

Purple Poppies in/and Fields of Green:
Young Lesbians Speak Out

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*She can never consent to creep
When she feels an impulse to soar
Helen Keller*

In dedication and love to
my friend, partner, and soul mate,
Beth

Abstract

Non-heterosexually identified young people, particularly those with a lesbian identity, have always experienced a marginalised position within Australian culture (Burnett, 1997; Gamson, 2000; Signorile, 1995; Thonneman, 1999). There is very little empirical research available which explores the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender lives (Brown, 1995; Burnett, 1997; Gamson, 2000). Hence myths, stereotypes, invisibility, lack of understanding and marginalisation of non-heterosexual identified people continue to be perpetuated in mainstream Australian society (Baird, 2005; Burnett, 1997; MacBride-Steward, 2004).

The anthropological study presented in this dissertation was designed to explore and theorise the *lived* experiences of young lesbians *post-initial coming-out* within an Australian context using Memory Work methodology (Haug, 1987). The first goal of this project was to describe and provide details of the under researched and misunderstood lives of young lesbians between the ages of 23 and 33 years of age who had identified as lesbian for between two and ten years; what is termed here as *post-initial coming-out*.

The second goal of the study was to gain insight into how young lesbians, *post-initial coming-out*, make sense of their lives, selves and identities, and positioning within society given the negative myths and stereotypes which currently exist within the general population in relation to people with non-heterosexual identities. The literature and data presented throughout the dissertation highlight the issues of invisibility, marginalisation, and homophobia experienced by each of the participants within a predominately heterosexual society. They also emphasised the inner strength and resilience developed by each of the participants in the face of adversity as they attempted to construct and make sense of their self narrative and positioning as defined by themselves and the positioning and identity imposed upon them by significant others. The data have been organised into four main focus areas; negotiating the family, work, heterosexual and lesbian landscapes.

Lastly, the study sought to further develop and refine the Memory Work methodology (Haug, 1987), particularly as it pertains to a doctoral research program. This study has

been able, via the use of Memory Work methodology, to provide richly descriptive and in-depth snap-shots of the lives of young lesbians *post-initial coming-out* in an Australian context which represents a unique contribution to the research literature. The study concludes with reflections on the methodology as it pertains to a doctoral research program and recommendations for further research which have developed as a result of this investigation.

The five participants in this study were strong, independent, brave young wimmin searching for acceptance and an understanding of their *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identities in an Australian context. While there were only a small number of participants, their memories and experiences yield rich new insights into the everyday lives and experiences of young lesbians.

Key Words

Lesbian, *Post-initial coming-out*, Memory Work, Identity, Australian lesbian communities

Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award of this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature:

Date:

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Chapter One

Introduction

Freedom grows in the cracks. People create options, choices, alternatives
for themselves

McGregor, 1980, 313.

Young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people have traditionally experienced a *marginalised* position within our Australian culture (Allgeier & Allgeier, 2000; Brown, 1995; Burnett, 1997; 1998; Gamson, 2000; Jennings 1994; Kissen, 1993; Pitts, Smith, Mitchell, & Patel, 2006; Savin-Williams, 1995; Signorile, 1995; Thonneman, 1999). Negative media coverage, for example, where lesbians are likened to vampires, and poor understanding within the medical, specifically psychiatric, profession until the late 1970s/early 1980s have not helped to minimise the stigma or break down the stereotypes attached to homosexuality. The myths, invisibility and lack of information surrounding lesbianism can be linked to the patriarchal society within which we exist where wimmin's¹ needs and issues are, in general, marginalised. Those who deviate from the hegemonic heterosexual norm experience even greater discrimination (Baird, 2005).

There is a relative paucity of empirical research about all aspects of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender lives (Bensimon, 1992; Brown, 1995; Gamson, 2000). The struggles and experiences of people within and beyond these communities are under researched in general, particularly within sites of educational institutions, where identity and sexuality are constructed during the formative years of early childhood and adolescence (Beckett, Bode, Clark, Cox, Crewe, Hastings, Herbert, Martino, McLean, Page, & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1997; Bickmore, 1999; Denborough, 1996; Epstein, 2000; Ferfolja & Robinson, 2004; Martino, 1997a; 1997b; 1999; 2000; Mills, 2004; Pallotta-

¹ I have chosen to, except where direct quotes are concerned, to use the alternative spelling of women/woman (wimmin/wommin) as a means of self empowerment and as a political stance against the patriarchy which we as wimmin face on a daily basis. The alternate spelling of wimmin is accepted in this literature (see for example, Kitzynger, 1989; 1996b; Kitzynger & Wilkinson, 1995).

