample, does not necessarily mean more, or different, information.

Regarding validity qualitative researchers have suggested alternative ways than those suggested by the quantitative researchers and have also suggested that what constitutes validity be revised (Bannister et al, 1994; Smaling, 1992). It has been suggested that an alternative form of validity includes keeping a reflexive journal which explores 'who you are, why you chose the particular topic, procedural notes, how you felt...in fact anything that you believe affected the research' (Bannister et al, 1994, p. 151). Other researchers have suggested transparency of the research process, linking the findings to similar work, checking theoretical assumptions (Corradi, 1991; Layder, 1982; Strauss, 1987).

Triangulation has also been suggested as a method. This involves studying phenomena in at least two ways, enhancing objectivity, validity and reliability (Smaling, 1992). Smaling and Bannister et al distinguish various forms of triangulation which include data

triangulation, investigator triangulation, method triangulation as well as theoretical triangulation.

Bannister et al have pointed out that completely valid research, which represents an ultimate truth, is not possible when working within a feminist paradigm which holds that all knowledge is socially constructed. They state 'We must recognise that all research is constructed, that no knowledge is certain, whatever the claims, but is rather a particular understanding in process, and that different understandings, different ways of knowing exist (Bannister et al 1994, p. 157).

Certain researchers such as Kirk and Miller (1986) have suggested that qualitative research validity usually 'happens', unfortunately this is at the expense of achieving reliability. Smaling (1992) has made clear recommendations as to how this problem can be overcome.

Firstly, he advocates that qualitative researchers need to define what they mean by reliability. He makes it clear that reliability can be a characteristic of actions (such as methods, techniques and instruments, research processes and research designs) and of research results (such as collected data, interim and final conclusions and recommendations).

To increase reliability he also mentions measures such as triangulation, peer examination, member checks, argumentative consensus, selection and training of researchers, observer, interviewers and others.

In conclusion, the point stressed by Marshall (1986, p. 197) is extremely appropriate:

We need to re-cast the traditional concept of validity to apply it productively to new paradigm, qualitative research. We certainly need to detach ourselves from any notion that validity tells us 'how true' any piece of research is on anything like an objective scale of truth... Validity instead becomes largely a quality of the knower, in relation to his/her data and enhanced by the different vantage points and forms of knowing – it is then personal, relational and contextual.

The shift towards and prominence of both feminist research and qualitative methods has been captured in theoretical debates and research in the social sciences. In psychology they have featured prominently in social psychology, and more recently in community psychology. A lot of this research (although not all) has been based within a social constructionist paradigm. These links between feminism, social constructionism and qualitative research make sense especially if one takes into account the commonalities between the three. One of the most obvious commonalities is the challenging of the traditional notion that knowledge is objective and that there is one truth.

The following section deals with the pragmatics of the present research project, for example recruitment of participants, instruments used and collection of data.

AIM OF THE STUDY

The main aim of the present study is to undertake an examination of the discourses regarding homosexuality and specifically female homosexuality (lesbianism) as produced by a group of black South African lesbians. In addition, the thesis explores the positions and viewpoints from which black lesbians speak, the institutions which prompt their discourses (for example, legal, cultural and academic), and the challenges which they offer to these dominant discourses.

Key questions which this dissertation asks in respect of these aims may be outlined as follows:

- 1) To what extent do participants conform to and construct their experiences within the dominant discourses of female homosexuality?
- 2) To what extent do participants resist and challenge dominant discourses of female homosexuality and what alternative discourses do they draw on to make sense of their positioning as black lesbians?
- 3) To what extent does their positioning as lesbians challenge as well as contradict the dominant discourses of gender roles and gender conformity?
- 4) Given the fact that there is a paucity of research on sexuality within an African context I am interested in how a marginalised form of sexuality i.e. female homosexuality is constructed within an African context and secondly how it challenges, supports and resists the dominant contextual heterosexual discourse on sexuality.

RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Selecting the participants and deciding what the most appropriate way to collect and analyse the data would be, was not a straightforward procedure.

To begin with, the nature of the subject under investigation placed restrictions on the recruitment and selection of participants. It was decided to attempt to recruit participants in a range of ways. Initially I wrote to various magazines and the South African feminist journal *Agenda*. At the same time the assistant researcher and I contacted women whom we knew personally. We also contacted a gay and lesbian organisation which we knew had a few black members. The response from the magazines was minimal and initially participants were drawn mainly from the group of women we contacted personally.

From this group we received referrals to other women who might be willing to talk to us. In many cases, the women who provided the contact would ask potential interviewees to call me. (The research assistant was not always contactable as she lived in the tented area of a squatter camp.)

The techniques used to attract participants thus amounted to what is traditionally known as friendship pyramiding, snowballing and networking (see Krausz, 1969; Vetere, 1982).

Interestingly, I received letters from people asking me not to pursue this enquiry as well as from a prisoner telling me that he was 'available' for a relationship and that I should not be a lesbian. I also received letters from readers of magazines with a predominantly

black readership requesting career guidance or seeking employment opportunities. Many of their addresses indicated that they were in remote areas of the country and had the idea that a person attached in some way to a university could help them in this regard. I answered their letters directing them to organisations in their areas that could possibly assist them.

What some of the responses indicated was that it was generally believed that a woman who could not find a man was lesbian; and secondly that there is a serious lack of resources on issues like career counselling and Aids awareness in rural areas and black people were grasping at any potential 'straw' that could provide help and information.

RESEARCH ASSISTANCE

Before discussing the participants and the instruments used to collect the data, it is necessary to provide details of the role and background of the assistant researcher as she was crucial to the whole process.

The assistant researcher was a Xhosa-speaking woman, 'F'. She had been 'out' as a gay woman for a number of years and when I met her she was active in a gay and lesbian organisation in Cape Town. She was also working on initiating a gay and lesbian organisation (or possibly a branch of a Cape Town gay and lesbian organisation) in Khayelitsha. 'F' had completed a short course on interviewing techniques with a marketing company where she did part-time work. She had no formal training in psychology.

'F' was the obvious choice at that stage. She had contact with black lesbians in Cape Town and its townships, as well as other parts of the country. She labelled herself 'lesbian', had an understanding of interviewing techniques, was competent in English, Afrikaans and Xhosa, and could translate when necessary. 'F' could interview the women at times which suited them as she did not have a nine- to- five job. Many participants made appointments for the mornings when children and other family members were not likely to be at home. Finally, 'F' was committed to the project as she felt very strongly that lesbian issues needed to be addressed on a range of levels.

INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION OF PARTICIPANTS

In a previous section I discussed how, in certain contexts, women do not use labels familiar to Western societies to define themselves as lesbian. In addition, when working from a social constructionist perspective it almost seems contradictory to select women who are lesbian' given the arguments of social constructionism. A comment by Kitzinger (1987, p. 187) reflects the difficulty which social constructionists could possibly encounter when deciding on research participants: '...despite the accurate recognition, by some gay affirmative researchers, of social constructionism as an important theoretical development for the social sciences, there seems to be considerable confusion about how research on homosexuality might proceed within this framework'.

In deciding how to recruit women for the study, I followed the following guidelines for inclusion:

- * Women who defined themselves as lesbian (and thus used the label 'gay' or 'lesbian')
- * Women who, according to my research assistant, labelled themselves by using a Xhosa word for gay (*nongayindoda*), which is translated into English as 'man-woman'
- * Women who said they loved other women and who socialised in what could be called a lesbian network in the township. Here I relied on the assistant researcher's judgment.

All the women in the sample were, at the time of the interview, 'involved' in a permanent relationship with a woman or had been dating women 'exclusively' for more than a year.

It should be noted that a lot of research regarding lesbians is subjected to a severe process of selection. As discussed previously, very rigid definitions serve as gate-keepers to decide who is eligible to be an account provider or participant (Kitzinger, 1987; 1990). Many researchers are then faced with what are often referred to as issues of definition – who for the purposes of the research should be accepted as a 'real' lesbian?

Psychological studies often define lesbians as women who engage in sexual activity with a person of the same sex. According to De Cecco and Shively (1984), only 11 percent of studies use self identification as a criterion and usually these writers are criticised for

naively accepting and trusting the respondents' self-identification. To qualify as an 'authentic' lesbian, a woman has to illustrate her 'reliability' as a lesbian. Variables that lend themselves to qualification include: A woman being able to provide 'evidence' that her lesbianism has been an integrated stable part of her adult lifestyle. She thus has to have reached a certain age (see Kaye, 1967; Saghir & Robins, 1969); not be sexually attracted to men (Ellis, 1969); be sexually attracted to women (Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Poole, 1972); and to have genital sexual activity with women on a regular basis (Bieber, 1969; Kaye, 1967; Saghir & Robins, 1969). This sexual activity with women should take place even though opportunities to engage in sexual activities with men are easily attainable (Ward & Kassebaum, 1964).

Kitzinger (1987) points out that another type of exclusion is to 'invalidate' a woman's lesbianism by providing labels that indicate that she is not a 'real' lesbian. These labels include terms such as 'a phase' (Moses, 1978); 'amphigenic invert' (Freud, 1977), which means that the woman also feels attracted to men; 'contigent invert' which means that if men were available they would be her choice for a sexual interaction (Freud, 1977) and pseudo-homosexual (Defries, 1976) which means that lesbianism is presented in political terms.

This labelling process is often used to discount the work of other researchers (Kitzinger, 1987). For example, referring to Masters and Johnson's research, Money (1979) discounts lesbian participants by saying they were in fact 'bisexual'. Saghir (1979) views Masters and Johnson's lesbian research participants as 'maladjusted heterosexuals'.

Researchers are usually working from the position that they have to discover 'the truth' about lesbians (and about any other area which they are researching). Kitzinger adds that by defining a large number of women outside the category of 'lesbian' researchers are left with a small, confined and homogenous grouping of 'authentic' lesbians (Kitzinger, 1987).

For researchers whose aim is to assess and find the truth and, accordingly, check the reliability and validity of their truth, the use of self definition and self-reporting would therefore be extremely troublesome. Evaluating the use of retrospective data in research on homosexuality, Spanier (1976), for example, draws attention to two primary sources of error. These are unintentional false accounting as a result of poor memory or changing perceptions of past reality, and intentional false accounting due to fear of the consequences of being honest with the researcher or through a conscious desire to provide an untruth for ego enhancement.

As spelt out in a previous section, the present researcher does not work from the theoretical position that there is one truth or that the aim of research is to present objective facts. The research reported in this thesis does thus not try to compile accurate, objective and ultimate truths about black lesbians. The group discussions are not intended to reveal, for example, what the participants think, or thought in the past – the focus is on the account itself. The aim is not to reveal the 'real' histories, life events and experiences of the participants, but to understand how people construct, negotiate and interpret their experience.

With this theoretical position and aim in mind, there is thus no need to impose strict definitions about who, for the purposes of research, should count as a 'real' black lesbian, nor was there a need for a representative number of lesbians. Similarly, the accounts provided do not need to be vetted for their 'accuracy', 'objectivity', 'reliability' or 'validity' as the aim is not to obtain the truth' about lesbianism, but to collect and explore the variety of accounts black South African lesbians construct about their lesbianism.

INSTRUMENTS

In the following section I describe the interview guideline, the vignettes and photographs that were used to elicit data. I then provide details regarding the individual interviews and focus groups that were conducted.

INTERVIEW GUIDELINE, VIGNETTES AND PHOTOGRAPHS

The data collected from the nine individual interviews and the ten discussion groups was by means of the interview guideline, vignettes and the photographs.

The interview guideline was initially intended to be used on its own. However, after using only the interview guideline during the three pilot individual interviews, it was decided to make use of vignettes and two photographs to elicit discussion as well. Ultimately, apart from the three pilot interviews, the data was collected primarily by means of the vignettes and photographs. The interview schedule was rarely used except to check whether issues had been covered.

The fact that the primary data collection method we eventually used (photographs and vignettes rather than the interview schedule as originally planned) illustrated to me that with qualitative research your methodology is never static, but in fact changes and develops as the project develops. This is a point which Holloway (1987); Lovering (1995) and others have emphasised.

Interview guideline

The interview guideline was developed on the basis of:

- a) Kitzinger's interview schedule (Kitzinger, 1987)
- b) Consultation with the research assistant
- c) Consultation with a field worker from a gay and lesbian organisation
- d) Legal, cultural, media and psychological constructions of homosexuality
- e) The three preliminary (pilot) interviews with black lesbians

The interview schedule was finalised after the three pilot interviews had been tape recorded, or hand-written and transcribed verbatim onto computer.

The interview guideline (both the pilot and the final) was translated from English into Xhosa and Afrikaans and then translated back into English to check for accuracy. The Xhosa translation was conducted by the assistant researcher and another woman who taught Xhosa at a high school. The two women translated the interview guideline separately before discussing and comparing what they had done. The Afrikaans translation

was conducted by the assistant researcher and a woman who taught Afrikaans at a high school using the same method (see Appendix 1 for the English version).

Vignettes

The two vignettes which were constructed were intended to be broad enough for participants to create their own meaning, but also to highlight slightly different aspects of the topic. This approach is considered especially useful for less literate women (Strebel, 1994). See Appendix 2 for the vignettes.

Vignette (A) was accompanied by a black and white photograph of two black women. Vignette (B) was accompanied by a black and white photograph of a woman and her family (mother, father, sister and male cousin). To make sure that no person was recognisable on the pictures, I had asked a friend in the USA to take pictures of African-American women. She sent me a picture of African-American women who belonged to a lesbian organisation on the East Coast of the USA. The women in the pictures had full knowledge of what the photographs were to be used for. The picture of a woman and her family used was a picture of my friend's family.

I found that this method was useful and in keeping with Ferreira & Puth (1988) who suggest that an informal group setting with open-ended questions contributes to greater discussion, interaction and stimulation between group members. They further point out that this is especially helpful with regard to issues that may be difficult to talk about in formal one-to-one interviews.

Biographical data questionnaire

This short questionnaire was designed to provide information relating to age, education, marital status, number of children, and other topics. It was administered at the end of the session. At the beginning of the individual interviews we gave the participants the option of filling the form out at the beginning or the end of the session. Most of the women chose to complete the form at the end. At the beginning of the group discussions we also gave participants the option of when to complete the questionnaire. All opted for the end of the session. Certain women asked us to fill the form out for them – they were less literate and felt threatened by having to fill out of the form. This questionnaire was available in English, Afrikaans and Xhosa. (See the English version in Appendix 3).

It seems that by choosing to fill out the questionnaire at the end of the session rather than at the beginning, participants found filling out forms generally stressful procedure or, alternatively, they did not want to provide personal information until they were more comfortable with each other and the whole process.

Individual interviews

It is suggested that for discourse analysis 'verbal material (written or spoken) must be collected and the text of interest should relate to a specific set of foci...a way must be established to elicit and record material' (Levett, 1988, p. 192). Women who we initially contacted were hesitant to be interviewed in a group situation, but they were willing to be interviewed individually.

However, many of these were hesitant to have the interview tape-recorded. Reasons for not wanting to be interviewed in a group situation ranged from not being 'out' ('nobody else knows about me' was a frequently cited reason); to 'I first want to talk to you alone'; to not having any particular reason. Reasons for the resistance to being tape-recorded ranged from unfamiliarity ('never being taped before') and therefore being scared, to being wary that the recording could be used as evidence against the participants.

We started the project by conducting individual interviews because of the hesitancy to be interviewed in a group, and because both myself as the principal researcher and the assistant researcher felt a certain amount of urgency to collect whatever data we could. Because this is such a hidden population, we felt we could not wait to eventually be able to conduct group discussions, rather that we should talk to the available women as soon as possible.

Once we had conducted individual interviews (or while the interview was in progress), certain women asked if we still wanted them to talk in a group. We also received requests from them to meet other lesbians.

From my notes and discussions with my research assistant, it seemed that the presence of the researchers in the individual interviews influenced the discussion. For example, participants checked with us to see if what they were saying was 'correct', or asked a direct question like: 'So what do you think?' I believe that, because of the cultural context from which many of these women come, they are not used to talking to someone who just listens, especially when they have been asked to 'just talk about themselves'.

We had some difficulty with the individual interviews because we often had to take notes rather than being able to rely on a tape recording. At times we found it difficult to decipher our own handwriting from these sessions, and sometimes the women wanted us to hand over our notes at the end of the interview. We had to reassure them that only I or the research assistant would read the notes or listen to the tape. We also often spent time playing the tape back to them because the participants wanted to hear their own voices.

We conducted a total of nine individual interviews. The group discussions which eventually materialised included six women who had been part of the individual interviews. (Three of the women who were interviewed individually did not participate in the group interviews – two because they were still uncomfortable with a group discussion, and one because of practicalities).

The first three individual interviews in which we only made use of the interview guideline, were also included in the study. These three interviews were used as a pilot for the final interview guideline.

It was partly these three initial interviews that led us to consider making use of instruments other than just the interview guideline to elicit information. We thus decided to include the vignettes and photographs which are described in the previous section.

The interviews which only used the interview guideline produced much less information than the interviews which made use of the interview schedule, the vignettes and the photographs.

To recap, nine individual interviews were conducted. Data from the first three interviews was collected using only the interview guideline. Data for the final six individual interviews was elicited using the vignettes and photographs as well as the interview schedule.

FOCUS GROUPS

After having conducted nine individual interviews, the assistant researcher and I realised that we had access to a number of women who were willing to be part of a group discussion. (This included women we had already interviewed individually). We had women contacting us asking to be 'interviewed' as they had heard from friends about us. The nine women who we had interviewed individually thus proved to be avid 'marketers' for us. They had told friends that they 'trusted' both of us and what we were doing was important, as one woman who called me said, 'I want to talk to you and 'F' (the assistant researcher)'. 'K' (who we had interviewed) told me 'you will not let anybody else know who we are and listen to our stuff'.

I was very pleased when the group interviews materialised. From the outset, I had wanted to conduct group interviews rather than individual interviews. One of the reasons for this is that I felt that this would minimise the researchers' influence on the participants.

In addition, focus groups allow access to a wider range of information than individual interviews and they also have the distinct advantage of offering the researcher the option of observing participants engaging in interaction that reflects their attitudes and experiences (Lovering, 1995; May, 1993; Morgan & Spanish, 1984; Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Focus groups also lend themselves to flexible discussions – they provide space for participants to debate and challenge each other regarding the topic, and they are a supportive space for issues to be discussed (Morgan & Spanish, 1984; Strebel, 1993). As illustrated in the section on the analysis of the group process, the focus groups provide more in-depth information on the topic, participants challenge each other, and they do not look to the researcher for constant confirmation (Basch, 1987; Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1988; Morgan & Spanish, 1984; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). For the present study we conducted ten focus groups.

The following section provides detail on how the individual interviews as well as the focus groups were set up, as well as how the instruments were utilised to obtain information.