Chiarolli, 1995; 1998; 2000; Rogers, 1994). While this study is not situated within a school or educational institute per se, the findings do have implications within these contexts as issues surrounding non-heterosexual identities currently are rarely addressed or considered within these sites. Further, research which has been conducted in the two areas of human development and lesbian and gay studies have focused primarily on gay identified males and is embedded in a North American context (Brown, 1995; Lawless, Kippax, & Crawford, 1996). As a result, the call articulated here for Australian lesbian-centred research is both timely and significant (Brown, 1995; Elliott, 1985; Gale & Short, 1995; Jordan, Vaughan, & Woodworth, 1997; Lawless, Kippax, & Crawford, 1996).

This anthropological study focuses on young lesbian wimmin in an Australian context and their *post-initial coming-out*² experiences using Memory Work (Haug, 1987) methodology as a means to explore a marginalised group whose experiences and positioning³ within an Australian culture, to date, has been under explored and under theorised.

The main purpose of this study was

To explore and provide snap shots of the *lived*⁴ experiences of young lesbian wimmin's *post-initial coming-out* within an Australian culture.

An central component of the study involved four research questions. These were developed as a means of integrating and organising the literature and data. The four questions were,

² The term *post-initial coming-out* has been developed to delineate the period of time between two and ten years after initially *coming-out* as lesbian.

³ The term *positioning* in this study is linked to specific social science literature and traditions and highlights how people seek group belonging and acceptance by the way in which they define and align themselves with specific sub-categories of people (See for example, Chiseri-Strater & Sunstein, 1997; Forsythe & Lander, 2003)

⁴ I have chosen to italicise particular words of significance throughout this document as a means of drawing the readers' attention to noteworthy issues, concepts, or contradictions which are important for this study. For the purpose of this research, the word *lived* is italicized to emphasise and value the multi-dimensional nature of every day experience for this particular cohort of young wimmin.

- ❖ How do young lesbians deal with, and (re)construct their relationships with family and friends *post-initial coming-out* (Brown, 1995; Elliott, 1985; Signorile, 1995)⁵?
- ❖ How does being a young lesbian shape career development and choices (Botkin & Daly, 1987; Campbell & Morrow, 1995; Chung, 1995; Fassinger, 1993; 1995; Hetherington, 1991; Morgan & Brown, 1991; Morrow, 1997; Morrow & Campbell, 1997; Morrow, Gore, & Campbell, 1996)?
- ❖ What are the *post-initial coming-out* experiences and tensions for young lesbians in the heterosexual and lesbian landscapes [for instance, negotiating anxiety, discrimination, stereotypes and societal expectations (Anderson, 1995; Burnett, 1998), understanding and navigating positioning as an *outsider* (Banks, 1998; Goffman, 1959); negotiating unwritten rules within sub-cultures (Barry, 2003; Burnett, 1997), and positioning and repositioning self within society (Brown, 1995; Burnett, 1998; Patterson, 1995)]? and
- ❖ How do young *post-initial coming-out* lesbians negotiate the lesbian landscape and their lesbian selves?

1.1. Why it is Important to Study the *Lived* Experiences of Young Lesbian Wimmin *Post-Initial Coming-Out*?

Living as a lesbian in a society predicated on heterosexual privilege presents many challenges in every aspect of daily life

Brownworth and Raffo, 1999, xi.

Prior studies as well as popular literature involving young lesbians, while important, have often failed to provide rich descriptions of the *lived* experiences and perceptions of this cohort of wimmin. They have tended to focus on the initial stages of coming to terms with a lesbian sexual orientation (for example, Cass, 1979; 1984a; 1992) and/or patterns of substance abuse and suicidal ideology (Garofalo, Wolf, Kessel, Palfrey, & DuRant, 1998; Garofalo, Wolf, Wissow, Woods, & Goodman, 1999; Hammelman, 1993; Hershberger, Pilkington, & D'Augelli, 1997; Hillier, Dempsey, Harrison, Beale, Matthews, & Rosenthal, 1998; Nicholas & Howard, 1998; Remafeldi, French, Story, Resnick, & Blum, 1998). The research on suicide is important to mention here because it highlights how there has been very little focus on young lesbians' experiences and secondly, it demonstrates the high risk of suicide ideation for non-heterosexually identified, or

⁵ The inclusion of references with each of the four research questions is a means of highlighting research which has been conducted with lesbians, but not *post-initial coming-out* young lesbians, and/or areas which have been identified by research as needing further study.

questioning, young people because of society's lack of understanding about their sexual orientation. In many of the studies which have focused on suicide, the term suicide ideation refers to the thought processes associated with non-attempted, unsuccessful attempts and *successful* attempts of suicide (Garofalo, Wolf, Wissow, Woods, & Goodman, 1999; Hammelman, 1993; Hershberger, Pilkington, & D'Augelli, 1997; Hillier, Dempsey, Harrison, Beale, Matthews, & Rosenthal, 1998; Remafeldi, French, Story, Resnick, & Blum, 1998). Many of these studies have shown that while there are higher percentages of young males, particularly in rural areas, who are successful in their attempts of suicide, the number of unsuccessful attempts appear to be much higher for females.

One suggestion to explain this disparity between attempted and successful suicide is that the difference in method choice between the two groups is pivotal in the difference in rates between successful and attempted suicide attempts; that is, males tend to choose guns or cars while females tend to choose to overdose with readily available over the counter pain medications or engage in other forms of self harm such as cutting or burning (Dyson, Mitchell, Smith, Dowsett, Pitts, & Hillier, 2003). Furthermore, "research in Australia has identified that same-sex attracted young people may be up to six times more likely to attempt suicide than the population in general" (Dyson, Mitchell, Smith, Dowsett, Pitts, & Hillier, 2003, 11). Further, statistics (for example, Wesley Mission Strategic Planning and Development Department and Life Force Suicide Prevention Program, 2000; Western Australian Department for Community Development and Youth Affairs, 2001) suggest that suicide is a leading cause of death for young Australians aged between fifteen and 24 years of age. There is also a suggestion that the number of suicides which are related to an individual questioning their sexual orientation that suicide is seen as a means of ensuring nobody ever finds out about their identity (Blumenfeld & Lindop, 1998). A recent Australian study (Nicholas & Howard, 2001) found the rate of suicidal behaviours⁶ for same sex attracted youth was between 6.2 and 50%. Further, subjects in the Nicholas and Howard study who were confused or undecided about their sexual orientation were found to have the highest rates of deliberate self harm. These excessively high rates can be linked back to the negative

⁶ Suicidal behaviours for same sex attracted youth are defined in the literature as engaging in unchallenged thoughts of suicide (suicidal ideation), engaging in substance abuse and/or sexually risky behaviours (for example, unprotected sexual intercourse).

attitudes held in Australian society towards non-heterosexual identities, particularly in non urban settings. While suicide ideation was not one of the themes specifically raised in the data collection process of this doctoral study it is relevant, firstly, because of the growing body of literature in the area and secondly, as a means of illustrating the impact of rejection and stigmatisation of non-heterosexuals, particularly with respect to young people, by wider society.

On investigation it can be illustrated that much of the literature and research concerning sexual orientation and identity development has been based on, or is biased towards, gay males (Fassinger, 1993; Jordan, Vaughan, & Woodworth, 1997; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995; Schnelder, 1989). Further, it is evident that society views lesbianism in terms of a pseudo-heterosexual image (Brown, 1995; Gale & Short, 1995; Hammelman, 1993; Lawless, Kippax, & Crawford, 1996; MacNeil, 1993; Rosen, 1992) which means that “lesbian relationships, as well as lesbian sexuality, have been interpreted in terms of traditional assumptions about heterosexual relationships” (Richardson, 1981, 113). That is, the assumption that a same sex female couple, or same sex male couples for that matter, must adopt a heterosexual equivalent of a male and a female role within their relationship (Allgeier & Allgeier, 2000). Research by Brown (1995), Burnett (1998), and Kitzinger (1996b), have found that this assumption remains largely unchallenged by the wider community. While this remains unchallenged, the way in which lesbianism is portrayed and stereotyped in society will continue to impact upon the way in which lesbians identify as wimmin, influencing their schooling experiences, the occupations they choose and their relationships with and acceptance by their families and friends (Beckett, Bode, Clark, Cox, Crewe, Hastings, Herbert, Martino, McLean, Page, & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1997; Burnett, 1998; Kitzinger, 1989; 1996a; 1996b; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1995; 1997; 1998; 2000; Perkins, 1996).