SETTING UP OF INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

Individual interviews

Either the assistant researcher or the principal researcher (myself) met with participants and conducted the interview at a place that was convenient for them. Prior to the interview being conducted we had spoken to them on the telephone or face-to-face in order to arrange a place to conduct the interview. Certain of the women, after speaking to us telephonically wanted to first meet us and then after this meeting, where we again explained the research which we intended to conduct, set another time to be interviewed. Others however, agreed to be interviewed after the initial contact. I believe that the meeting which took place 'to just talk' served as a way to gain each others' trust.

Focus groups

Before the focus groups met, either the assistant researcher or the principal researcher met individually with each participant who had not participated in the original nine individual interviews. Our initial aim was for both researchers to meet with each participant, but the group which met in Alice in the Eastern Cape, and one of the groups which met in Khayelitsha, only met with the assistant researcher.

The group discussions were held at a place that was convenient for the participants. Two were held at my house, one at a tavern in a Khayelitsha, one at a room in a technikon residence, two in a community organisation meeting room in Khayelitsha, one in a

primary school classroom, one at a participant's home, and one at a sports club. The meeting in Alice was conducted in a lecturer's office at the University of Fort Hare.

Focus Group procedure to elicit information

After they were formally introduced to each other, participants usually sat around chatting to each other while we tested the tape-recorder and put the photographs up on a wall or other convenient place. All groups responded to both vignettes. The photographs were attached to the wall and the vignette explained to them.(the same procedure was followed for the individual interviews except that the photographs were given to the individual women). At times we had to explain the vignettes more than once.

In our individual meetings with the participants, we had explained the process as well as the reasons for the research. This was understood in different ways, for example 'so, it's for your studies, but will help lesbians' or 'it's for a certificate from the university and people will get to know about our lives'. At the beginning of the group sessions we once again explained the process and asked if there were any questions.

Most of the groups (as well as the individual interviewees) had questions and expressed strong feelings about confidentiality like 'only the two of you can listen to the tape as we do not want to be found out by our voices'. We had to give the assurance that no one else would listen to the recording and all names would be changed in the final document. The women also expressed concern that they did not want the full transcript read by anybody else – I had explained that what was said 'would be written down word for word'. Many

felt that certain information could lead to their families 'knowing about them if they read it in a book'. I was concerned about how this 'absolute confidentiality' was going to impact on the study, but assured the participants that I might only give 'some sentences' and not the 'whole talk'. I took two completed dissertations to show the participants how they only reflected extracts in these sources. Feminist writers like Collins (1990), Finch (1984), Kitzinger (1990), and Strelbel (1993) have drawn attention to the ethics and politics of researching women and of the potential to exploit them and the data collected. This potential to exploit and betray was an issue which I was very conscious of throughout the research project (see section on journal for further discussion).

The issue of language needs to be commented on. Groups and the individual interviewees were given the choice of whatever language they felt comfortable in. Interestingly, many opted to speak mainly in English but spoke in another language if they 'got stuck'. In these groups it happened that they spoke English and, at times, Xhosa. One of the two groups that were facilitated only by the assistant researcher, who is a first language Xhosa speaker, was facilitated in Xhosa. However, the participants in this group used many English words and expressions.

A group of nurses were all first language Xhosa speakers but they chose to speak in English. I was not sure if this was because I was present. When I asked why they had chosen English, the responses included 'we do not talk about this 'secret' in Xhosa'; 'we speak mostly English in the hospital'; and 'I only speak Xhosa sometimes'.

When the women spoke Xhosa and I did not understand, the research assistant or somebody in the group translated. Because the research assistant understood all three languages, translation was not necessary for her. However, in the group where all three languages were spoken, translations of both Xhosa and Afrikaans contributions were necessary.

After each vignette which related to the photographs participants were asked what they thought about the life situation of the person/s in the picture and certain questions were introduced when necessary. Sessions lasted between 90 minutes and two hours, with the vignettes both being presented at the same time. Introducing the vignettes together worked extremely well in eliciting discussion – I would argue this was partly due to the issues being closely related.

The groups were conducted without any major problems. The discussions flowed much more easily than I initially expected. The vignettes generated lengthy, detailed discussions. Questions from the interview guideline were rarely introduced. When transcribing the tapes, I sometimes felt that we introduced questions from the guideline to 'make sure we were covering everything' as well as the fact that the principal researcher's formal training was mainly in quantitative research methods – sometimes insecurities about other ways of data collection surfaces in unexpected ways.

After the session, refreshments were served and discussions around the vignettes usually continued and we handed out some reading material.

READING MATERIAL

We provided some leaflets that had been written for the gay and lesbian community. At this stage not much was available and I had photocopied some articles that were written specifically for African-American women as well as some South African leaflets which provided details about gay and lesbian organisations that were emerging. The idea behind this was to provide a means of support, especially to the women who had not met lesbians previously, the sentiment which is captured in the following statement: 'I thought I was the only women in the whole world that felt like this'.

JOURNAL AND PROCESS NOTES

Throughout the project I kept a journal and at the end of each individual interview and focus groups I made structured process notes under the following headings:

- a) How I felt.
- b) Non-verbal behaviour of participants.
- c) General implications and thoughts.

These notes proved very valuable to me in two ways. First, doing them forced me to reflect on and record my own reactions to and handling of the discussions. In addition, this reflective record could possibly be used as part of any subsequent analysis.

Bannister et al (1994) suggest keeping a journal as one of the ways to increase validity.

Although problems and shortcomings in research are often 'written out', or possibly just not reflected in the writing up of the project, I would like to mention a shortcoming with this reflective process. The assistant researcher who was an integral part of the research process should have taken notes on how she felt. We did speak informally about how we felt after each group discussion, but these conversations were not documented – at the time, neither of us 'saw' this as a necessary step in the research process.

One of the issues which features prominently in the journal is the request for absolute confidentiality by the participants. My journal captures my feelings and how I struggled with this very concrete and real example of having to respect the individuals' wishes around confidentiality. I believe that like-minded researchers should have access to data of a qualitative nature, but in this instance the requests of the participants had to be heeded.

In my journal I wondered about whether this strict adherence to confidentiality or what most women called 'security' was related to South Africa's past – apartheid-era activists had to go to great lengths to protect their personal security.

Lesbians in other contexts also have to be assured of confidentiality, but not to the extent requested by participants in the present study. One of the consequences of this confidentiality is that I am not able to provide an appendix which reflects the transcription of any of the interviews (both individual and group).

THE RESEARCHER AND PARTICIPANTS

The relevance of 'who conducts research on whom' has very often been stressed. This has often focused on white women doing research on black women (Blyth, 1989; Greene, 1994; Kitzinger, 1987), and on men doing research on women – essentially the issue has been raised around outsiders looking in. Obviously, the issue of power has been integral to these debates. The issue of differences in identity between the researcher and participants was initially publicly debated in South Africa at the Women and Gender Conference in Natal at the beginning of 1991 (De la Rey, 1997a). An issue that black women felt particularly angered about was the fact that most of the conference presentations were of research conducted by white women researchers exploring certain aspects of black women's lives.

Regarding the present research, I was aware that I am a middle class black (coloured) woman and the majority of the participants are black working class women (both African and coloured). The assistant researcher is an African working class woman. Also, I did not label myself as lesbian but said that I could see myself having a relationship with either a man or a woman. The response I received was varied. Certain of the women felt that what was important was the fact that I am black. The following statement made by a participant more or less captures this sentiment:

I talk to black women everyday about everything and anything. Perhaps not about being gay but sometimes we do talk about it. I only talk to whites when I really need to, at the shop for example...Come to think of it I do

not have white friends – white people do not come to my house – even those comrades in the gay organisation I belong to do not always understand the experiences of a black lesbian. Some of them have ideas about us which are in fact racist.

The women that could be labelled as political activists were, however, divided on the issue of race. Some said to me that 'our struggle is a non-racial one' and that means that 'not all whites are bad' therefore 'not only people who say they are lesbian are good and all others bad'. However, one woman stated:

if all the work is done by whites, like example the autobiographies of black women, then this is a problem – what I am saying if there is a pattern of only whites being involved this is a issue. However, I do not say in principle that only blacks should do studies on blacks, men on men...no that is not my position.

Kitzinger (1987) found that politically conscious black lesbian women in Britain did not want to be interviewed by a white woman. However, the situation in South Africa seems to be slightly more complicated – black women do not outright exclude white researchers, but state that they should not dominate. This could possibly be related to the way in which the liberation struggle of the African National Congress has played itself out in South Africa – it has not been an anti-white struggle. The conclusion could be drawn that this has an effect on the women I spoke to – they did not have a separatist agenda in terms of sexual orientation or race. Alternatively, their willingness to participate in the

interviews could be related to the pleasurable experience of talking to an 'understanding stranger' (Dexter, 1970).

In some of the groups the African women tried to explain certain things to me which they assumed I might not understand as I was 'coloured'. For example, 'V,' a participant states: 'my mother wanted to take me to the *sangoma* – in our culture (looking at me) the *sangoma* is a traditional healer and is an important person.' I felt that the issue of both class and the part of South Africa that they thought you 'came from' was relevant. In certain of the groups some of the coloured women would use language and then attempt to (voluntarily) explain what they meant to both me and the assistant researcher. As one woman jokingly stated 'Cheryl, I know you do not understand everything us *Kaapies* [Capetonians] say, as I can hear on your accent that you are not from the Cape – sometimes even coloured educated people from Cape Town do not understand the *Kaapse Taal* [Cape language]'. As regards the assistant researcher, it was assumed that she did not understand as she was African – the explanations offered were thus for the benefit of both of us.

A range of researchers have documented the role which class and cultural factors have on the research process (Blyth, 1989; Greene, 1994; Kitzinger, 1987; Riessman, 1991; Silverman, 1993). I did not feel that the issues raised in the preceding discussion had any major inhibiting effect on the information which the women shared. However, I decided to further explore certain aspects in the analysis of the group process.

Finally, the point made by De la Rey (1997b, p. 194) is an important one which researchers should take cognisance of '...no matter what the method, we need to be conscious of our own positioning in relation to the researched and the social and political context in which the research occurs.'

WHAT DID THE SAMPLE EVENTUALLY LOOK LIKE?

The following table provides details of the participants in the individual interviews.

TABLE 1: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS: DEMOGRAPHIC FEATURES

N = 9

VARIABLE		N
Age Range	22-24	2
	25-29	1
	30-34	2
	35-39	1
	40-44	1
	45-49	1
	50-54	1
	55-59	1
Home Language	English	3
	African	4
	Afrikaans	2
Education Level	None	-
	Primary	4
	Junior Secondary	2
	Secondary	2
	Tertiary	1
Language of Interview	English	6
	African	2
	Afrikaans	1

Nine women participated in the individual interviews. Their ages ranged from 22-54 years. Women were interviewed across age groups. As commented on elsewhere, certain

women chose to speak in English rather than their first language. Only one of the women had a tertiary education. Excluding the women with the tertiary education. Among the rest approximately half of the sample had a primary school education and approximately 50% a secondary school education. Of the women who had a secondary education, just under 50% had only completed junior secondary school. The low level of education is not uncommon given the fact that the women are black South Africans – the apartheid government did not see the necessity of educating blacks beyond the need for manual labour (see, for example, Bisheuwel, 1943; De Ridder, 1961).

Just under half of the women had children. The majority of the woman (80%) did not have more than two children. All nine of the women had lived permanently in the Western Cape for more than four years.

The following table provides details of the focus groups.

TABLE 2: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS: DEMOGRAPHIC FEATURES

VARIABLE	GROUP1 (a) n = 5	GROUP2 (b) n = 5	GROUP3 (c) n = 4	GROUP4 (d) n = 4	GROUP5 (e) n = 7	GROUP6 (f) n = 5	GROUP7 (g) n = 7	GROUP8 (h) n = 7	GROUP9 (i) n = 7	GROUP10 (j) n = 7
Age range	21 - 27	28 - 46	19 - 24	37 - 53	27 - 51	18 - 42	21 - 43	23 - 39	30 - 53	28 - 44
Home Lang.										
English	3	1	2	-	-	2	1	-	2	1
African	2	3	3	4	7	-	3	7	3	4
Afrikaans	-	1	1	-	-	3	1	-	2	2
Educ. Level										
None	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Primary	-	-	-	2	1	-	-	-	-	-
Jun. Sec.	-	2	-	1	3	4	2	-	3	3
Secondary	-	2	-	2	-	1	3	2	3	3
Tertiary	-	1	6	1	3	-	2	3	1	-
Language group bc. is	English	English	English	Xhosa	Xhosa	English	English Xhosa	English	English Afrikaans Xhosa	Xhosa
Facilitator (Ass. Res/Res.)	AR/R	AR/R	AR/R	AR/R	AR/R	R	AR	AR/R	AR/R	AR

A total of 60 women were interviewed by way of the focus groups. Six of these had participated in the individual interviews. Thus the total number of women who partook in the study is 63. (this takes into account the three women who had been interviewed individually but did not participate in the focus groups). The size of the groups varied from four to seven participants.

Certain researchers have suggested that groups in which participants know each other have advantages (Morgan, 1988). Others have suggested that group members should not be familiar with each other. Given the nature of the topic being researched and the limited

access to the population, the researcher could not be too 'fussy' on a issue such as this.

Only the members of the focus group convened in Alice and the group of technikon students knew each other fairly well. One group, all nurses, did not know each other but they all knew the assistant researcher.

Four of the groups were facilitated only in English; two in Xhosa; two in Xhosa and English; one in English and Afrikaans; and one in English, Afrikaans and Xhosa. Seven of the groups were facilitated by both the principal researcher and the assistant researcher; one by the principal researcher on her own; and two by the assistant researcher on her own.

The majority of the women were living permanently in the Western Cape at the time of the interview. The women who participated in the discussion at the University of Fort Hare were all permanent residents of Alice or the surrounding area.

The age of the women ranged from 18-53 years with an average age of 34 years. Just over 60% of the sample had Xhosa as their mother tongue. The remainder of the sample spoke either Afrikaans or English as first language. Just over 60% of the women had children. The majority of the women had two children. Of the women who had children under 15% had three or more children.

Regarding education, 21 of the women had a only junior secondary qualification; 14 of the women had a secondary qualification and 15 had a tertiary qualification or were busy

with tertiary studies. Of these 15, however, a few of them had not completed high school – these were nurses who had a nursing qualification but who had only completed junior secondary school. The women who had a secondary qualification or who were pursuing a tertiary qualification were younger than the others. What was significant to me was that a number of the women who had completed their secondary qualification were employed as domestic or factory workers. Those who had completed a post secondary education were mainly nurses and teachers. Once again, this is indicative of the apartheid government's policies – securing a high school education did not mean that you would receive a decent paying position if you were black. Should you want to embark on a career after school the most likely options were teaching or nursing. The high unemployment rate also means that people are willing to take any job available.

In her study on black women and Aids, Strebel (1993) noted that many of the participants were educated but not employed. In the present sample just under 40% of the women were unemployed. A number of those who were employed were domestic workers, but this did not always mean full time employment. A point made by Kadalie (1995, p. 66) in her discussion on a profile of South African women is relevant: 'The majority of African women who are employed are concentrated in service and agricultural work....the small majority of African women in the professional sector is found mostly in the teaching and nursing profession'. A large number of coloured women in the Western Cape are employed in garment factories as low-paid workers. Those that have pursued careers are usually teachers or nurses. The occupations and positions of the women in the present study was closely related to the points made by Kadalie.

The assistant researcher and I facilitated seven groups jointly. She facilitated the group in Alice on her own as I could not be present and was aware that the group was most likely to be facilitated in Xhosa. She had worked in the area and certain of the women were prepared to talk only 'if she spoke to us on her own'. She facilitated a group in Khayelitsha on her own because these women were not 'out', although they were willing to be interviewed by her because she had been working with them in attempt to start a gay and lesbian organisation there. I facilitated one group on my own because the assistant researcher was not able to make it to the venue due to transport problems from the township on the day.

The following section describes in detail the transcription and analysis of the data.

Following this I then present the results of the group process analysis which investigated features both across and within groups.

TRANSCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Discourse analysis was utilised to interpret the transcriptions of the group and individual interviews. The primary methodological framework draws heavily on Thompson's depth hermeneutics (1990). A few points for clarification are necessary.

According to this qualitative framework, actions, utterances and texts are meaningful constructions which need to be interpreted. In social inquiry when these symbolic forms are interpreted, Thompson stresses that it should be remembered that 'objects' of the investigation itself is a pre-interpreted domain. Analysts are thus offering an

interpretation of an interpretation – they are re-interpreting a pre-interpreted domain. Another point which he asserts is that human beings are integrally connected to historical conditions – they are thus always part of a broader social context. Thus in any analysis of symbolic forms, this social historical context needs to be the first level of analysis (Thompson, 1990).

Thompson (1990, p. 280) defines depth hermeneutics as 'a broad methodological framework which comprises three principal phases or procedures'. The three phases of the approach are the social-historical analysis, formal or discursive analysis and interpretation/re-interpretation. He does not view these phases as separate stages of sequential method but 'as analytically distinct dimensions of a complex interpretative process' (Thompson, 1990, p. 280-81).

As mentioned previously, there is no blueprint or manual which serves as a guide to discourse analysts. The most appropriate method is the one which has been designed for the particular study. For the present study, the procedure devised followed Thompson's recommendations (1990), although the methods developed by Potter & Wetherell (1987; 1995); Thompson (1984); Van Dijk (1985); Strebler (1993); Duncan (1993); and Levett (1988) all proved helpful.

STAGE ONE: SOCIO-HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

This stage of depth hermeneutics is concerned with analysing the ways in which social institutions and contexts condition the 'production, circulation and reception of symbolic

forms...to examine the rules and conventions, the social relations and institutions, and the distribution of power, resources and opportunities by virtue of which these contexts form differentiated and socially structured fields' (Thompson, 1990, p. 282).

With regard to the present study, this stage is the one which would be concerned with sketching the historical conditions and social institutions which influence the discourse of a group of black lesbians. The institutions and structures which can be seen to influence the discourses in the present study include universities, the law and socio-cultural institutions and structures. These institutions are the loci of power, resources and opportunities and they thus need to be analysed in order for the discourse to which they contribute to be understood (Duncan, 1993; Thompson, 1984 & 1990; Van Dijk, 1989).

For the present study, the legal, socio-cultural and academic construction of homosexuality within a particular socio-historical framework as discussed in chapter three is deemed to meet the requirement of this first level of analysis and is thus not discussed at this point.

What has to be highlighted is the fact that the discourse of black lesbians cannot be seen outside of the historical conditions that shaped their lives both as black working class women and black lesbians. Kadalie (1995, p. 66), for example, states that 'African women make up the poorest socio-economic sector of the population. (See, for example, Cock, 1980; Hansson, 1991; Horn, 1991 for a discussion on the position of black South Africans under apartheid).