While it is desirable for young lesbian wimmin to have positive role models and access to information about sexual identity at all stages of their life, it is especially important when they are *post-initial coming-out* as this is a time when they can experience high levels of anxiety. Relationships with family and friends have had the potential to change significantly, career and job direction may have undergone re-evaluation and there could be physical health issues to address in terms of negotiating safe sex options. Therefore, it is important that this anthropological study explore the way in which young lesbians

negotiate their positioning and existence in society. This can be accomplished through an examination of how this positioning affects their personal growth (Gonsiorek, 1993; Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1995; Perkins, 1996; Richardson, 1981; Signorile, 1995), access to career options (Campbell & Morrow, 1995; Chung, 1995; Fassinger, 1993; 1995; Morrow, 1997; Morrow & Campbell, 1997; Morrow, Gore, & Campbell, 1996) and intimate relationships (Hollway, 1989; Kitzinger, 1996b).

Despite invisibility at all levels and in all aspects of their lives, lesbians do exist and are productive members of society. Therefore, it is essential that research is inclusive of, and respectful towards, lesbians. A study which investigates the experiences of young lesbian wimmin personally, socially and culturally is both timely and significant.

1.2. What Aspects of Lesbian Lives Am I Investigating?

This study investigates the *lived* experiences (Denzin, 1988; Glesne & Pershkin, 1992; Hoskins, 2000; Lather, 1991; Stephenson, 2005) of young lesbian identified wimmin *post-initial coming-out* within an urban setting on the east coast of Australia during the late 1990s and early 2000. The term, *post-initial coming-out*, has been developed specifically for the purposes of this study and delineates a time period of between two and ten years since initially *coming-out*. The first two years which follow the initial *coming-out* process have been shown to have unique qualities which are not necessarily indicative of experiences after this time frame (Burnett, 1997; Savin-Williams, 1995). There has been limited research examining the experiences of middle age (for example, Baruch & Brooks-Gunn, 1984; Fertitta, 1984; Hann, 1989; Hunter & Sundel, 1989; 1994; Mitchell & Helson, 1990; Sang, 1991) and mature lesbians (for example, Auger, 1992; Deevey, 1990; Dunker, 1987; Martin & Lyon, 1992; Raphael & Robinson, 1984; Reid, 1995), and only slightly more which examines the process of *coming-out* (for example, Cass, 1979; 1984a; 1992; Elliott, 1985; Patterson, 1995), however, there is nothing which articulates the experiences and issues of young lesbians between *coming-out* and middle age. All of the five wimmin involved in this research project self identify as lesbian and had *come-out* in varying degrees to family and friends. They were all within a two to ten year time frame from when they initially *came-out*. As a group they examined how

experiences and expectations of, and with, others shaped their identity, or images of self, and positioning⁷, within an Australian culture.

The italicised use of the term *lived experience* in the research focus question is significant because it emphasizes that “experience is not just cognitive, but also includes emotions. [It recognises] that every human situation is novel, emergent, and filled with multiple, often conflicting meanings and interpretations” (Denzin, 1988, 18). It is a term which is currently being used by many researchers (for example, Bakare-Yusuf, 1999; Davies, 2000; Glesne & Pershkin, 1992; Grosz, 1995; Hoskins, 2000; Lather, 1991; Marshall, 1999; McWilliam, 1999; Somerville, 2004; van Manen, 1990) to emphasise and value the multi-dimensional nature of every day experience. It is the aim of this study to explore how young lesbians make sense of their experiences and their positioning in light of conflicting meanings and interpretations.

It is imperative for this study to limit itself to examining the *lived* experiences of young lesbians within, and from, an Australian culture only in order to provide a focused and thorough study. This has been a deliberate decision to meet the requirements of a doctoral dissertation whereby a good study is focused and specific in its aim and purpose (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). It has been acknowledged (de la Peña, 1994; Hunter, Shannon, Knox, & Martin, 1998; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1996; Quintanales, 1999; Sears, 1995; Tremble, Schneider, & Appathurai, 1989) that while the experiences of lesbians from non-Western cultures can be partially similar to those of Western lesbians, there are many additional factors and issues which impact upon their identity formation. For instance, there are strong cultural, religious and family traditions and expectations which can influence a non-Western wommin’s decision to marry and have children, regardless of her non-heterosexual orientation, in a desire to *honour* and *save face* for the family. Cultural and religious traditions can also be influential in a family’s perceived *right* to sell wimmin into marriage (Hunter, Shannon, Knox, & Martin, 1998; Tremble, Schneider, & Appathurai, 1989). To provide a relatively consistent cultural focus, all of

⁷ The term, positioning, is used in this study to highlight the multiplicity of placement, mentally, culturally, politically and physically, by self and significant others in a variety of contexts (Ghorashi, 2005). Researchers (for example, Crowhurst, 2001; Davies, 1994; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1996) also the alternate term *multiple subject positions* to describe the notion and process of placement.

the participants for this study were naturalised Australian citizens and lived in Australia at the time of the study.

1.3. Languages within Languages and Cultures within Cultures

Language has the power to bracket our everyday understandings of our lifeworlds

Sears, 1999, xiii.

As with any non-mainstream group within our society there is the development, or construction, of language or codes which hold particular meaning, importance, and relevance to members of the sub-culture or community (Banks, 1998). This is also the case with members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. It is important to note that even under the umbrella of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender unity/community there are sub-cultures and groups within sub-cultures, each with their own language and codes. “Although lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons experience common bonds, they are heterogeneous and culturally diverse. They represent social groups that differ in such factors as gender, socio-economic class, race, ethnicity, region, religion, age, cohort, parenthood, types of jobs and careers, marital history, current relationship status, educational attainment, being *out* or not, types of support groups, and other ways of life” (Hunter, Shannon, Knox, & Martin, 1998, 18). Often the language which bonds, or helps to create unity within this community is inaccessible to *outsiders*. Thus, of necessity, it is vital to introduce and explore some of the terms which are pertinent to the lesbian landscapes explored in this study.

For example, Western culture views lesbians in terms of pseudo-heterosexual images and as a consequence lesbian relationships are often viewed or evaluated in terms of traditional heterosexual relationships, that is, roles of butch (socially determined masculine behaviour) and femme (socially determined feminine behaviour) (Loulan, 1995). While these *roles* were popular in American lesbian culture of the 1950s and 1960s because of heteronormative standards or expectations, lesbians do not necessarily confine, limit or conform to such roles as norms in contemporary Western societies. Part of the aim of this study is to examine the way/s in which young lesbians negotiate, challenge and create their position and roles in an Australian culture.

Labels are most effective when they are self determined, hence there are multiple and interchangeable terms, or labels, being used throughout this study. For instance, wimmin who are attracted to wimmin can refer to themselves as lesbian, gay, dyke, wimmin identified wimmin, queer or as someone who is same sex attracted or non-heterosexual in their orientation.

Essentially, lesbian, bisexual, gay, homosexual, transgender, and queer are all labels or terms which have been used to “capture sexual and gender identities [or] senses of self. [However,] Queer has been a more vexed, conflict-ridden and confusing term, both as an identity and disciplinary marker. Queer marks an identity that, defined as it is by a deviation from sex and gender norms either by the self inside or by specific behaviors, is always in flux” (Gamson, 2000, 349). Currently, the term queer is used to apply to both females and males who fall outside the label of heterosexual, or reject sexual labels altogether, and highlights the disparity between sex, gender and desire (Hunter, Shannon, Knox, & Martin, 1998; Jagose, 1996). It also has political links in its use of unsettling what has been understood in Western society as two polar extremes of identity; heterosexuality and homosexuality. Jagose (1996) describes the term queer as both “an umbrella term for a coalition of culturally marginal sexual self-identifications and at other times to describe a nascent theoretical model which has developed out of more traditional lesbian and gay studies” (1). Nonetheless, the sole use of the term queer, and subsequently queer theory, is problematic for this study, firstly because of the terms’ elastic nature and resultant inability to evoke or sustain a common or consistent meaning, and secondly, because it is most often used synonymously with gay males and subsequently tends to render lesbians as invisible. Thus, a number of terms which refer to a non-heterosexual identity, as utilised by the five participants, will be used throughout this document.