STAGE TWO: ANALYSIS OF TRANSCRIPTS

Thompson asserts that a second level of analysis should be an examination of the symbolic forms which includes an analysis of the social actors' understanding of the terrain. What needs to be noted is that '...symbolic forms are contextualised products and something more, for they are products which, by virtue of their structural features, are able to and claim to say something about something' (Thompson, 1990, p. 284). This level of analysis cannot be seen in isolation from the socio-historical analysis. In fact this level 'reflects' the social actors' interpretation of the socio-historical context.

Thompson (1990) states that there are various ways to conduct this analysis.

For the present study, it was conducted as follows:

The taped recordings were transcribed verbatim from the audio cassettes and typed onto the computer. Pauses and hesitations were not recorded. The actual talk was documented and new speakers, comments from the facilitator/s and inaudible talk was indicated.

The ten focus groups were marked A-J and the individual interview numbered 1-6. (See Appendix-4 for details of coding conventions).

Transcriptions were done by the primary researcher and the assistant researcher. This was in keeping with the confidentiality requested by the participants. The Xhosa transcriptions were done by the assistant researcher.

Both the process of transcription and translation was a daunting, time-consuming task. For example, at times what was being said was unclear due to people talking simultaneously or due to background noise like passing traffic. The fact that the transcribers were part of the group made it easier to overcome these obstacles, but this could also contribute to the transformation of data. However, this possible transformation of data is recognised as a common occurrence with transcriptions (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Strebel, 1993).

Strebel (1993, p. 101), for example, points out that 'it needs to be recognised that transcriptions and translation are not simply mechanical acts resulting in replicas of 'live talk' – the process of carrying out these activities necessarily creates new versions of the discourse which reflect the positioning of those involved'.

The present study does not aim to conduct a detailed language analysis, but looks at broad discourses around female homosexuality as produced by the participants.

After the tapes of both the individual and groups interviews were transcribed, and translated where necessary, the transcriptions were read very thoroughly and then re-read several times. During these readings I was searching for recurring themes, for sets of statements which seemed to represent certain events, for certain patterns both of consistency and variance. This involved searching for the recurring themes, listing them on different sheets of paper, identifying words and phrases or sentences that seemed to paint a particular picture, listing these on sheets of paper (of various colours) and then going through everything I had in order to make sense of the data. I also searched for

repeating and contradictory phrases. Often the same words, phrases or sentences cropped up and could be categorised in a number of categories or themes. This is in keeping with discourse analysis and different to content analysis where words or phrases may only occupy one coding category.

Levett (1984) comments that each statement 'should' be placed in multiple categories as the meanings conveyed in a particular sentence, for example, often relate to a broad range of both paradoxical and contradictory discourses.

The obvious question at this stage is how does one 'do' this coding and identification of themes? According to Levett (1989), an analysis can only take place as a result of extensive prior reading and theoretically informed ideas. Strelbel (1993) notes that her coding of data into categories was informed by both reading and practical work in the field as well as multiple readings of the data. Billig (1988) also notes that discourse analysts should have built up an understanding of the topic before starting to analyse and understand a text. For the present study all the above was relevant. I felt that an understanding of the topic and the context was most helpful. I had initially tried to conduct an analysis soon after I had collected the data but had great difficulty. About a year later I found it much easier and this could be attributed to a large extent to my increased understanding of the field and topic. It might be argued that after conducting the interviews and groups I should have had an understanding – indeed I did, but with much more reading and practical work in the area I found the analysis at a later stage much easier.

I initially identified more than thirty broad recurring as well as atypical discursive patterns or themes. The transcripts were then read again to see if additional categories/themes needed to be coded as well as to see whether certain themes could be merged. What was actually happening was that the categories were being tested against the data process which was first discussed by Glaser & Strauss (1967). This process had generated an enormous amount of paper-over 200 pages and at this stage I realised that I needed to go back to my aims and focus of the research to structure the analysis and not to be overwhelmed by the data.

Taking into account that my primary aim was to explore the discourses on female homosexuality as produced by a group of black lesbians and to explore how these discourses both reflect and challenge certain dominant groupings discourses on homosexuality, I went back to the data, re-read, merged certain themes and the following broad themes were identified. They were motherhood, gender conformity, gender roles, construction of "the lesbian", need for intervention, relationships with men, relationships with heterosexual women, relationships with family and broader community, relationships with lesbian community and relationships in post-apartheid South Africa.

Re-immersing again into the data and continuing to focus on the aims three broad discourses emerged. I labelled them as follows: 1) gender and sexuality discourse 2) echoes of psychology discourse 3) relationships and socio-cultural issues discourse. There was overlap between all three discourses (as can be expected with discourse analysis). The gender and sexuality discourse included the earlier categories of motherhood, gender conformity and gender roles. The echoes of psychology discourse included the construction of 'the lesbian' and the need for intervention category. The discourse around

relationships and socio-cultural issues included the categories of relationships with men, relationships with heterosexual women, relationships with family and the broader community, relationships with the lesbian community and relationships in post-apartheid South Africa.

At this stage I re-checked parts of the text that were excluded. Obviously, as has been pointed out by Strebel (1993), it is quite possible to have produced a broad range of discourses which have been excluded from the present study or alternatively to have highlighted positions differently.

The text was checked again and quotes were selected which represented voices from a broad range of settings. Mama (1995, p. 86) makes the following point regarding her research which is relevant to the present research: 'I make no claims about the use I made of the material at my disposal being the best or only use that could be made. On the contrary, I regard the material as having a potentially infinite number of possible interpretations and uses to which it could be put.'

STAGE THREE: INTERPRETATION/RE-INTERPRETATION

'However rigorous and systematic the methods of formal or discursive analysis may be, they cannot abolish the need for a creative construction of meaning, that is, for an interpretative explication of what is represented or what is said.' (Thompson, 1990, p. 289). Put simply, Thompson is arguing that the analysis needs to go beyond the sifting out of recurring and contradictory themes. He argues that symbolic forms say something

about something and this needs to be highlighted or grasped by an interpretation. This interpretation within a depth-hermeneutical framework is simultaneously a re-interpretation. The reason for this is the fact that the discourse which is being interpreted has already been interpreted by the social actors who make up the socio-historical context.

At this stage, according to Thompson, a meaning might be projected which is different from that constructed by the social actors. This raises the issue of conflict of interpretations. Thompson (1990, p. 290) however recognises that this is inherent to the process when he remarks that 'the possibility of conflict of interpretation is intrinsic to the very process of interpretation'.

What should be remembered here is that there is never only a single interpretation of discourse. For this reason (as mentioned in an earlier section), there is no reason to prove 'absolute truths' or to verify (in the statistical sense) that a particular version makes up the truth.

Writers such as Ricoeur (referred to in Thompson, 1985) as well as Thompson (1984) argue that although there is no 'one truth', the analyst should attempt to illustrate that his or her interpretation is the most probable one. However, this is not the end as the text would always be open to other interpretations.

For the present study, the method of validation is the one mostly commonly and similarly employed by a range of discourse analysts (see, for example Duncan, 1993; Lovering, 1995; Potter & Wetherell, 1988). This entails a broad and representative set of quotes

along with the interpretations of the texts which have been analysed. Duncan (1993) notes that this has the advantage that it allows others to evaluate these interpretations and, when deemed necessary, to provide alternatives. This is presented in the next chapter.

What should be noted is that, although the analysis for the present study has been discussed as separated phases, they are in fact interrelated. In addition, the stages are not presented in orderly succession when the report of the analysis is presented in the results and discussion chapter.

ANALYSIS OF GROUP PROCESS

An additional stage of analysis focused on the group process. Investigation of features (both within and across the focus groups) was conducted. In addition, the individual interviews were compared to the focus groups.

Morgan & Spanish (1984) state that it is possible for systematic differences to be present between information gathered in focus groups and individual interviews and I was interested to see if this was the case in the present study. The individual interviews were only compared to the focus groups in terms of the total output in each category – essentially, I looked for the issues which participants chose to present in the focus groups in comparison to what was presented in the individual interviews. Obviously, I was also interested in the issues which they did not present (if any) in either of the situations.

The focus groups were compared across the following variables:

- * Who facilitated (impact of facilitator)
- * Stranger or more familiar groups both in terms of participants knowing/not knowing each other as well as participants knowing/not knowing the facilitators
- * Total output in various categories, language, race and rural/urban.

The scope of the analysis was restricted to issues which I felt would assist in contextualising the later analysis of discourses.

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

The individual interviews produced many more statements in the categories relating to aetiology and reproduction than the focus groups. In the individual interviews very little was said about issues relating to attitudes to men and attitudes to heterosexual women. Regarding the other categories, women in both the focus groups and the individual interviews addressed similar issues in terms of quantity of output. However, in the focus groups, women provided more detail about issues. In the individual interviews the women looked towards the interviewer to 'support' what they were saying whereas in the focus groups the women appeared much more confident in what they were saying. In the individual interviews what was said was almost said 'tentatively'. When the women knew the researcher there was a much higher overall output. Also, when they knew the researcher, the women tended to raise issues regarding heterosexual women and men.

One woman said that 'I would never tell you this if I did not know you' while another said the opposite: 'I would not share this with you if we knew each other'.

It seemed that speaking to both women who were familiar with the researcher, as well as those who did not know the interviewers, increased the range of responses. This seems to suggest that there is no absolute position as to the responses that would be elicited based on whether the researcher and the participants are familiar with each other or not.

Looking at the differences between what women said and their age, the younger women made a lot more reference to being like 'other' women, meaning heterosexual women in comparison to the older women. This could be related to issues of identity – the younger women 'struggling' with issues of identity.

As a participant aged 19 said:

It doesn't mean that we cannot do things like those women who have boyfriends – we also like nice clothes, clubbing and would maybe like to enter a beauty competition...mmm. I wonder maybe somebody will have a competition for us...lesbians...but then it must be secret....we must only tell each other. (C)

Another of the younger women, aged (23) spoke about the issue of reproduction and linked it once again to 'all other women' – meaning heterosexual women: 'Just like those women who go with men, I can and will have a baby...yes I like children just like them'.

(1)

Issues of reproduction and 'being like other women' were very prominent in the discussion.

When talking about being marginalised, an older women aged 50 said

I don't care what other woman and men say about me. What is the difference? If they think we are different who cares? I don't have children but then again some women who are married or live with men don't have children...I just ignore what is said and do not need to prove anything to them. (I)

A number of the older women spoke about 'why' they are lesbian.

'I am like I am ...that is loving women because I was made like this'. (This was not a question that was asked directly but a number of the older women spoke in relation to the vignette about issues which could be described as 'reasons why we are lesbians'). The following statement captures the sentiment.

I thought for many years now..that I need to know why I like (silence)...girls. I even prayed about it and asked God to make I mean take this sickness away...now I just live with it and be happy and not try to get involved in fights or stuffstay away from the law - if they know I will go to jail and this is below me - I know of somebody that got into trouble with the law ...she is like me...loving women. (D)

ANALYSIS OF FOCUS GROUPS

Familiar/Stranger

As stated previously only the members of the group which met at the technikon and the group which met in Alice were familiar with each other. In some of the other groups there were one or two women that were familiar with each other but more as acquaintances than friends. In the group of nurses, all the individual participants were familiar with the assistant researcher but did not know each other.

Fern (1982) found that groups of strangers may be preferable to groups of friends or acquaintances, but that the differences were not large. The market research literature suggests that it is preferable to use groups where members are not familiar with each other. Kitzinger (1990) concluded that there were certain advantages to using pre-existing groups while Morgan & Spanish (1984) observed that there are no absolute rules regarding acquaintances or strangers and that the researcher should decide which form of focus groups are practical and/or best suited to her research questions. Strebel (1993) did not find marked differences between groups of strangers and acquaintances, although groups of strangers tended to have a lower overall output.

Findings from the present study indicate that groups of friends or acquaintances produced more overall output (in comparison to strangers) and they tended to challenge each other on issues as well as agree emphatically that they had a similar experience on certain issues.

The groups of strangers also tended to have lower overall output (in relation to when they knew the researcher or were even vaguely familiar with each other). The difference was, however very small.

The group of nurses who were all familiar with the assistant researcher but not with each other tended to bring the researcher into the discussion at all times. One example is when a woman stated: 'Did your family also abandon you?' and then again 'did you also first think there was something wrong with you?'

Knowing the researcher seems to have the advantage that they feel comfortable enough with her to want her to be part of the discussion – she was seen as part of the group and not just a researcher. Although she had told all groups that she labelled herself as 'lesbian', it was only the group where members knew her personally that she was actively drawn into the discussion. This may have to do with the level of trust between the researcher and the participants. Gaining a certain level of trust meant more than just informing them that she identified herself as lesbian. However, knowing her did not seem to result in a vastly different text – put differently it did not majorly influence what was spoken about.

It was also observed that groups of friends or acquaintances spoke less about the non-support or hostility of family structure. The groups of strangers recounted in detail the abuse that they had to endure from their immediate families. It is possible that the groups which consisted of friends or acquaintances were hesitant to talk negatively about their families to people that they knew – in a sense they were protecting the family structure,

something which is common amongst black people (see Clarke, 1993; Greene 1990, 1994).

At the end of the session and without being asked, one woman in the group of technikon students remarked: 'I am not sure if I would have opened my heart if I did not know all of you here' but then said to nobody in particular '*skinnerbekke* [gossips] please note everything is confidential'. It would seem, as Strebel (1993) observed, that there are both advantages and disadvantages to group members knowing each other.

Language

Here I was particularly interested in the language used by the participants, especially given the importance of language within discourse analysis.

The preference for using one language over another is closely related to identity, but it is also related to other factors which have not as yet been researched (see Espin, 1984; 1987; Necef, 1994).

Analysing the groups who chose to speak in English although their first language was Xhosa yields some interesting issues. Although they chose to speak in their second language, they reverted to Xhosa quite often. In one of the groups when they continually spoke in Xhosa in spite of having said they preferred English I said 'are you sure you do not want to speak in Xhosa and 'F' will translate for me?' A woman responded and was echoed by the rest of the group: 'I can say how I feel, express myself easier in Xhosa,

but this topic about us loving women is easy...I mean much easier to speak about in English....I feel more comfortable...why I don't know'. Another person said 'I feel not so shy, embarrassed about myself when I speak English about this'.

It is almost as if the women have compartmentalised the contradictions inherent in being a lesbian and being just a regular black woman. The women also reverted to their first language when getting excited. Espin (1987) has theorised that often a first language is the one in which emotion is expressed and speaking about certain issues in a second language may distance the person from certain important parts of herself – those with which she feels uncomfortable.

Alternatively, it should be remembered that certain words may not be present in Xhosa. We know for example that there is no equivalent for the word 'lesbian' in the Xhosa language. Thus choosing to speak English may be a way to express that which is not expressible in Xhosa.

Race

There was no difference in terms of output between the groups that consisted of only African women, those that consisted of only coloured women and those that consisted of both African and coloured women.

However, there were other nuances. Interestingly the groups that consisted of both African and coloured women spoke more frequently about issues of support/non-support

from the community. It seemed that this was a way to inform each other of their specific communities. The groups that consisted of African women spoke more negatively about the role that men play – one woman observed 'they are useless - they do not want to pay lobola any more, yet they want to talk about tradition when it benefits them'. The coloured women were more accommodating- 'there are many good fathers and husbands – they are not my problem, I will even encourage my daughter to like men – in fact I always do this'. The African women spoke in much detail about what could be termed the 'sexual' nature of their relationships.

The groups which consisted of African women debated in great depth the role of culture and tradition and how that impacted on them 'being lesbians'. Many of the African women said things similar to: 'I [thought] I was the only woman in the whole world that was like this'. This is possibly indicative that in African communities issues classified as falling in the realm of sexuality are not discussed specifically.

Rural and urban groups

For the purposes of this study only the group that was convened in Alice at the University of Fort Hare consisted of women from a rural area. The only category which produced a much higher output in this group than the other groups was the issue of culture. Women discussed in detail and for a lengthy period whether their 'loving women' conflicted with their culture. (This is discussed in detail in the next chapter). It could be expected that issues of tradition and culture would be issues that are important to women in rural areas given, for example, the role of the traditional chiefs in this area.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the group process could have been done in much more depth and also a range of other issues could have been given attention. However, it has highlighted the importance and impact of certain contextual issues in not only the amount of text that is generated (quantity), but also what is generated (quality). It also confirmed my initial understanding that a group discussion of 'sensitive topics' leads to increased output as well as to a increase in 'quality' of the output. This group process analysis also contributed to a better understanding of the context for the main analysis which is presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents, discusses and interprets or, as Thompson (1990) would say, 're-interprets' the discourses produced by the participants of the project.

In keeping with the aims of the study, I draw attention to what it means to them to be black lesbians in South Africa or, put differently, how they, as black lesbians, construct their identity. The section also presents and discusses the manner in which the women drew on dominant discourses, but at the same time also challenged, contradicted, and at times re-conceptualised, these dominant positions. They thus produced contradictory and alternative discourses to the dominant ones. The three main discourses I identified in the previous chapter are:

- 1) A sexuality and gender discourse
- 2) An echoes of psychology discourse
- 3) A discourse around socio-cultural and relationship issues.

THE SEXUALITY AND GENDER DISCOURSE

The sexuality and gender discourse included the categories of motherhood, women's roles and gender conformity. Dominant to this discourse is the participants' discussions on motherhood.

In their discussion on mothering as lesbians, participants very often took up multiple (and sometime contradictory) subject positions in order to present 'positive' images of themselves.

The categories of gender conformity and women's roles replicated as well as challenged the discourses of dominant groupings. Once again a prominent theme in these discussions was an attempt by the participants to present themselves in a 'positive' light.

Motherhood: Yes it is important for us too

The participants spoke often and in detail about the importance of having children. This included the younger women who did not have children (for example the technikon women), as well as the older women – those who had children and those who did not.

The importance of having children was linked to the discourse of 'naturalness'. This discourse was very dominant and reflected the essentialist notion that women have a 'natural instinct' to have children. The following statements highlight this position.

It is a must, to have babies I mean. I have children and I had that feeling to get one. So I had a man to give me a baby. I wanted the baby not him, him I did not love, I only love women – but I had him till I had the baby. (D)

This I am saying because I know from experience, till you get that baby you do not feel right. You wish and wish and even take lots and lots of herbs to get one so then

when you have a man to make sex with you, you get a seed quickly and then are pregnant and then don't have to have sex anymore. (I)

The need to have children as it was 'natural' and would contribute to them being 'real' women was also expressed by younger women.

Children are also my dream..I will feel like a real woman..and my family will like it. I do not want to miss this experience

Oh, yeah, I have this feeling to have a child.

Cheryl: 'Do others feel like this?'

'Yes,yes yes' [in unison] (C)

However, participants also challenged the dominant notion that having children meant having a relationship with a man. The discourse also challenges the notion that having sex with a man is only to a man's benefit. These women had sex with men in order to have a baby. Being lesbian meant that they had relationships with women. However, they saw no problem with having heterosexual sex in order to fall pregnant. Interestingly, it has been reported that in African societies women who are lesbian 'have' a man in order to reproduce (Krige, 1974).

I definitely want children..it is a must..I don't go for that idea that you have to have a permanent man to have a child..they go missing anyway....for different reasons, obviously. (J)

I would definitely want to have a child..or children. This is what bothers me about being a lesbian..can I be a lesbian and have children?...I know a lady who is also a lesbian and has children.... But I have never had a boyfriend like her...Mmmm, I wonder.. But I will do something about it ...maybe.. maybe take a man to my bed and quickly get pregnant. (E)

Yes children are very important... I have got one already ..[laughter]. I just got drunk twice in the tavern and went with a nice man for two weeks ...I mean two times.. and then I was pregnant. I did not want him really..but I wanted a baby and a lady cannot give you a baby ...[laughter]. Now I have I am a mother and he is missing with his wife... but this is just what I want... So now I do not get people who say Z when are you going to get a man...because I have a baby all these questions have gone away. (B)

For these women, having a child conforms to dominant ideology of 'motherhood is a must' but being a mother is also a way of contributing to living a more 'comfortable' life as a lesbian. Having children accorded them adult status in the eyes of others but at the same time they were challenging the discourse that pressurises them to have children. Being a mother thus empowered them by providing them with the space to live more comfortably as lesbians.

You see when I had a baby people treated me like an adult... now my mother and aunt do not ask..so where are you going? So now [smile, giggle]..I can visit my girlfriend and even sleep there when I want to.

I just took that man to give me a baby...he thought I was in love... (D)

I had a baby now they don't think I love women anymore, the men just think 'so now she is okay - she doesn't deny us', but it just tricked them. (A)

The remarks of Collins (1990, p. 134) about African-American women is appropriate in the South African context as well:

Strong pronatalist values in African-American communities may stem in part from traditional Black values that vest adult status on women who become biological mothers. For many, becoming a biological mother is often seen as a significant step towards womanhood.

The following statement confirms Collins point, although in this instance it worked in a contradictory way in the sense that it also benefited them.

I wanted a baby as in my culture women have babies and then you are no more a child. Boys go to the bush...you know are initiated to be adults ..we have babies. Also when we have babies the men feel good, they have proved their fertility. You see but they do not know that women like me just make them feel good and then say bye-bye. (G)

In a study dealing with teenage pregnancy among black girls, Preston-Whyte & Zondi (1989) confirm the importance of motherhood:

An extremely high value is placed on children for and in themselves... We suggest that the value placed upon children are so high that marriage is, in some contexts, quite irrelevant to the bearing of a child...If an African woman is single she is not necessarily regarded as unfailingly disadvantaged, nor does she regard herself to be pitied, unless she has no child. Bearing a child is seen as imperative-it is part of being a woman and of achieving success as a woman.

(See Berglund, 1976; Preston-Whyte & Zondi, 1989; Ngubane, 1977 for further discussion on the importance of bearing children). Preston-Whyte and Zondi (1989) comment that the role model of the successful single woman who has children and is neither ostracized nor openly ridiculed is further encouragement not to avoid pregnancy at all costs.

Another discourse which was prominent was that 'although' the participants are lesbian, they would still be good mothers. This discourse that mothers are, first and foremost, heterosexual women, contradicted any discourse that lesbians per se could be good mothers. They were good mothers because it was natural and in spite of them being lesbian.

All women, including lesbians, know how to be mothers so we must use this that God has given us..the talent to be a mother. (B)

I am lesbian..even that means that I still know how to be a mother – I have all the parts that women have. (B)

Yes we all just know how to be mothers..so we must do this. (B)

So lesbians are good mothers just like all other women. (J)

Motherhood was normalised within a lesbian context and it contributed to them being ordinary, everyday women.

A lot of lesbians have children. It is common to have children, why should we not have them? We are no different, just we love women. I have children, I wanted a child because then I knew I am okay just like those ones with men and married. (H)

A much less prominent discourse was women who questioned whether they would be competent as mothers. This discourse was in fact challenged and contradicted by the discourse that all women, even lesbians, are naturally competent mothers.

I wonder if it is a good thing for women who love other women, lesbians like us to be mothers. Is it a good thing? I wonder. Maybe we are different and therefore should not be mothers. (J)

I wonder if we should be mothers. Remember we are not like married mothers. We go out a lot, party, not just sit at home with a man to look after children. (I)

I mean there is nothing wrong with us but yes, maybe up to a point we are different but we are born women and therefore we should have children and we when you have one you just know what to do. (I)

Yes there are difficulties with children but we are good mothers. I have never thought 'P' is no good at raising children because she is a lesbian. I accept what I am - I did not choose - but I am a natural born mother. (A)

This discourse of the 'natural good mother' was so strong that any position which questioned it was both challenged and contradicted and the women who raised it were actually othered, that is, no longer the regular everyday woman and mother.

You cannot be for real who think about not be a good mother. Maybe you are not so okay, a bit weird...[giggles] . What I mean is ..you are definitely a mother..otherwise ooo ... otherwise... then you have a problem on your hands.(4)

Haai, Haai, we all know about being mothers, you must not think we cannot. The day I think like that I will know I have lost it.. then I will be so weird. (C)

The women who questioned their competency as mothers reflect points raised by Pennington (1987) as well as Glenn (1994). The latter draws attention to the fact that lesbians who are mothers often have to deal with their own issues about their sexuality and question whether they would be good mothers. Glenn (1994) states that lesbians are usually depicted as women who are seeking pleasure for themselves in contrast to

motherhood which represents the feminine qualities of altruism and selflessness and this contributes to them questioning their 'skills' as mothers. However, this was not a dominant discourse amongst the participants.

Although the importance of having children was a very dominant theme in the women's discussions, there were conflicting opinions which challenged this.

If you don't want children it is also okay but then I speak for myself – I don't care what others say, I don't want children. But that does not mean that I don't like children – in fact I am like a mother to my brother's two children. (C)

Although the woman does not want children she also emphasises that she knows how to be a mother by stating that she plays the role of mother to her brother's kids. Once again, the essence of motherhood is emphasised. Collins (1994) says that in the African-American community it is important to be a mother, or at least some form of mother - despite strong cultural traditions encouraging women to become biological mothers, women who do not have children receive recognition and status from other mother relationships which they establish with Black children.

Interestingly another position which emerged which was, in a sense, contradictory to the 'we are the same as heterosexual mothers discourse' was a discourse of freedom to choose as regards contraception and unwanted pregnancies as a result of being lesbian.

What I like about being a lesbian especially regarding babies is that because I am not with a man, I can choose when to have a baby...men just want children all the time..and another thing I do not have to take those pills and things to not have a baby. (3)

Yes, we now can do what we want to do...mmm and still be just like everybody else with babies and all, but different because we do not get the tablets at the clinic.

AR: 'Who is everybody else?'

Those that are not lesbians. (C)

In this instance the difference discourse was used in a positive way and in fact provided a space for the participants to negotiate a certain amount of power.

None of the participants raised the issue of artificial insemination in becoming mothers and thus 'bypassing' the sexual act with a male. This is an issue which has been quite prominent in the literature regarding white lesbians (see Corea, 1985; Hanmer, 1981). I would argue that it can be expected not because they are necessarily 'against' technology, but because in South Africa health services which are accessible to black women are limited and the focus is on primary health care. Thus, because of the lack of options, any

discourse which allows motherhood without having heterosexual sex does not have the space to emerge.

Another area which was not part of these women's discourse was the issue of adoption. It might be that once again the dominance of the discourse to have biological children silences any position which would challenge this tradition. The issue of adoption might also have been absent for another reason: in certain African communities when you do not have your own children, it is a given that you take care of the children of family members and children in the community (Collins, 1990; James, 1993; Preston-Whyte and Zondi, 1989). As James (1993), p.44 states: It has been my grandmother's simple belief that all children must be fed, clothed and sent to school. If for some reason their biological parents were unable or unwilling to discharge these obligations, then it was incumbent upon some other member of the community to accept that responsibility.

The issue of official adoption is therefore not relevant – it happens anyway without any label, official or otherwise. It seems that the dominance of the position on having biological children as well as other cultural traditions served to silence and constrain any positions which were contradictory.

What was significant was that very little was said about the difficulties which black women in South Africa experience in their role as mothers. A range of South African research has documented the difficulties faced by black mothers, a lot of it focusing on the difficulties experienced by single mothers. It can be argued that such a silencing of women's experiences of control of female sexuality (Levett, 1988). Strebel (1993, p.

167) comments that this silencing of women's experiences 'is also reflected in a more general absence of voice among South African women regarding issues of sexuality and experiences of gender oppression'. The silence around the difficulties of being a mother seems to confirm Strebel's point.

The dominance and importance of motherhood for black women in South Africa has been further entrenched by the way in which political organisations addressed women's issues. In South Africa, large numbers of black women were part of these organisations, organised around the discourse of motherhood. This focus highlighted the virtual absence of a discourse which challenged the need and importance to have children.

A range of writers have focused on how these organisations mobilised and campaigned on the basis of motherhood (see Charman et al, 1992; Fester, 1997; Hansson, 1991; Horn, 1991, 1994; Wells, 1991). Wells (1991) labels this 'motherism' and states that this should not be equated with feminism. However, Fester (1997) in her recent article on the history of women's organisations in the Western Cape strongly argues against Wells's outright rejection of these organisations as not being feminist. She states that 'women's resistance arises out of their particular historical contexts' and that motherism and working 'shoulder to shoulder with our menfolk' can be seen as a form of South African feminism (Fester, 1997, p. 46). She further argues for '..a uniquely South African form of feminism which includes national liberation and organising on a basis of motherhood'(p.46). A participant who is very active in South African politics states:

Even us activist who are lesbian and are in women's organisations know the importance of wanting to give birth to your own child..we cannot be denied the experience because we are activists and lesbian...no, no. (I)

With reference to the participants it could be argued that they have not challenged the traditional notion of motherhood in the same way as white lesbians have done and this is reflective of their historical context.

From the excerpts it is clear that the women assumed a range of positions in relation to the dominant conception that all women should be mothers, but most of them endorsed the importance of motherhood. However, although most of their discourse reflected dominant discourse, there were voices which challenged and contradicted this position. Their positioning as black lesbians within this discourse contributed to them challenging and 'using' the discourse for their own benefit. They thus had power to change certain aspects of their lives or, alternatively, to negotiate a space for themselves which was empowering, albeit within the constraints of the dominant discourse.

Womens' roles and lesbianism

A discussion point which was often an outflow of the discussion on motherhood was the issue of what roles they should occupy, given that they were lesbian. Here the conversation centred around the issue of the roles society expected women to take on and how they should fit into these roles. Here, as in the literature, they compared their roles and themselves to heterosexual women.

The prevalent argument which surfaced was that they were just like heterosexual women.

We are the same like women who have men...so why should we not do the things that they do well ...or like cooking, dressing up and buying nice things. (5)

Yes I always look at myself in the mirror and say ..wow you look as good as any women who likes men..and then I think and you can do all the things they do. (A)

Central to the discourse that they could do whatever heterosexual women could do was a need to be seen as regular – once again the normalising discourse emerged. However, there was a contradictory discourse which suggested that as women they were just like heterosexual women, but as lesbians they were different, the 'other'. However, they should be accepted in spite of the fact that because they were lesbian they could not fulfil all the roles expected of women. In this discourse there was often a clear separation between being lesbian and being a 'regular' woman.

Yes we lesbians are different...but we do not think that we should not do women things. .But because we are lesbian we can do both...things..like shopping which women do well and fixing the washing machine which women who have men cannot do. We can do it because we are lesbian. (F)

This discourse of a lesbian being like a man but still a woman in certain ways is prevalent in images of lesbians in South African literature (see the story of Gertie September in Chetty, 1994).

However, there was also a discourse that to be a regular woman you could not do traditionally male things. Once again the quest to be 'normal', a 'real woman' was dominant and silenced contradictory discourses.

I don't do that. I call my brother when something has to be fixed. That is for men to do. Women are not just good at fixing, building and stuff like that. I then do things like sewing for my brother who lives alone. (8)

I call a plumber or something..I sometimes used to think maybe I must do this ..then I think no you are already like a man to some people...let me get somebody then I know I am not a man..yes let a man come and doing the chopping and fixing.
(H)

These women seem to have internalised the dominant stereotypical roles expected of women. However, it could be that in conforming to these roles they are avoiding certain problems that could be expected. It has to be remembered that the majority of these women are not 'out' and thus when they draw on the services of men they are in fact deflecting questions regarding their sexuality. They thus appear to have conformed to the role of a 'regular' woman. One wonders what the consequences would be if they had openly challenged all the trappings of 'being a regular woman'.

The comment made by Kendall (1995) on lesbian women in Lesotho is apt:

They marry men and conform, or appear to conform, gender expectations. Most will bear and tend children, carry those children on their backs, fetch firewood and water which they will then carry on their heads, cook, work for wages, manage their households and cater for the physical needs of their husbands or boyfriends. There are simply no other choices available to working-class Basotho women, culturally or economically.

However, there was an awareness amongst a few that women did not need to fulfil the stereotypical roles of women, that it was oppressive and should be challenged. They however recognised the constraints of this position as lesbians.

Like I said, why must we think that only women can cook and clean and men are mechanics? We should all be able to do both. Then the men don't get off so easily. I do everything. But you know what now that I fix a car, kill a chicken and other things ..like speak against stuff that oppress women they in my community say I am a *nongayindoda*. I have been with women for many years but I always lived like the women with men and then they did not see what I was doing. But now they point fingers at me and know that I am a lesbian. It is sometimes difficult. But I want to stand up for what I believe in. (D)

I have a similar story. When I was cooking, cleaning and not doing stuff that men do, the men did not say hey, what kind are you ? those white stuff ..those women

who want to take a woman to bed. Maybe I must go back to being like the married one, but not marry, still have girlfriends. I will trick them. I rather will give up doing mens stuff and still have a girlfriend (I).

Their positioning as black women seems to suggest that in challenging dominant ideology like for example, challenging traditional roles of women and doing things that are traditionally seen as 'male', could in fact disempower them as lesbians. They thus position themselves as having internalised certain aspects of dominant ideology in order to 'be lesbian'. Thus by being seen to be doing household tasks that 'regular' women do they are creating a 'comfortable' space to 'be lesbian'.

A Foucauldian interpretation also offers some insight into these contradictory positions which women occupy. Foucault (1976, p. 96) argues that "rather than producing radical rupture or transformative change, resistance from the 'inside of power' is individualising, no single locus of great refusal, no soul of revolt....or pure law of the revolutionary, but shifting, spontaneous points or knots of resistance that inflame certain parts of the body, certain moments in life."

Gender conformity and lesbianism

The discussion on women's roles invariably led the discussion to the issue of the gender roles which participants largely appeared to conform to within their own relationships.

Their discourse did not challenge the traditional roles which were assigned to women and men. However, their positioning seemed to be fluid depending on who was the most 'economically sound' at a particular point. Their discourse thus reproduced the dominant discourse in certain african communities that the man is the provider. (See Preston-Whyte, 1989). In addition, it echoed the traditional heterosexual arrangement that in a relationship there is a male and a female and they occupy specific roles.

Listen, now that we are talking about what men and women can and want to do – can I just ask in your relationships is there a man and a woman?

Is there an Eve and a Steve

Is this in making love?

In all stuff, everyday things.

Let me say in our relationship sometimes I am the man and sometimes I am the woman (I).

R: 'Can you explain that?'

When I was unemployed then I was the woman..cleaning, cooking all that stuff, but when she [name] was unemployed and I was working, then she was the woman..doing all that stuff.(I)

A discourse slightly different from the one above also emerged. In this discourse there was still the traditional 'male' or 'female', depending on who was earning the money, but at particular times they 'decided' who would be the 'man' or the 'woman' – they took turns. It seems that between themselves they decided who would 'have the power' or, as

Foucault (1979) would argue, this would be an example of disciplinary power where they are actually controlling themselves and thus entrenching the dominant discourse.

Yes it is like with us..when I lost my job I had to listen to her and behave like a woman..shut-up and all that ...so I just was a woman...but when she had difficulty ..when the woman fired her, I became the man..shouting, counting the money, making the decisions, the rules...I even decided to wear pants more often...like men wear the pants..but this was only for sometimes..then we change. You know what... sometimes we say ..this week you be the man and I the woman and then the next week it is your turn again.

Yes we also play ..like we are the actors. (I)

There is another way in which their discourses could be interpreted. The woman who says 'we play like actors..we decide who is going to be ..a man or a woman for a week' could be suggesting that gender is socially constructed, what Butler (1990) would describe as 'drag'. Butler argues that drag and roleplaying (like the participants referred to) has revolutionary potential in the sense that such practices illustrate that gender is socially constructed. She further argues that these practices also illustrate that gender has no essence but is merely 'drag' or performance, whether put on by feminine heterosexual women or heterosexual men or roleplaying lesbians or male gay artists.

Drag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn and done; it implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation. If this is true, it seems, there is no original or primary gender that

drag imitates, but gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original
(Butler, 1991, p. 21).

One could thus wonder if what the participants are partaking in is 'playing with gender', illustrating the fluid nature of gender, challenging the idea that gender is 'real' and 'true'.

Another issue about which there was much discussion related to lesbians and femininity. There were strong arguments for women to assert their 'femininity' in a range of ways. Women who did not conform to this position were labelled as 'other' – an 'us and them' divide. Here again a picture of the 'normal' lesbian was constructed – in this instance, one who wears make-up, perfume and so on.

I do not want to dress as a boy, in fact I make a special effort to look like a woman. I have make-up, dresses and when I wear jeans, I usually wear a feminine top – maybe lace under a shirt..[giggles] nice soft stuff. (C)

Yes I am like that too..I am a girl ..I don't like boys [as boyfriends] because also I don't like the way they look.. I mean about especially the stuff most of them wear..suits maybe. (E)

I don't want to be a lesbian if I cannot dress like girls who are not lesbian..no I don't want to be like them in everything..but why is it only them that can buy nice perfume, dresses and maybe have long nails and shave your legs? (D)

They did not challenge or present an alternative to femininity as Jeffreys (1993, p. 88) suggests the lesbians of the 70s 'saw it as consciousness raising to appear in public or on television in a guise which deliberately eschewed femininity. We believed that this would show women that an alternative to femininity was available'.

However, Judith Butler has argued that these instances of 'femininity as masquerade' can be interpreted as political strategy. This strategy has also been labelled as 'mimicry'. Tyler (1991, p. 53) interprets the notion of mimicry by drawing on Irigaray's work:

To be a mimic, according to Irigaray, is to 'assume the feminine role deliberately..so as to make visible, by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible..To play the feminine is to 'speak' it ironically, to italicize it..to hyperbolize it...or to parody it...In mimicry, as in camp, one 'does' ideology in order to undo it, producing knowledge about it: that gender and the heterosexual orientation presumed to anchor it are unnatural and even oppressive.

The discourse above did surface amongst younger women in the focus groups and in one of the individual interviews as well.

I like to dress up like a real woman...then they don't know what to expect from a lesbian. I have these heels and little dress because hey, they don't expect this of a lesbian [giggles]. (C)

I am an extrovert – I dress outrageously, green hair – and I am black, then I am taken notice of and I say wow, I am lesbian. Then people listen and take notice of me. This girl, this lesbian girl is not going to hide in the corner, girl. (3)

Taking this idea further, it could be argued that mimicry undermines ideas of the fixity and reliability of gender by assuming femininity as performance (Jeffreys, 1993).

However, both Jeffreys and Tyler are critical of this interpretation. Tyler (1991) argues that if all gender is but a guise, then it would be impossible to detect imitation from the 'authentic' self – if there is no authentic self, then the revolutionary potential of the exercise is lost. Jeffreys (1993, p. 87) states:

It is difficult to believe that the postmodernist lesbian theorists are serious in seeing mimicry or roleplaying generally as a revolutionary strategy...the theory does allow women who want to use gender fetishism for their own purposes, whether erotic or just traditional, to do so with a smug sense of political self-righteousness'.

hooks (1992) in her article on the pop icon Madonna argues that Madonna is not undermining ideas of the fixity and reliability of gender by putting on gender as performance. She argues that Madonna obeys and exploits the rules of white male patriarchy rather than challenging them. Finally, hooks argues that the destabilising 'potential of texts' can only be determined in relation to actual social practice. Among the participants in this study, mimicry seemed to be a way to 'come out', not be invisible, and thus challenge notions of what a lesbian is.

It was interesting to note a relative silence on taking on a male role, living as a man, as is depicted in certain South African literature on black lesbians (for example, Gertie Williams). While the reasons for this are not clear, I would speculate that the quest to be a regular everyday woman in spite of being lesbian is very prominent. Taking on the male role openly would further marginalise and alienate them and thus construct them as being 'not real' or 'not normal'.

Talk about gender roles, which essentially related to the division of labour, usually led to a discussion on the issue of 'who is the man and who is the woman in bed'. Interestingly the word 'sex' was very seldom used to describe the sexual act. Phrases like 'in bed' and 'when you are loving her' were commonly used. Kendall (1995) suggests, for example, that sex may be associated with a penis and thus lesbians do not 'have sex'. The following supports the point.

When we are in bed I like to be the woman then I get excited. Then the 'man' can do things to me and I just lay there.

No, when we are loving each other then I like to be strong, like a man.

R: 'Are you people talking about when you have sex?'

No, No, you see, you know Cheryl we, women are loving each other, there is no sex man, haai, haai, we not have the stick to have sex...haai only for boys not us.

(E)

Another issue that needs attention regarding the above discourse is that the one woman gets excited when she is passive - 'just laying there' and the other one gets excited when

she is 'being strong like a man'. Jeffreys (1985; 1990) and Kitzinger (1994) argue that a possible way to interpret the above phenomena is to look not at only how sex oppresses or liberates, but to look broadly at the way in which sex and sexuality is constructed. It is constructed within the discourse of power/powerlessness and within this discourse powerlessness is eroticized. Thus the woman who can only enjoy sex when she is being 'the dominated one' is eroticizing the power/powerlessness discourse just as the women who can only enjoy sex when she is 'dominating'.

Within the present study this discourse of either being the dominated, submissive one or the dominated one was met with very little challenge. Certain women went on to explain how this kept their relationships 'strong', 'on track' or 'deepened their love for each other'.

In all three long relationships which I had, one was butch and one femme. You all know what that is..yes you do know. When I go to the ..nightclub [name] I look where all the butch and all the femmes are. I met my girlfriends here and they all knew I was butch, but sometimes we changed. You know it would be boring in the bedroom if we were both the same one, has to be stronger, have more what can I say power, authority..It keeps us, the relationship on track.

AR : 'Do others feel that way?'

Yep, how boring if we were just two women, I won't feel like there is a challenge..both just being nice not being difficult and stubborn and all that ..now my

partner is the strong one and I am like a woman and all this arguments and stuff we have make everything so very, very, exciting. And we keep the love going. (J)

Kitzinger (1994, p. 205) argues that many lesbian psychologists and therapists often encourage this dominance and submission especially when lesbians come to them with the presenting problem that their sex lives are no longer very exciting. ...'in order to resurrect sexual desire many lesbian psychologists explicitly recommend sexual practices built around eroticizing power and powerlessness'. Taking the argument further, this eroticization of powerlessness is thus rooted in women's oppression (Jeffreys, 1985; Kitzinger, 1994; Lorde, 1984) and when this discourse is replicated by dominated groups it is entrenching the dominated discourse. Once again, Foucault's notion of individuals 'policing themselves' (self-discipline) to entrench dominant discourse and not being controlled by sovereign powers (for example, the law, the state) is relevant.

The discourses on gender conformity and lesbianism were echoed from positions that were shifting, fluid and which reflected their investment in being constructed as normal, regular women.

ECHOES OF PSYCHOLOGY DISCOURSE

What I have labelled the 'echoes of psychology' discourse is one which was very prominent amongst all the groups as well as the individual women. This discourse subsumed the themes related to

- 1) The construction of the lesbian and
- 2) The need for intervention discourse.

The construction of the lesbian

With regard to the construction of the lesbian discourse, talk centred around the depiction, construction and representation of the lesbian. Often these representations were linked to a discourse of 'so that's why we are lesbian'. Once again their discourses both challenged and replicated dominant psychological representations of the lesbian. However, alternative, 'new' discourses which were not present in the academic literature also emerged. Interestingly, certain discourses which were prevalent in the literature were totally invisible in the discourse of the participants in the present study.

One of the prevalent discourses constructs the lesbian as women who were blessed by the ancestors to 'love other women'. It was a discourse which was fairly dominant in the discussion of the groups which could be termed 'rural', and included the two *sangomas*.

We are loving women because we are blessed by the ancestors. The ancestors decided that we have special powers. Women who love other women can heal others. When I knew I loved only women very much, that is in the bedroom, I knew I was going to be a *sangoma*. Then I just waited till the ancestors contacted the *sangoma* in my village. When I went to tell her about my love for women she told me that I will be a *sangoma*. I knew this and she just confirmed it. So after a couple of months I started to become a *sangoma*. (J)

Being a lesbian was constructed as something which was decided for you, it was out of your control and eventually you just follow this 'path'. However, this discourse did not view lesbianism as an intrinsic or essentialist characteristic.

AR: 'So, is it part of you?'

You mean like being a man or a woman...you mean part of our flesh and our souls?

AR: 'Something like that.'

You mean part of our biology or our being? No, it is not built into us. We that love women are just the same as all women, inside us, what is that word...instincts are all the same...just we who are named lesbian have been given power, not in our bodies, no. Maybe this power will be removed and then we will not be lesbian..although I do not think this will happen. (J)

However, in relation to this they distinguished between the real lesbian (they that were blessed with power) and others that are 'fake'.

But let me tell you about this. We all know about those women who just say 'let us love women because we don't like being in bed with a man', just one day they say so and then they love women. Now that is not like it is supposed to be. These women should not be allowed to behave like this. They are not blessed sometimes they are maybe the people that bring the bad things to the community. (J)

Similar to dominant literature (see eg Ellis, 1969; Moses, 1978; Saghir & Robins, 1969) they distinguished who had the 'privilege' to 'be a lesbian'. Normal, regular lesbians were those with special powers. Those that they did not see to having special power were 'othered' and marginalised – labelled fake, evil women who bring bad things to the community. Power in this instance is thus in the control of those who have been blessed with special attributes.

Another construction of the lesbian, and in line with literature, was that they were sick and should be cured (Botha, 1975; Jacobs, 1975; Prinsloo, 1973).

I think I am a bit sick, you know I have this love for women and maybe somebody had wished bad luck on me, now maybe I need to get myself made better, I have been to the *sangoma* and the white doctor for medicine. But the *sangoma* she said, I am blessed and the white doctor he gave me pills to feel happy.(D)

Although participants represented lesbians as sick and in need of cure, what differed from the literature is that they saw the sickness as a result of a spell of bad luck being cast over them. Obviously how they made sense of 'the sickness' is contextual.

However, there were voices which challenged this discourse. A contradictory discourse did not challenge the idea that lesbians were sick but challenged what was seen to cause the sickness. This discourse held that lesbians may be sick, but not because a spell of bad luck had been cast on the individual lesbian. Rather, a spell had been cast on the community during the period when she was born. The apartheid state was in fact the

culprit which had cast the bad luck spell. One of the women suggested that her lesbianism was as a result of her mother taking contraceptives given to her by her white employer prior to her birth.

I don't think I had the bad luck on me personally. When I was born in the year of 1963, there were bad things happening all over, my grandfather was sent to prison for being a communist, my mother also went to jail I don't know why and a lot of bad things...the government if I now think of it was responsible, one does not even know all the things the nationalist party government did ..they wished bad luck on blacks and that is how I got this. I know a lot of lesbians born when there was apartheid. Now I cannot get rid of it. (E)

Yes, being lesbian was maybe a virus or something that the white people gave in the pills to my mother. My mother said after my older sister was born the lady that she worked for, the white lady, gave her pills from the doctor to stop having babies. Now, my mother she say she knew that there might be something wrong with me when I was born but it only surfaced later..when I loved girls. This is so sensible, this opinion, I agree with it. (I)

On one level it could be argued that representing lesbianism as a consequence of the apartheid state is removing personal responsibility for lesbianism, thus resulting in a certain amount of social acceptance, even if this is pity or tolerance. Kitzinger (1987) argues that in drawing on this discourse, the woman herself undermines any suggestion that she is a threat to society or to the heterosexual, patriarchal hegemony. Lesbianism is

thus privatized and depoliticised in a bid for acceptance. The depoliticisation is in fact ironic if one takes into account that they are drawing on a particular political discourse to account for their being lesbian.

Regarding the present study, representing lesbianism in this light does seem to gain a certain amount of acceptance or tolerance. This can be seen in women not being evicted from the family home, and being assisted with seeking a cure. However, it seems that even when lesbianism is constructed within this discourse, it is seen as a threat to heterosexual hegemony.

Even though these men know of the thing, the curse that the apartheid put on me, they still say 'Come to be with us, we don't like you not liking us, we have a thing that will make you feel good. We know about the curse but we cannot just say okay and not ask again and again if you do not want to make sex with us'. They also say that I will not have children and then our culture will not be carried forward. (J)

One man actually said that he was worried that all girls will become like this and then our community will die and men will not be wanted anymore. (4)

Another point to be made is that although the above discourse represents lesbianism as a 'sorry state' and a sickness, it is not entirely similar to the discourse of 'lesbians in a sorry state' as presented in the literature. In the literature the 'sorry state' is as a result of personal inadequacy or failure (Kitzinger, 1987). Here the 'sorry state', the sickness, is as a result of apartheid and not as a result of personal inadequacies. Blaming apartheid

meant that participants could transfer feelings of guilt to an external locus of control. I wonder how their discourses will change in a post-apartheid society, something which they often spoke about (see section on post-apartheid South Africa).

Another discourse which emerged constructed the lesbian as somebody who had 'been born that way'. This discourse corresponds to a range of accounts in the literature which constructs the lesbian as having qualities which are innate, natural, stable and universal and similar to heterosexual women (for example, Armon, 1960; Saghir & Robins, 1971). This discourse seeks to normalise lesbianism and lesbians are presented as ordinary and normal – just like heterosexual women. In addition, the position seeks credibility by constructing lesbianism as essential or inherent rather than a matter of choice. The following statements highlight this discourse.

I think she [the woman in a vignette] just like me was born gay. And therefore she just has to be happy..I am not complaining, but what I saying is nobody can blame me. I did not choose, but remember I am still like women who go with men, just I go with women.

Yes I agree with you, we are not freaks, we are just like everybody else, only different ...when it comes to being a lesbian we were born with the instinct. (B)

I knew from when I was young that I liked girls. I always wanted to touch them, it just came naturally. It's part of my natural instincts. Some are born to be attracted to the males and others like us have different instincts. (H)

Certain discourses which are fairly prominent in the literature were absent from the participants' talk. One account popularised by Freud (1977) and Henry (1941) constructed the lesbian as a person who has not reached mature psycho-sexual development and is thus not able to achieve adult heterosexual modes of development.

Another discourse which Caprio (1954) and others suggested was that bad childbearing experiences led to lesbianism. This was absent from participants' discourses, and one can only speculate as to why this is so. Possibly maturity is linked to fertility and having children. Thus, as most of the participants have or want to have children, discourses around psycho-sexual development and lesbianism are absent. Put simply, if you have a child or want one, you are psycho-sexually mature. The absence of a discourse on bad childbearing experiences could be explained by the construction of mothers responsible for childbearing as competent, efficient and natural. Alternatively, it might be that these psychological discourses were not disseminated through institutions to which they had access.

It might be argued that the 'bad contraceptive' discourse is related or, in a sense, similar to the 'bad childbearing experiences' discourse. However, this discourse differs from the classical 'bad childbearing discourse' in the sense that in the latter the blame is laid at the door of the mother, while the 'bad contraception' discourse blames the apartheid government and its policies.

A minor discourse which emerged was that participants had never given any thought to 'being lesbian'.

I never thought about it, I just was like that, what you see is what you get. Nobody asked me about it and I never told anybody about it. I was just me [name]. (G)
However, when individuals came to organise in the townships things changed.(G)

I did not know that when I loved a women I had a name – lesbian..only found that I am this when the organisation and 'F' came and said we must all stand together and become an organisation. I think it is so funny now I have a name to call myself. (4)

You know I am now a member of the gay and lesbian organisation but it is not here in my township. However, since they came to organise us, I call myself a lesbian. Before I that I was just loving women. I did not know 'P' you are a lesbian, no it was not like that. (I)

I did not have a name for me and my girlfriend now I know because we sleep in the same bed and love each other we are lesbians. (2)

The discourse suggests that before individuals from the gay and lesbian organisation came to 'organise' in the township they did not label themselves. They were 'given the label' or, put differently, until they 'were constructed' by individuals representing the organisation. This is similar to what Weeks (1990) and Wolfe and Penelope (1993) noted – at a particular time same-sex behaviour was labelled (for example, 'lesbianism') and the

behaviour was usually linked to a constructed identity – 'the lesbian'. This labelling was, however, challenged by participants.

I say don't call me anything because I don't call myself anything. (A)

I agree that name is for whites, comes from them. I am still thinking of a name but till then I do not have one. (G)

The comments made by Kendall (1995, p. 9) in her Lesotho study are appropriate here:

What the situation in Lesotho suggests is that women can and do develop strong affectional and erotic ties with other women in a culture where there is no concept or social construction of 'lesbian'And yet, in part because of the 'no concept' issue and in part because women have difficulty supporting themselves without men in Lesotho, there has been no 'lesbian' option available to Basotho women.

Jeffreys (1993) also notes that indigenous Australian lesbians have questioned the use of the word 'lesbian' to describe themselves. They have argued that a word which has its origins on a Greek island does not necessarily have relevance to them. Secondly they have also drawn attention to the issue that 'woman-loving' in traditional culture does not allow room for an urban lesbian identity' (Jeffreys, 1993, p. 89).

One could speculate about the impact of this 'no name brand' discourse. Not identifying with the label could be a form of protection and a way of maintaining privacy. As one of the participants said:

I do not call myself a lesbian or any other word. Now when people say 'Oh, you lesbian' in a negative way, I just say to them 'Did I ever say to you that I am a lesbian? Until you hear it from me it is just a story, a skinner (gossip) story, so stop listening to everything you hear, it might only get you into trouble.' The less these busy bodies know the better. (5)

However certain discourses reflected the idea that once they 'had the label', it had worked for them in a positive sense. This discourse was most prevalent amongst a small number of women who had recently become affiliated to gay and lesbian organisation.

After I found out from 'F' that I was called a lesbian, I was so happy, now I did not feel lost. I did hear the word once but did not know what it meant. (B)

I like the name. Now I go to the tavern and look for people who call themselves this name and then I tell them about the organisation. I only ask if I think they love women. I say 'do you know what is a lesbian' and two have said to me 'we are'.

(G)

In the preceding excerpt the lesbian identity was used as an organising tool. This is similar to arguments used by gay and lesbian activists, namely that the identity is

important as an organisational and mobilising tool or strategy (see Weeks 1985, 1987). Jeffreys (1993, p.89) also states that 'The fact that the identity might make no sense to indigenous peoples or non-urban peoples in general does not negate its importance as an organising tool in its own context'.

An almost invisible discourse is the one that could be labelled a 'feminist political discourse'. This argues that lesbianism is a challenge to patriarchy, a political choice, and thus empowering to women (Kitzinger, 1987). However a minor discourse did emerge which had echoes of a feminist social constructionist discourse. Gay and lesbian organisations probably had a part to play in this discourse as the women were active members of a lesbian organisation.

Lesbians are lesbians because we know men are not good and we choose to be with women. It is not only a feeling inside me, it is a decision I made in my head. (I)

I decided some years ago, 'go with women'. I heard about it from my grandmother, about women that love women and ignore the men. Only sometimes use them for children. Then I thought 'yes they are my comrades but I will just be comrades and live and love a woman'. Lesbianism is my democratic choice. (E)

This discourse was challenged in the groups where it surfaced. The women were labelled and marginalised and not given space to be heard.

Oh, no that's not me, imagine deciding to be one of us?

Yes, how is that possible, if we were not born like this we would not have been lesbian. (E)

It would seem that the discourse to be a regular woman, the 'normalising' discourse, was very dominant in participants' construction of the lesbian. Interestingly, being normal and regular led to them fitting in, while at the same time this silenced them and continued to keep them invisible as 'lesbians'. The normalising discourse was thus a powerful mechanism for regulating their sexuality.

The 'construction of the lesbian' discourse illuminates that discourse is fluid and contextual, that dominant groups discourse is replicated in the discourse of dominated groups, and that dominated groups challenge discourses.

'NEED FOR INTERVENTION' DISCOURSE: YES, NO, MAYBE, FOR WHAT PURPOSE?

Certain discourses reflected prevailing beliefs in the importance of counselling in 'dealing with the issue'. However, two contradictory dominant discourses emerged. The one negated the role of counselling and the other supported the counselling process.

The discourse which supported counselling had various perspectives as to the role of counselling but a common thread was that 'the experts' knew best. Certain women viewed it as a way to change them into heterosexuals while others saw it as a support structure.

I agree and disagree with you – I feel yes, 'Z' [her name] you were born like this – but that does not mean that the *sangoma* cannot help you. Take for instance when a baby is born with a strange foot..[tries to explain]..then the doctor or the *sangoma* can help it grow properly again.. I sometimes think this is the same for me.(E)

The preceding discourse that intervention was necessary and could 'heal' you, the end result being that you may no longer be a lesbian was a marginal one, and often challenged in the group.

Are you saying they must make us straight..no I don't agree..I rather think they must accept us..everybody must. However, we can go maybe talk to somebody at Lifeline about it..In fact I called them and they spoke to me that it is okay to be like me.. they said that if I was not happy to be like me, I must call again. You had to be happy to be a lesbian.(E)

This confirms Kitzinger's (1987) comment: first you were sick if you wanted to be gay, now you are sick if you don't want to be gay. The need participants expressed for experts to help them stay in control and be normal was dominant in most of the group interviews conducted in the urban areas.

Yes I went to speak to a counsellor at the student centre...I was afraid ...but they were nice and said that I am different but that it is okay to have the feelings which I have. (F)

Let me say something – I am happy like I am and I think that talking about our feelings to the people at the centre – the centre where you can go if you are raped or have any other problem you want to talk about – is very helpful. I just went there. I had heard that they listen to any problem, personal one, so I went and I told them about me and that this secret and they said I should not feel bad it is okay – now I go whenever I have doubts. I like that place very much – it is helpful.(F)

Certain of the above excerpts concur with literature which assures lesbians that they are no different to heterosexuals and says they need to accept their lesbianism (Calderone, 1976; Cooper, 1980). The focus is on the individual – they 'seek to develop the potential of the 'whole' person. They urge acceptance of the of the individual on his/her own terms and reject changing the person radically to what he/she is not (Brummett, 1981; Cooper, 1980).

The need for intervention discourse reflected not only the need for counselling but also positioned counselling and thus psychology as normal, that is, their discourses pointed to the normalisation of psychological practice. This confirms the point made by Wilbraham (1994, p. 4) that 'psychologization – the application of psychological discourses to a phenomenal world – refers....to the operations and effects of normalizing practices of psychology'. Rose (1990) also suggests that psychological knowledge which is available about individuals has the role of both informing and maintaining a range of normalising practices (for example, law, health and psychology). This is further borne out by the following comments:

Everybody goes to counsellors, social workers and psychologists to talk about things that ..are bothering them..like being a lesbian..or that you cannot remember your stuff that you studied..for all kinds of issues. (C)

I know so many people who go for counselling

You can go to the *sangoma* who will listen to you talk about these issue or, if you are in the city, you can go to the person near the welfare office – who talk to you – or like 'S' said, they counsel you.(C)

Kitzinger (1987; 1993) has explored the role of psychological therapy in the lives of lesbians. She argues 'in directing the lesbians attention away from the outer world of oppression and offering her a satisfying inner world as a substitute, psychology offers salvation through individual change rather than system change. The individual is responsible for the amelioration of her situation, and she is urged to find individual solutions to her problems. Furthermore research of this type overtly discourages explicit rendering of a lesbian identity in political terms'. Her viewpoint complements those of Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn and Walkerdine (1984) who argue that psychology as profession has historically been a partner in maintaining conservative social agendas.

It should however be noted that 'psychological knowledge and practices of subjectification do not work exclusively by repression and domination, or coercion and constraint' (Wilbraham, 1994, p 4). Rose (1988), for example, argues that psychologisation has in certain instances contributed to positive outcomes like contentment and happiness. Giddens (1991) is another theorist who does not view the quest for self-fulfilment purely

as a reaction to a detached world. He argues that information about the personal or social self involve 'processes of reappropriation and empowerment intertwined with the expropriation of loss' (Giddens, 1991, p. 7). He further argues that individuals trust expert knowledge, but at the same time there is a certain amount of doubt and resistance, and this situation contributes to the emergence of alternatives.

At the same time there were women who were wary of counselling and realised that it posed certain contradictions. They provided reasons why they felt counselling was of no use. A woman who went for counselling could still feel as unhappy (or more so) after the intervention:

For example you go there and they just listen to you and say little and then they give you nothing and you just leave it is a scam. I am not fooled by these people. Who are they anyway? If you go for counselling you may not feel better. What do these white people know about me, haai, no. I am okay like I am – must I go there because I am a lesbian? I said to my friend we do not need to go just because we are lesbian. (G)

The opposition and resistance to counselling which these women expressed echoed concerns elsewhere in the literature (Jeffreys, 1993; Kitzinger, 1987). As depicted by Kitzinger, the necessity of counselling discourse constructs the lesbian as 'other'. Implicit in this approach is the belief that lesbians have problems and they need experts to help them 'work through it'. As mentioned in Chapter three the 'lesbian as pathological' discourse has been replaced by the 'lesbian in need of psychologist' discourse. This need

for counselling obscures the dominance of what Foucault would term 'disciplinary power'.

In the present study, a minor discourse emerged which depicted the lesbian as socially constructed and also negated the role of counselling. As could be expected, this discourse was more reflective of the more highly educated women in the urban areas who have come into contact with feminist ideas or, alternatively, had been exposed to the shortcomings of counselling.

No, I was not born like this..I used to like boys..but now I only have girls because they are so much more understanding. I democratically decided to be a lesbian. So what is this counselling for, what can they tell me..nothing..so they can say ja..you are okay, ja you are sick or whatever...no man, I have better things to do with my time – a money making spinner if you ask me. (B)

I say I am free to choose what to be..like you choose to study, or be a nurse or whatever..you choose to be a lesbian. (F)

I don't tell me I need to talk about this, or I mean go and ask to talk about this to somebody I don't even know. (H)

The above excerpts which challenge the role of counselling may be interpreted as individuals drawing on multiple and diverse subject positions available within discourses to negotiate, challenge, counter and transform power relations in everyday interactions

(see, for example, Gavey, 1989; Hollway, 1989a, 1996; Walkerdine, 1986). In addition, challenges to the necessity for counselling could be construed as resistance to the psychological discourse: an attempt to keep participants' issues outside of psychological control. However, although some of them did not agree with counselling, at times they felt alone, isolated and without support. Their opposition to counselling could thus be 'empowering' as well as constraining.

One may wonder why the dominance of the discourse which negated counselling was so prominent. This is not in line with academic research, neither in African-American, nor in white communities (Greene, 1993; Kitzinger, 1987). One need only look to the socio-political and economic situation of these women for an answer. Primary health care is extremely limited for the majority of black women (reference) so mental health care is, if not unknown, definitely not easily accessible.

In addition counselling was seen by many activists in the 1980's as irrelevant and merely supporting and entrenching the discourse of the apartheid regime. Counselling did not encourage individuals to challenge the state but merely helped them to be comfortable with the existing status quo (see Anonymous, 1986; Turton, 1986).

Interestingly, another discourse which emerged in relation to counselling was 'we need counselling because we are illegal. This lesbianism is illegal'. The counsellor was seen as a lawyer: 'if you go and see them they will keep you out of jail'. 'Illegal' did not, however, mean that they accepted the illegality.

I should go to the counsellor because I know of men who went to jail for loving men. So women might go next. The person at Lifeline is like a lawyer maybe...I do not know. (G)

I sometimes wonder if I am illegal as a lesbian. I know blacks, we are illegal now I am doubly illegal. (7)

Although, as explained in an earlier chapter, lesbianism has never constituted a crime in South Africa, this did not mean that they did not think of themselves, black lesbians, as criminals. Although they questioned their legal status, they believed that it had something to do with the apartheid state.

But let me say that it is this government, the Nationalist Party, that has made me doubly illegal. (7)

DISCOURSES AROUND RELATIONSHIPS AND SOCIO-CULTURAL ISSUES

The discourse of 'relationships' includes the categories of relationships with men, heterosexual women, the family and the broader community, the lesbian community, lesbianism and culture and a discourse on post-apartheid South Africa. The post-apartheid discourse was a dominant discourse which related to how they viewed their positioning as black lesbians under a democratically-elected government.

In this discourse, they spoke quite frequently about their present relationships with the white lesbian community. It should be borne in mind that most of this data was collected while individuals were about to vote for the first time in their lives.

Relationships with men

In discussing their roles and generally their lives as lesbians, the issue of men usually surfaced.

I want to make it clear I have got nothing against men

I speak for myself..but I am lesbian..but not against men. (B)

Central to their discussion was the discourse that, although they are lesbian, it is not because men are 'bad' or generally problematic for women - in fact they had good relationships with men. They also did not distinguish between gay men and heterosexual men. This discourse was very conciliatory to men and made discourses which, for example, highlighted abuses committed by men against women, invisible. In addition, they drew on essentialist arguments regarding their lesbianism to explain why they were not involved with men. Although not stated explicitly, underlying this argument was the idea that if they had any control over the issue, they might not be lesbian, and thus men would not need to be excluded as potential partners in personal relationships.

I have always had a good relationship with men. My father is a very good man, so is my brother and three years ago before I loved a woman I had a very, very nice man. (C)

Men have a role – I do not have a problem with them. I just don't want to be involved with them as I am a lesbian. (1)

Men are no problem I am just lesbian.(H)

Another position which emerged was that all women and men (they did not distinguish between lesbian and heterosexual women) should unite and take up issues of discrimination together. The issues they referred to were issues affecting them as black people.

Men and women should do things together – I mean fight for issues. Like if there is discrimination, men are our comrades. (J)

Yes men and women in the struggle fight together for things, we cannot say because you are men we do not want to stand by you.(B)

Furthermore, men who did pose problems were not held to be responsible for their actions. Once again the apartheid system and its subsequent consequences were blamed.

With most men I do not have a problem – they are good fathers – some of them – most of them – but they also have problems – no work, going to work by the mines – then when they come back you don't know each other any more and then you fight and then think – this is bad, this man, then it is not his fault (J)

In the literature a popular radical feminist discourse is that men should be excluded from women's lives. However, this discourse was not shared by the participants.

Another argument I don't like is that women should get rid of men totally, we must fight them – no, that I do not like. (B)

Why should we say no, let us make away with men. Only live with lesbians? This makes no sense. (I)

The preceding discourse reflects the way in which political women's organisations took up issues. Secondly, it could be argued that it is a normalising discourse: 'just like heterosexual women we are not against men'. Also, given the economic position of black women as well as the shortage of affordable housing for working class black people, it is possible that a position which argues for lesbians to live separately from men and maybe even in separate lesbian communities is just not practical or possible.

Regarding the way in which political women's organisations functioned Fester (1997) draws attention to the fact that men were not seen as enemies but as comrades in the struggle for national liberation.

She notes that the policy was to work alongside men in the common struggle against apartheid.

The United Women's Organisation to which large numbers of black women belonged accepted the Freedom Charter and Women's Charter of 1954 as policy documents. The words reflect the role of men: 'We stand shoulder to shoulder with our menfolk in a common struggle against poverty, race and class' (Fester, 1997).

Regarding the discourses of the women in the present study, I would argue that on one level their positioning in relation to men is as a result of the way in which men were positioned in the fight against apartheid. Also, in African societies men (patriarchy) have a lot of status (power) both within the family and in the society. Women are taught to respect this authority and it is played out in different forms, for example, being submissive and taking on the role of cooking, cleaning and bearing children. Within the present context, the discourse that they like and are not against men may be a form of normalising their 'otherness'. This conciliatory position towards men was not shared by all the participants:

Let me state this clearly – I am not a lesbian because I want to have nothing to do with men, but let me just say men are not as good people as you people say. (F)

Yes, just think of how men drink and give women hidings and then some of them even rape women and abuse children. (D)

Yes that is true – you know I know gay and married men who are all bad. The one gay man beats his mother and his sister – if he had girlfriends he would give them hidings too. (D)

I am much better-loving women – they are at least there when you need them. (2)

I would agree with all this – even if I was not loving women – men are not good. (D)

Even old ones, grandfathers, do bad things. I have lots of examples. (J)

The above suggests that these women have come to view men as 'not good' as a result of experience, both personal and the experience of people in their communities. However, they also argued that having this position on men was not a consequence of them being lesbian. Another point to be noted is that none of the women mentioned feminism as having contributed to this position. Interestingly, the discourse emerges that all men 'are problems' young, old, married (what could be interpreted as 'straight'). This is a position similar to that held by lesbian feminists (Dworkin, 1987; Jeffreys, 1990, 1993; Kitzinger, 1987) who argue that patriarchy generally is the problem and thus this does not exclude gay men from being viewed as part of the enemy camp.

Another discourse which surfaced was one which 'othered' and labelled lesbians who they knew were not accommodating to men. The following quotations represent this position.

I know that some lesbians (in my organisation) say men are the enemies.(F)

Yes I know, I don't agree with that..those women are actually very rude and aggressive and pushy. (F)

Those women who say we should be against men should be disciplined. They should be reminded of the role of men. Those are the types that I would not associate with. They are usually also a bit violent, quick tempered and you sometimes do not even know what would get them angry.

Ja, you know they are unpredictable and could also get up to all kinds of things and I agree with [name] they are very quick to pick a fight or an argument. (D)

The images of lesbians above concur with the literature which portrays lesbians as violent and of an 'unsavoury' nature. In addition, they are distancing themselves from these women who are not like them, they are the others, not the everyday, regular, 'same as heterosexuals' lesbians.

Duncan (1993) has drawn attention to the fact that, at the discursive level, one of the common negative portrayals of blacks is that they are prone to committing acts of violence. I would extend this analysis to the image created of lesbians. For example, in one of the rare instances of a focus on lesbians in the South African media, they were portrayed as violent and aggressive women preying on young girls (Sunday Times, 19 November, 1989).

Such stereotypical characterisations tend to provide justification for the treatment of lesbians as dangerous women. These discourses not only reflect a heterosexist ideology, but constantly reinforce the need to maintain heterosexual, legal and even psychological control over these 'other', 'untame' lesbians.

It could also be argued that 'we are not like lesbians who do not like men' is a form of saving face. The 'saving face' concept refers to the acceptable public image which people attempt to maintain for themselves and others (Essed, 1991; Van Dijk, 1991). In this sense the participants are trying to present a positive public image of their positioning as lesbians.

Another discourse which emerged was the one that saw men as the enemy, but argued that they could not be held responsible for the problem. Participants argued that men's behaviour is a result of apartheid. However, these women saw the fact that they 'did not love them [men]' as positive, although they understood where the problem originated.

Men are really, really sick..I think if it was not for apartheid we would have better men. They became so frustrated. So I do love women, not men, but I also understand why men are so bad, so I do not like to love them....For years now..maybe six I stay far away from them, even when I was growing up I thought..jislaaik I do not like you boys..girls are much better..do not even touch me, you make me feel sick when I think of the things you do..fighting, drinking, running away from the mother and children. (E)

This discourse could be interpreted in a number of ways. In the South African context men were not constructed as the enemy – apartheid and racial capitalism was the enemy. Men were oppressed and thus took out their frustration by oppressing women. What is interesting, however, is that these women have chosen not to associate with men, that is, they have chosen to 'love women'.

Relationships with heterosexual women

Talk about the relationships of participants with heterosexual women illustrated that they do not see themselves as separate or different from heterosexual women. Their discourse did not reflect the literature which suggests that lesbians do not have very close social ties with, for example, heterosexual women. However, their discourse should be contextualised. The majority of these women are not 'out' and therefore they conduct their lives in a manner which does not differ from that of heterosexual women. Thus they socialise with heterosexual women, are part of community organisations with heterosexual women and so on. The following excerpts reflect the discourse of women who were not 'out' on heterosexual women. In this instance the essentialist argument that the only difference is that they are lesbian was once again central to their discourse, so why should they not be friends with, or have 'problems' with heterosexual women?

My friends are all women. Both those that are not lesbian and those that are.

However, only the lesbians know about each other. What I actually mean is that the other friends do not know about us. They know we share a house, a room in my uncle's house, but then lots of people all share rooms.(G)

I have no problem with women who are with men, we are all friends, just I am a lesbian. (G)

Women who were 'out' to certain individuals and organisations in the community did not position themselves differently in relation to heterosexual women.

My friends are all women and men in my community, doesn't matter what they are.

AR: So what about the married women and single women who are not gay and know that you are a lesbian? Are they still your friends?'

Yes, some asked me questions when I first told them about me. But they understand that I am a lesbian and that I have accepted it. They understand. Also they do not worry about me looking out for their men. (D)

A rare discourse that emerged was the one that highlighted a problem with heterosexual women. This discourse emerged amongst women who were part of a gay and lesbian organisation. In the focus group it was challenged by other women.

I am not so in favour of women with men. They have different issues to us. We have to take up issues because we are lesbians. Most of my close friends are in the organisation. Before this I kept to myself. The married women were always asking me about my boyfriends and why they do not see them.

I did not share commonalities with them. (I)

I socialise with women who are lesbian that I have met through the organisation. We have lots to talk about and do together. (F)

What emerged is that women who live in the townships – both those that are 'out' and those that are 'in the closet' – have close ties with both heterosexual and gay women. The women who are part of the predominantly urban gay and lesbian organisation have close ties with other lesbians in the organisation. Obviously the women who are members of an organisation are 'out' (if not to all, to people in the organisation). It could be argued that the organisation has provided them with the space to debate and this challenges dominant discourse around lesbianism. Thus a discourse has emerged where they have come to challenge and evaluate their position in relation to that of heterosexual women.

Relationships with family and the broader community

Women who spoke about relationships with family were most likely to be the ones that were 'out'. Most participants who were 'out' just decided to tell a family member one day. Most of those who were 'out' had first made the disclosure to a mother or grandmother. Their talk did not reflect that coming 'out' had been a process as is reflected in the literature.

The following discourse of shock and disbelief emerged when participants had made the disclosure that they were lesbian. In all cases they had told their mothers.

My mother was shocked. She said 'No, no, I do not believe it. You have been such a good child. Where did things go wrong?'(F)

She [the mother] just sat down and said 'Bring me some water for the shock'. She then said, 'You are my baby child, where did I go wrong?' (A)

My mother said 'No, no, no. That cannot be true'. She then said 'I heard of this thing' but for me to be it was a great shock as I was a good child and had not presented any problems to the family. (D)

This is similar to the experience of Chan-Sam (1993) when she told her mother – the mothers were shocked and construed their daughters being lesbian in a discourse of 'where did I as a mother go wrong?' Alternatively, a discourse emerged which saw the 'good daughter' as not being synonymous with being a good lesbian – 'you were always such a good child'.

The consequences of participants disclosing their sexuality to their mothers were varied. One position which emerged was that the mother denied that anything had ever been said, and never raised the issue again. This was experienced by women who stayed in the same house with their mothers as well as those who did not. Those that lived in the same house as their mothers even in fact brought partners home and slept in the same bed as them. No questions were ever asked. It was a discourse of total denial and 'business as usual'. The mothers also never mentioned the issue to other family members.

However, when mothers responded in this way it usually contributed to the deterioration of their relationships with the daughters as the following illustrates.

She just never mentioned it again but we were no longer close. She did not tell me all kinds of things as she had done before. (D)

I did not live at home but visited. However, after I told her this it was not the same. Now I hardly visit. Maybe talk on the phone. But it is like we have lost each other. But still I feel that I had to tell.

It almost seems that in 'conducting business as usual' and not talking about the issue to the daughter or any other family member, the mother is protecting and upholding the notion of the regular everyday family.

Another response from the mothers was to seek the intervention of a medical doctor or a traditional healer – their understanding of lesbianism reflected certain literature, that it was a sickness that they could be cured (Henry, 1941; Hopkins, 1969; Jacobs, 1975). The mothers saw this as a means of support and that they were sending out a message of the good, caring mother. It was quite common for the mothers to bring home various traditional as well as Western medicine for them.

My mother just said 'Shame my child you are sick. We will go to the *sangoma* and get help'. She treated me like when you have a serious sickness. She even said I must get a certificate from the doctor and stay out from my job. (A)

My mother just made an appointment at the doctor and said I do not have to worry about the money as she had medical aid from her school. (C)

Interestingly, when the latter discourse emerged, the women's relationships did not deteriorate with their mothers and most of the time they just let their mothers treat them as if they were sick. The mothers often informed other female members of the family. The males were only told that the daughter had a women's sickness, which only women knew the details of. Possibly the relationship between mother and daughter did not deteriorate as the mother felt 'good' about being caring and the daughter also felt nurtured and cared for, even though the mother did not accept her as a lesbian per se.

A discourse that was almost invisible in the mothers' responses was that their daughters had been 'born that way.' This was in contrast to how the women themselves had made sense of the issue. As has been illustrated in the previous sections, a dominant discourse amongst them was that they had been 'born that way'. It is possible that this discourse was not prominent amongst the mothers as it would mean that they as mothers had to take responsibility for producing an 'abnormal', sick child.

Disclosure to other family members had varied consequences. Telling a brother or father (a rare occurrence) resulted in this kind of patriarchal response:

My brother just said 'Ag, we all know you are a lettie. I don't even want to know, just fuck off and get on with your life.'

This type of response was similar to that of Chan-Sam's brother (1993). Fathers were rarely the first person to be told and they responded in the following ways:

My father said I am insulting men – why was I so bad – and said I must leave immediately and not come back to his house. He said he could not believe my mother had given him this kind of child. (I)

My father got angry and said I just need men to show me how good sleeping with them were. He also said this was a white thing, totally not part of his culture. He then chased me away. (B)

The father in the example above construed lesbianism in an 'insulting to men' discourse. As Kitzinger (1987), Dworkin (1987), Faderman (1981) and others have suggested, lesbianism is seen as challenging patriarchy. What is also significant is that none of the women had indicated that their mothers or other female members of the family had labelled their behaviour as 'un-African', 'Western' or 'white' as the fathers had done. The fathers were also not supportive and usually evicted participants from the household.

The point made by Bellos (1995, p. 79) is appropriate as regards the fathers' responses: 'men have classified female sexuality as passive and subservient. Bad women are those who are sexually active, who choose to have sex with women and speak about it'.

Another interesting discourse which emerged and which challenged the 'un-African' discourse was the response from some mothers, grandmothers and, on the rare occasion, from fathers and grandfathers:

My mother said she must take me to the doctor. She said that her mother had told her of this. She said long, long ago before we were controlled by the whites, women used to marry each other. She said men did it also. (E)

My grandmother when she heard said that she knew about this from the old days. Marriages even happened. But when we became civilised it was not allowed to take place anymore. (J)

This confirms the literature which suggests that same-sex marriages had in the past taken place within African societies (Krige, 1974; Mason-John & Okorowa, 1995). The statement 'before we were civilised' is also significant – it probably means before the colonialists took control of their communities.

Another unexpected discourse emerged amongst women who were 'out' to family, friends and the broader community. They spoke of not being totally ostracised by the community.

I am totally 'out'. Everybody knows about me. They asked me a lot of questions and then said they understand and that I am still one of them. I must just be happy and not leave the community. (E)

Everybody understands. Initially people were shocked but just talking, educating them to understand helped. I still live in the community. They do call me names, but then they call all women names, fat ones, ugly ones, thin ones, light skinned ones..all. They just say 'Hey, you who like women' and laugh. (H)

There are no documented studies on the attitudes of black South Africans to homosexuality. The two South African studies on attitudes to homosexuality only reflected the attitude of whites. Regarding black attitudes in other societies, there is no consensus in the literature. However, it is generally assumed or implied that black communities are more homophobic than white communities (Bellos, 1995; Mason-John & Okorowa, 1995). Clarke, 1981 and Smith and Smith, 1981 and others report on the homophobia within the black community. However, Bellos (1995) and Suriyaprakasam (1995) report that black communities in Britain might not be any more homophobic than white communities. However, there is very little documentation on the issue. Suriyaprakasam (1995, p. 101) offers a possible reason why black families are more supportive than expected and this interpretation makes sense for the present study:

Black communities have had to face racism, adapting and modifying their cultural values to fit into the changing environment. This can give us more flexibility within our families to deal with all kinds of issues, including lesbianism. Some Black lesbians find that families are accepting of their lifestyles and their differences, but are reluctant to discuss issues in terms of lesbianism.

We should therefore not assume that coming 'out' in black communities is harder than in white communities, and that black communities are more racist. We might be entrenching a racist stereotype. The latter point should be heeded in any future research which is conducted in South Africa. The discourse of the women in the present study indicate that there is no one response to coming 'out' in the black community.

It seems that the women's mothers as well as the broader community which, in certain instances, did not totally ostracise them, were invested in the discourse of portraying themselves as protective and compassionate. However at particular times they still ridiculed these women. The lesbians seemed to accept the ridicule – at least they were not being treated with physical violence or 'evicted' from the community. Here an 'empowered' position was negotiated at a micro-level (Foucault, 1976).

What has been described above is the discourse of women who were 'out' to certain individuals. The following section represents the discourses of women who were not 'out', except maybe to a few other lesbians.

Why the need to go and tell your mother, father, family? Yes, I know some of you in the gay and lesbian organisation went to tell your mothers or whatever but why? I cannot do that for myself. (B)

I do not tell them not because they will disown me, but I just do not see why I should tell. Do we tell our parents when we get drunk, or tell lies or whatever? So why say 'Hey there, I am a lesbian' and then we feel uncomfortable with each

other. Basically it fucks up our relationship. (I)

We have our distance. We are close, but not in everything. They do not tell me everything about themselves – it is almost like parents do not tell children everything, the respect thing you know, and likewise it would maybe be seen as disrespectful if you just say, 'I am a lesbian'. Also they have a function – cultural, emotional – those things are important if you are black and South African. (J)

A common thread present in the preceding discourse is that participants felt they would lose the closeness of their families. The discourse also suggests that breaking this 'bad' news to their families would be disrespectful. The discourse that the families would not accept them, evict them and maybe disown them was not prominent. Thus, by not coming 'out' they do not risk losing the support of their families and do not run the risk of being labelled a 'disrespectful daughter'. In a sense, then, the status quo is not challenged. This is similar to Suriyaprakasam (1995) who reports on black lesbians in Britain who question the value of coming out to their families. Two of the women in her study are quoted: 'I've never understood people who have to tell their family. My family don't know' 'My parents don't live here, but I see them once a year or so. But I have really good boundaries with them about my personal life, so they know what they can and can't ask me about.' (Suriyaprakasam, 1995, p. 101)

What is striking about the discourses which emerged in the present study is that there is no one response from the black community to lesbians 'coming out'. On the one hand the community, especially the males, saw lesbianism as a challenge to masculinity and

partriarchy. This is in keeping with the point argued by Pharr (1988) that homophobia is a weapon of sexism. A contradictory discourse which emerged did not encourage active talk on the issue, but was nonetheless supportive and conciliatory. This discourse seemed to have the role of maintaining unity in the community and also portraying the black family and the black community as understanding and accommodating.

Relationships with the broader lesbian community

Talk about relationships with the broader lesbian community emerged from the groups whose participants were members of a gay and lesbian organisation. Given that most of the women in this sample were not 'out' as lesbians and thus did not come into much contact with other lesbians, relationships with a lesbian community was not spoken about much. Essentially there was not a black lesbian community in the township, although women recognised each other as 'women who love other women' in a tavern setting, for example.

Central to the discussions about relationships with a lesbian community in the urban areas was the relationships of participants with white lesbians. The following discourse emerged fairly regularly.

Now that I live here in Cape Town and not in the township, I have heard about the organisation for lesbians and I then went with 'V' and I am now a member. There I met more lesbians and through them I meet even more white ones as well. But they are just like any other boere. I said to them that they do not know what oppression

is. Whites, whether you are lesbian or not, all vote for the NP. Only a few don't – like Joe Slovo, for example. (D)

That was the same for me. I met lots of African lesbians but also white lesbians when I came to stay in the area classified for whites. I even had a romance with a white lesbian for maybe three weeks, no four. But although she liked me she was a racist. She say 'Why you ANC people want to fight about so much?' We all have different areas and places, blacks are different to whites. She say 'You just like pap and vleis and have strange traditions'. She did not take me to her house and meet her family. Not because I was a lesbian, the other white lesbians used to go on a Saturday with her, but because of my colour. She said my family is not ready for you yet. I told her she was racist and her being lesbian meant nothing to me. However, some white lesbians are comrades and lesbians. They are alright-we struggle together and love each other. (E)

The above sentiments regarding racism are endorsed by Lumphondwana (1996). In a groundbreaking article on racism within the South African lesbian movement, she argues that racism is the primary factor which is contributing to rendering the South African lesbian movement ineffective and irrelevant. She states:

The burdens of centuries of colonialism and decades of apartheid, combined with out-of-sync white lesbians and token blacks, has resulted in an ineffective, irrelevant and useless lesbian movement in South Africa. What could be called a lesbian movement is practically nonexistent in our country. I argue that a politically relevant

and effective lesbian movement is doomed as most lesbian organisations are afraid to deal with a complex and webbed relationship between blacks and whites. The relationship is characterised by and summed up in one word that sends chills down the spine: racism (p. 72).

The above discourse that white lesbians are racist towards black lesbians is commonly reflected in the literature. However, a discourse that was common amongst the participants and is not that common in the literature was the discourse that white lesbians are racist, but not all are racist, 'some are comrades'. As stated earlier this position that not all whites are enemies might be related to the way in which the South African liberation struggle was conducted the African National Congress in exile as well as its 'affiliates' like the United Democratic Front within the country. This position is highlighted by Ray Alexander-Simons, a white woman who was exiled from South Africa. In a interview she gave recently on her role in mobilising women from African countries for the South African national liberation struggles she states:

I must say it was not easy being white. In May 1970, the Zambian Minister of Foreign Affairs hosted a cocktail party to start off the Pan African Women's Conference in Lusaka. I was there with Ruth Mompati. The Algerian and Egyptian women were very rude and told me to leave, that I had no business being there. I called Ruth Mompati and told her what they had said. She gave a mouthful, and told them that they did not know the South African struggle (Primo, 1997, p. 31).

None of the participants in the present study were advocates for an organisation where all whites were excluded but, like Lumphondwana (1996), argue that black women should not be overshadowed by white women and they should be provided with space to take up leadership positions. Like Lumphondwana they argue that at particular points whites are racist just by the very way in which they do things. As a participant in the study remarked:

I am a teacher and joined the gay and lesbian organisation. But even then I am not so articulate as the whites. I can write things down, then we are the same, but when we talk in a group I feel nervous and the words struggle to come out. Then a damn white woman will use all the right lingo and say what I wanted to say in the first place. She will then be put in a leadership position. Also they have all things, faxes and stuff, and then it makes it easier for them to lead the organisation. They also say 'Yes, 'B' should be the secretary as she has experience'. For crying out loud, when am I going to be given the chance to get that experience? And you know what this 'B' said to me? 'You are a teacher and so am I, and we live in the same area, so what's the difference between us?' This type of racism is so bad, it's the kind that is almost more difficult to deal with than the blatant type. So I see no use in being part of the organisation, I would rather join an organisation where I do not have to deal with such liberal racism. But I also want to say that I believe in non-racialism and do not support an organisation that is for blacks only. We could as blacks meet separately to discuss issues but whites should not be barred from the organisation. Have I made sense to you people here in the group? (E)

One could further speculate as to why an outright anti-white stance was not advocated. In advocating a non-racial position they are thus portraying the position of the African National Congress (ANC) which emerged in the 1994 elections as the dominant political party. The Pan-Africanist Congress, whose ideology could be labelled as much more black-conscious than the ANC, received much fewer votes than expected. In advocating a strong non-racial position in terms of white lesbians while at the same time noting their racism as a group, the women are in fact reproducing the discourse of the dominant ANC. By positioning and promoting themselves within this dominant discourse they are thus attempting to promote a positive image of themselves. However, just being lesbian they are also challenging the discourse of the dominant grouping, or individuals within the dominant grouping.

LESBIANISM AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO CULTURE: A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS?-NOT FOR ALL OF US

Talk about cultural traditions and practices in relation to the participants' lesbianism emerged as a discussion point in a number of the groups but was most prominent in the group that could be classified as rural.

What was interesting was that lesbianism as a contradiction to culture or un-african as certain african leaders have argued did not emerge as a prominent discourse. Women drew on historical information to support the point that "women who love women" had in fact "always" been part of their culture.

I know that women who love women have always been here in the community, my grandmother spoke about it. I have even heard of them getting married. (J)

Yes even the chiefs knew about it I have heard, this was long ago. You just loved women and did not make a issue out of it. (J)

I cannot see why it is said to be un-African a lot of things almost everything is African and then the whites took it as theirs. It does not affect me and my culture, I do and accept all the cultural things just like everybody else. Only one difference I am a lesbian, loving other women. (G)

Although the above discourse does not view lesbianism as un-african or in contradiction with cultural values, once again their arguments were construed within a normalizing and maintenance of the status quo discourse : we abide by all cultural traditions and support them, do not challenge them, the only difference being that we are lesbians. Creating a space for themselves as lesbians within the status quo discourse contributed to an image of the regular everyday woman in the community who is not in conflict with accepted traditions and values.

A discourse which was much more difficult to identify in terms of the cultural argument was that apartheid forces had been responsible for lesbianism and was thus a contradiction in terms of their culture. I had expected this discourse to arise as it had previously emerged in the 'construction of the lesbian discourse'. However, when it was raised it was challenged.

Maybe this lesbianism is against culture, maybe it is part of the curse of the apartheid government. (J)

No, the curse that the apartheid government maybe put on the community did not affect the culture and traditions. It affected pregnancies and babies born. (J)

I agree with her the curse did not infiltrate our traditions what I am maybe saying is that women like us have always been here, maybe even the curse just made more of us. So if the curse was not there all of us would not be lesbian. Some are as a result of the evil and the others just made because the God want us like this.(J)

The above discourse on the one hand recognises the role of apartheid but in order to protect their culture and traditions and to project it as 'pure' they thus resort to differentiating between the 'real' God-given lesbian and the 'default lesbian' created as a result of the apartheid government's evil intentions.

What was interesting regarding this discourse on lesbianism and culture was that there was an overtly visible shifting of positions, contradictions to positions taken and the emergence of alternative positions. This was in fact raised by participants as the following illustrates:

I am not sure about this culture and lesbian thing, I know that it is not against my culture but sometimes my arguments get different as I talk about it (J)

Yes, I say something now then we talk and I want to go against my earlier talk, point of view then it looks like I do not know what I want

Yes, that is how I feel (background support from others) (G)

Relationships in post-apartheid South Africa

The participants spoke at length about how their lives would change after the 1994 elections.

On the 27 April when we have a vote for the first time the ANC will definitely have the most votes and then apartheid will no longer be with us and all will have rights, blacks and lesbians and gays will be legal. We blacks, all blacks, coloured, African have all been oppressed, only whites are people in this country. Most whites treat us like dogs, no they treat dogs better, so I say first fight for the rights as blacks and then we lesbians can say hey, we are also oppressed. (E)

I agree, it will be better for us in the new South Africa. Blacks will have rights and then lesbians can also and will also have rights. (E)

In the above discourse the women saw themselves primarily as oppressed as black people. The discourse thus promotes unity amongst black persons. While they recognise that gays and lesbians are oppressed, they believe that once apartheid goes certain rights would automatically be extended to lesbians.

Another point that needs to be made is that, in talking about being oppressed in South Africa, the participants very rarely spoke about being oppressed as lesbians or as women. In this discourse, a feminist discourse on their oppression as women or as lesbians was not hegemonic. Their discourse is once again echoing the discourse of the ANC and its members. As an activist and lawyer interviewed by Primo (1997, p. 38) states: 'My view has always been that black women are black people first before they are women. It is as part of an oppressed nation that they have suffered the most extreme forms of oppression, namely loss of land, attempted destruction of their culture and families, and political persecution, including imprisonment and death. Life was predetermined by race in this country.'

A contradictory discourse which also emerged was that participants, as lesbians, did not need any special rights in the new South Africa. While the previous discourse acknowledged that lesbians should be extended certain rights in post-apartheid South Africa, the present discourse argued that once black people were awarded certain rights it would automatically include them and lesbians would not be discriminated against. As the following participant's discourse reflects:

We will get rights when whites no longer rule us. Also we are not illegal as lesbians but as blacks yes, we are illegal, criminals. I know lots of women who have been killed by the security police because they are black, not because they are lesbian. To be black is worse. Loving women I can hide that and fool them...they think I love men, or they don't even think about it. (D)

On one level the discourse reflects the official South African legal position on lesbianism. It was never a crime as male sexuality was. Interestingly, the woman's discourse suggests that the state did not need laws to criminalise them as lesbians, as a range of laws directed at black people were sufficient to control their behaviour.

A relevant point is that when the participants spoke about being oppressed, they included all blacks and did not differentiate between the groups that had been created by apartheid (for example coloured, African, Griqua and so on). However, when talking about issues at a more personal level (for example, carrying passes, forced removals, separate schools and residential areas for various groups) they would point out to each other how the government applied the 'divide and rule' strategy between these various groups.

We need to understand that we as blacks have been oppressed as blacks, and the government played us off against each other, for example, people the government classified as 'coloured' did not carry passes like those they classified as 'African'. But the government and whites were the ones that benefited, coloured, white, Indians were all nothing in the eyes of the NP. So now we as black lesbians must support each other because we have similar experiences. Yes, I know some coloureds say Africans are and Africans say coloureds want to be white, but this is the trap that the NP caught us in. Now they laugh and say 'black on black violence'.(G)

Duncan (1993, p.289) in his analysis of discourses on racism produced by black parents (that is, coloureds and Africans) noted that, 'while the parents referred to coloureds and

Africans as oppressed groupings, they 'do not present any descriptions or criteria which distinguish these two groupings. In other words, while they generally identify two groupings they do not constitute them as different. Because they do not constitute them as different, it can be assumed that their distinction between these groups is more a consequence of dominant group discourses and practices rather than a basic belief that these groupings differ fundamentally'.

What is striking about the post-apartheid discourse is the fluid shifting nature of women's position within that discourse. However, their positioning and location in the discourse that they were primarily and commonly oppressed as black people was a discourse around which there was very little challenge and contradiction. Certain discourses, as mentioned and discussed earlier, blamed apartheid for the existence of lesbians (for example, the government casting a 'spell' on the community and the government providing mothers with dangerous contraceptives), one wonders how this discourse will shift in post-apartheid South Africa under a democratically-elected government.

CONCLUSION

The discourses which have been analysed are exceptionally multifarious and rich in discursive and explanatory themes. It is certain that a closer and more exhaustive analysis would have produced more as well as different information than that presented in this chapter.

Taking into account time and space constraints as well as the fact that I recognise that different 'things' could have been done with the data (Mama, 1995) as well as the fact that any body of texts is never complete (Thompson, 1984), the contents of the present chapter will have to suffice.

An important point that needs to be reiterated is that despite the participants' replication of certain aspects of dominant discourses, their discourses are also a site of struggle. They challenge, censor and contradict dominant discourse. Another point to be made is that the participants at times positioned themselves within Western dominant discourse and at other times actively challenged the Western discourse from within the parameters of an African discourse.

Finally, a lot was said but at the same time there are areas which have not been spoken about or were raised very tentatively and not given much space for discussion. Certain of these silences I have referred to in the present chapter. In the concluding chapter I also briefly draw attention to the issue.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In keeping with the tradition of academic dissertations, I should at this point provide an exhaustive summary and overview of everything that went before, draw final conclusions and then make suggestions for future research which would benefit a certain grouping in society (black lesbians in this case).

However, I want divert from this tradition and take a similar route to the one embarked upon by Mama (1995, p. 159) regarding her research. She provided a brief summary of the theoretical context of her research, a brief summary of the findings, and then provided suggestions on the practical applications of the findings. Although some clear directions emerged in the analysis of the participants' discourse, I do not see the study as having ended:

How does one end the beginning of something?... at the very heart of the approach advocated here is a feeling of perpetual change and movement....this in itself makes the idea of closure somewhat inappropriate. This is not a neat story ending with all capillaries cauterised and stitched with surgical precision, but one which makes a small opening through which, it is hoped many new ideas and arguments may flow (Mama, 1995, p. 159).

In keeping with the qualitative tradition of accountability to participants, I recently canvassed their opinions on what I should do with the findings of the research. The

recommendations I make regarding future research include the practical application of the present findings thus includes the suggestions of participants.

The following section is a brief thematic review of the theoretical paradigm within which the research was located and I attempt to summarise how in keeping with paradigm the research was conducted and reported on. This step is in keeping with the process of reflection that has been referred to at various points in the dissertation.

The findings of the research have been discussed in detail in the previous chapter. In this chapter I refer briefly to the findings but also focus on the silences – what was not said. This is then followed by a discussion on the application of the present research and suggestions for future research.

THE THEORETICAL PARADIGM AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

This thesis is located within a feminist social constructionist paradigm. A central argument to this thesis and flowing from the theoretical paradigm in which it is based is that a lesbian 'identity' is socially constituted and historically determined. The argument that was put forward was that the term 'lesbian' as noun or identity is a recent invention, that historically same-gender interaction was not linked to an identity and that we cannot make generalisations based on experience in Western society to lesbianism in, for example, an African context. Working within this paradigm, categories which are taken for granted like sexuality, sexual orientation and others have been questioned. The position was taken that these 'entities' or 'behaviours' are shown to be dependent on

culture, historical context or totally non-existent (Gergen, 1985; Weeks, 1986).

What did research within this paradigm involve?

The research enterprise within this social constructionist paradigm involved five tasks or phases as suggested by Kitzinger (1987) but also drawing on the suggestions of Burr (1995), Gergen, (1985), Maynard (1994), Smaling (1992) and others.

The first is the deconstruction of the ideological context of research in the area. This process was initiated primarily in Chapters two and three.

The second is the deconstruction of the 'mystique surrounding social science itself' (Kitzinger, 1987, p. 188). This was conducted throughout the thesis but it was specifically addressed mainly in Chapter two.

Thirdly, a social constructionist approach will recognise that there is no absolute or objective truth, that one's argument is an account, a construction, a version (Burr, 1995; Kitzinger, 1987). This was recognised throughout the collection of data phase as well in the analysis of results.

Fourthly, social constructionists offer alternative interpretations to 'phenomena' while recognising that their interpretations are open to re-interpretation (Burr, 1995; Thompson, 1990). This was recognised throughout the thesis.

Finally Kitzinger, 1987, p. 191 suggests that social constructionists will engage 'in overt and explicit moral and political evaluation of the alternative constructions. This would include making research results available to a range of constituencies and the willingness to be 'prepared to reassess our own ideological perspective'' (Kitzinger, 1987, p. 191).

In keeping with the feminist paradigm of the research, the following points made by a range of researchers (Burr, 1995; Code, 1991; Du Bois, 1983; Mies, 1983) and summed up by (Kitzinger, 1987, p. 184) were endorsed throughout the research endeavour:

Knowledge is socially constructed, and thus dependent on a given social, cultural and historical context, the exploration of women's knowledge must be grounded in the specific contexts in which such knowledge is generated; the existence of multiple and often inconsistent or contradictory perspectives is also acknowledged... feminist researchers include, as central, an analysis of power in determining the form and representation of social knowledge, either in relation to women's position in society, or in considering the role of the researcher in her/his research.

The key questions which the dissertation asked as well as the way these were asked were thus influenced by the theoretical context of the research.

Comments on what was said and what was not said

One of the key questions was to explore to what extent black lesbians conform to and construct their experiences within the dominant discourses of female homosexuality. As

the results indicated, the women's discourses both replicated as well as challenged dominant discourses. However their discourses around motherhood, for example, were framed within a discourse of the normal, everyday, regular woman.

Throughout the discourses which emerged, participants had a vested interest in portraying themselves as regular women. This in a sense located them within 'the community' and served as a protection against outsider status.

The sexuality and gender discourse positioned participants as contradicting the dominant heterosexual discourse that a man is a necessary 'entity'. A prominent discourse was that men are needed for women to produce children. They thus conformed to the dominant cultural discourse of biological mothering but, within this discourse, challenged the role of men. Although throughout the findings there was an absence of a radical feminist discourse this did not prevent alternative discourses like the 'just use men for pregnancy' discourse from emerging.

Although the argument was made that men should just be used, participants were particularly accommodating to men. A discourse that was censored when raised was the one that positioned men as 'the problem'. In their attempt to be constructed as 'normal', 'real' women they projected themselves as not being antagonistic to men.

There was a relative silence around the abuses committed by men and, when this was raised, men's actions were often justified as being a consequence of apartheid. In attempting to 'close ranks' and not portray black men and heterosexual women as

'problematic', they were once again protecting their insider status within the black community.

The sexuality and gender discourse was relatively silent on an issue like lesbian dating (courtship) for example. Rose, Zand & Cini (1993, p. 70) state that this is an issue which has of late 'captured the popular imagination of lesbians'. However, the participants seldom discussed issues such as how they met partners, the 'dating' rituals as well as what could be termed 'cultural lesbian courtship rituals'. A participant who did raise the issue also provided insight as to why it was not an issue that was central to their talk.

I was just wondering how do we meet each other and then how do we go about 'bowling' each other? (C)

What do you mean, like how do we go and chat each other up and tell each other that we want a date – you mean like men do to womert, flirting and that stuff? (C)

You know I asked the question but I think maybe it is a bit private. We do not tell everything, maybe we need to think up in future some guidelines like boys learn in the culture – then we know, we are taught and do not need to talk about these sex type of things. (C)

In certain African communities cultural traditions and customs are often passed on through ritual and not through talk at the individual level. The 'mummy-baby ritual' (Gay, 1995) for example, is a way of imparting information around issues of sexuality.

Thus the silence on dating ritual and the argument that it is private or that the culture of participants should provide guidelines should be seen within the context of African custom.

A minor discourse and one that was almost invisible was the one around Aids. A position emerged that participants could not get Aids as they did 'not sleep all the time with men that did not want to use condoms' – only when they 'needed a baby'. What they did not discuss was whether the men that 'gave them babies' used condoms. The perception seemed to exist that only with regular sex could you be infected with the Aids virus. This was a worrying position as participants failed to comprehend that they might be infected with the Aids virus – this was the one time that they placed themselves as 'other', not regular women in relation to the heterosexual community. The discourse which emerged was 'because we are different we are protected against the Aids virus'.

Regarding relationships in post-apartheid South Africa, a discourse that predicted difficulties for lesbians did not surface. The discourse that as black people they will no longer be discriminated against and oppressed was prominent and this was automatically extended to 'black lesbian people'. The issue that gay and lesbian rights were not part of the agendas of political organisations was not seen as a problem, and no mention was made of leaders from prominent political parties who had publicly voiced an anti-gay sentiment.

One has, however, to take cognisance of the fact that all the data was collected shortly before the 1994 election and many of the participants were actively involved in

campaigning for the African National Congress. Uppermost in these women's minds was securing the rights of black people. This could be a possible reason why the issue of lesbian rights was not a prominent topic in the focus groups.

In addition, a large number of the participants were not 'out' as lesbians and securing rights publicly as part of a lesbian constituency was not part of their immediate agenda.

It would be interesting to conduct research among participants who are presently 'out' as lesbians to find out whether their expectations of the present government's attitudes towards homosexuality have been met.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF ALL OF THIS

An important phase in the research process is that of practical application. Potter and Wetherell, 1987 suggest that the findings of discourse analysis be publicised as widely as possible. They argue that the process starts with those whose discourses have been analysed – in this instance, black lesbians.

Chesler (1976) and Duncan (1993) argue that publicising the findings of discourse analytical research meets the criterion of being accountable to the participants. They further argue that this step is critical when marginalised and oppressed groupings are involved.

As Duncan, drawing on the sentiment expressed by Alexander (1985), further argues 'it is high time that those in whose interest social scientists in South Africa frequently purport to do research, are given due recognition as equal partners in the research process' (Duncan, 1993, p. 331).

I thus recently decided to canvass the opinions of accessible participants about the practical application of the research. At the same time, I asked them if they were comfortable with the title that I wanted to give the dissertation. With hindsight I recognise that I should have spoken about these issues during the interviews and focus groups.

The following are a list of suggestions offered by the participants I spoke to: (I quote verbatim)

- * Take the findings to the government and let them see that there are many of us (but not our names).
- * Write a book that tells people about us, an easy book.
- * Write a play about black lesbians and put it on in the community and for schools so that people get educated.
- * Do workshops – like the racism workshops which many people know about
- * Talk on TV about what you have found, from our talks.
- * Make a film on black women who love other women.

The researcher intends taking up the suggestions made by the women and whatever is practically possible will be implemented. The intention would be to involve as many of

the participants as possible as well as lesbian organisations and other interested parties.

POSSIBLE FUTURE RESEARCH

Given the paucity of research in this area, a lot could be suggested in terms of future research. One possibility is exploring the discourse of black lesbians in relation to the present government. It would also be interesting to find out how black lesbians construct their identity in post-apartheid South Africa, especially given the discourse which emerged blaming apartheid for lesbianism. The shifts in their discourse as citizens of a post-apartheid South Africa in relation to black men (who now have rights) would be interesting to track. Given that no South African study on the discourses of black people towards homosexuality exists, this is a project which should be urgently undertaken.

Finally I would urge that academic institutions and individuals at institutions begin to address the issue of gay and lesbian rights with the same kind of vigour and enthusiasm that has been accorded to issues relating to racism and sexism. Hopefully, just as the racism and sexism of curricula and policies have been addressed and redressed, similar attention will be given to the dominance of heterosexism within curricula and university policy.

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APPENDIX ONE

Interview guideline

- 1) What do you understand by the term 'lesbian'?
- 2) Do you use the word to describe yourself?
- 3) If not, what word do you use, if any?
- 4) Do people 'know' that you are lesbian?
- 5) Who knows? Family, friends? Have you told them?
- 6) How did you first 'find out' about lesbianism?
- 7) How did you meet your first partner?
- 8) Have you had a sexual relationship with a man?
- 9) If 'yes', tell me about it.
- 10) Do you think that it is necessary to tell people that you are lesbian?
- 11) Are you open about being a lesbian?
- 12) If no, why not?
- 13) If 'yes' to who?
- 14) What would or has your family's reaction been?
- 15) Do you take on a particular gender role in your relationship?
- 16) Tell me about it.
- 17) How do you relate to men?
- 18) Have you chosen to be lesbian?
- 19) If not, would it be a choice for you?
- 20) Has lesbianism been a conscious choice and why? or did it just happen?

- 21) How would you say you 'came to be a lesbian'. Through friends, feminism, etc?
- 22) Is being a lesbian an important thing for you?
- 23) How do you feel about gay black men? Straight black men? Men in general?
- 24) How do you feel about heterosexual women?
- 25) Do you have close relationships with them?
- 26) Do you think you can be sure you are a lesbian if you have slept with a man?
- 27) Do you find any difficulty with coming to terms with being lesbian?
- 28) Would a lesbian ever stop being lesbian?
- 29) Do you have children?
- 30) If not, would you like to have children?
- 31) Tell me how you fell pregnant?
- 32) Do you think that being a white lesbian is different to being a black lesbian? If 'yes' or 'no', why?
- 33) Who do you socialise with? For example, other lesbians, men etc?
- 34) Would you feel more comfortable with a black heterosexual woman or a white lesbian? Why?
- 35) Tell me about your religion and being lesbian.
- 36) Tell me about the place where you work - do they know you are lesbian?
- 37) If yes, tell me about their reaction.
- 38) Tell me about your social activities.
- 39) Do you belong to a gay and lesbian organisation?
- 40) Has it been a positive experience. Why?
- 41) If not, why?

- 42) Have you attended any of the public events that have been organised for example, the Gay Pride march? If not, why not?
- 43) How do people in your community react when they know that your are lesbian?
- 44) Do you feel close to (a kind of sisterhood) with lesbians both black and white? Tell me about it.
- 44) Do you feel close to (a kind of sisterhood) with straight women (heterosexual women)?
- 45) How has Aids affected you as a lesbian?
- 46) When you meet women do you wonder whether they are lesbian? Is there any way of knowing?
- 47) Do you feel uncomfortable with being a lesbian in terms of culture and traditions?
- 48) Is there anything else you would like to talk about in relation to being a lesbian?

APPENDIX TWO

Vignettes in English

Vignette:A (Accompanied by a black and white photograph of two black women)

Twenty-seven year old Francis and 35 year old Zodwa live in Guguletu on the outskirts of Cape Town. They have been a couple for the past 18 months. They live in a room in Zodwa's parents house. Francis is a nurse and Zodwa works as a cashier at a supermarket in the city. Francis has two children who both live with them. Neither Francis nor Zodwa have told their families that they are lesbian.

Talk about the lives which Zodwa and Francis lead.

Issues which you could talk about are:

- * What would their family's reaction be should they tell them about their relationship with each other?
- * What would the reaction of the community be?
- * Do you think that having children poses difficulties in terms of being lesbian?
- * Do you think they have close relationships with men in the community?
- * Who would you say are their friends?
- * When they have problems who do you think they would talk to?
- * Talk about their relationship in terms of household tasks.
- * How would you imagine they have worked out the division of labour in the house?

- * What problems do you think they might have?
- * Looking at the picture, talk about anything which you think is important to them and affects them in their lives.

Vignette B: (Accompanied by a black and white photograph of a woman and her family – mother, father, sister and male cousin).

Maria, the woman on the left hand side of the picture, is 37 years old. They moved to Cape Town from the Transkei about a year ago and the family rent a house in Montana. Maria is lesbian and has been seeing Lucy (aged 40) who lives in Milnerton for the past eight months. They met at work. They work in the same building in town. Maria is a telephonist for a small company and Lucy works as a secretary. Prior to meeting Lucy Maria had a relationship with a woman in Mitchells Plain. Lucy is a member of a gay and lesbian organisation in Cape Town. Maria has gone with her to a few meetings. Recently Maria told her mother about her relationship with Lucy. All Lucy's friends and family know that she is lesbian. Maria has not met Lucy's family as Lucy says they are not ready to accept that she has a black partner. Neither Lucy nor Maria have children.

- * What do you think the reaction of Maria's mother was when she told her she was lesbian?
- * What do you think about Lucy and Maria's relationship?
- * What problems do they have?
- * Do you think that it is a good thing that Maria spoke to her mother about being lesbian?

- * If her mother told her father what do you think his reaction would be?
- * Who do you think Maria would talk to should she have problems?
- * Who do you think are Maria's friends?
- * Looking at the picture talk about anything that you think is important to Maria and that affects her life.

Note: for the group facilitated in the Transkei the names of familiar townships and areas were used. Instead of having moved to Cape Town, the family in the second vignette had recently moved to the Transkei.

APPENDIX THREE

Biographical data questionnaire in English

PLEASE BE SO KIND AS TO FILL IN THIS FORM. ALL INFORMATION WILL BE TREATED AS STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL. YOU DO NOT NEED TO PROVIDE YOUR NAME. PLEASE ASK FOR ASSISTANCE SHOULD ANYTHING NOT BE CLEAR TO YOU. SHOULD YOU WISH US TO FILL OUT THE FORM WITH YOUR ASSISTANCE, PLEASE INDICATE THIS TO US. THANK YOU.

- 1) How old are you?.....
- 2) How many children do you have.....
- 3) Do you have a regular partner?
- 4) For how long has she been your partner?
- 5) What is the highest standard you have passed at school?
- 6) Have you studied or are you studying at a tertiary institution?
- 7) Have you ever been involved with a man?

- 8) Where were you born?
- 9) Where do you live permanently?
- 10) Are you employed?
- 11) If 'yes', what is your present job?
- 12) If 'no', where did you work previously?
- 13) If you are a student where are you studying?
- 14) What year are you doing and what are you studying?
- 15) Do you live with:
- a) family.....
 - b) partner.....
 - c) on your own.....
 - d) friends.....
 - e) other
- 16) What is your home language:
- English.....
 - Xhosa....

Zulu....

Sotho.....

Afrikaans....

APPENDIX FOUR

Coding conventions

- new paragraph for each quotation
- new line for new speaker
- numbers 1-9 to identify individual interviews (Table 1).
- letters (A) - (J) to identify the ten focus groups (Table 2).
- three dots...for omitted talk.
- question mark (?) for inaudible talk.
- AR – assistant researcher
- R or Cheryl – principal researcher
- = for overlapping talk
- * for talk in the background, for example, when a point is supported collectively by the group.

APPENDIX FIVE

Explanation of terms

BLACK: This includes all persons who were disenfranchised under the apartheid government.

AFRICAN AND COLOURED: these were categories of black people that were created by the apartheid regime. I do not condone the racial categorisation of Black people in South Africa into various groups. However, the use of racial terminology reflects the fact that these politically constructed differences cannot be ignored in a critical analysis of the South African society.

MOFFIE: term used (initially derogatorily) to refer to a gay male.

SANGOMA: Traditional Healer

SQUATTER CAMP: Informal Housing Settlements