Other terms which will be used throughout this thesis include *homophobia* which is understood to mean the irrational fear of homosexuality. It is “an aversion to and prejudice and discrimination against lesbian, gay and bisexual people, the traits that characterize them, their sexual practices, lifestyles, and beliefs” (Bohan, 1996, xiv). Closely related to the concept of homophobia is the broader term *homonegativity* (Sears, 1999). Reflective of the pervasive, ubiquitous effects of constant (O)thering by the

dominant socio cultural context, the word homonegativity serves to bring to the forefront the constant challenges facing non-heterosexually identified individuals as they attempt to create a cohesive self narrative against overwhelming odds. *Coming-out* is described as “the sequence of events through which individuals come to recognize their sexual orientation and disclose it to others” (Bohan, 1996, xii). While the term, *post-initial coming-out*, has been coined for this study to refer to the period after initial disclosure to others and one’s self of a homosexual orientation (that is, within a two to ten year time frame from first *coming-out*). Chapter Two, the *Literature Review*, will explore the use, history and relevance of these terms as they relate to investigating the *lived* experiences of young lesbians *post-initial coming-out* in an Australian culture. Other terms which are significant to the study are explained the first time they appear in this document.

1.4. Methodology

This study uses Haug’s (1987) feminist methodology, Memory Work. This is a non-empirical method which examines the structures and relationships within which women live and the ways in which they understand and negotiate them. Memory work is “embedded in critical theory. It joins the subject and the object into a single focus of the research, and attempts a process of transformation via learning and social action” (Grbich, 1999, 185). This method is particularly pertinent to a study such as this which explores the *lived* experiences of young lesbian women *post-initial coming-out* within an Australian culture.

The Memory Work method is based on a social constructivist and feminist conceptual framework for research. This qualitative research approach is characterised by its ability to provide meaningful contexts whereby participants engage with past experiences (encoded as memories) in ways which connect them with current practice and provide direction and evaluation through strategic group reflection. This method also recognises that the memories recounted in the Memory Work sessions do not have to be factually true to be psychologically true of a person. It is argued that what is remembered is significant because it is troubling or unfinished in some way. What is remembered and what is forgotten tells us much about the person who is recounting the experience. While some (for example, Reinharz, 1992) argue that there is no one uniquely feminist methodology, it is acknowledged by many (for example, Grbich, 1999) that there are

specific methods or approaches which recognise and adhere to feminist research principles. These principles include recognising the “social constructedness of gender, an acceptance that women are oppressed”, development of an “emancipatory relationship between researcher and researched, an exposure of the researcher’s position, emotions and values”, and a “presentation of research results that address issues of power, honesty and ownership” (Grbich, 1999, 53).

Researchers like Cotterill (1992), Farrar (1994), and Koutrouslis (1993), argue that Memory Work is in fact a qualitative feminist research methodology in that it confronts, challenges and overcomes problems encountered by research which is *on* rather than *with* participants. This methodology is characterised by an “emphasis on telling rather than asking” (Small, 1999, 33). Further, Memory Work recognises the “commonality of experience” (Haug, 1987) by allowing participants to connect or engage with their past experiences. At the same time this method provides a context in which their previous actions and current practices are given direction and evaluation, through ongoing individual and collective reflections. The reflection process is a key component of data collection and analysis (Davies, 1990; Kippax, Crawford, Benton, & Gault, 1988). Hunter, Shannon, Knox, and Martin (1998) argue that “qualitative methods are most appropriate for exploring or expanding upon the unknown, describing social processes, and understanding subjective, personal and cultural experiences” (18), therefore the use of Memory Work methodology seemed appropriate and significant for this study.

1.5. Positioning of the Researcher

One of the aims of this study is to explore the way in which young lesbians negotiate their position and existence in society and how this positioning impacts upon their relationships (Anderson, 1995; Burnett, 1998), career options (Botkin & Daly, 1987; Campbell & Morrow, 1995; Chung, 1995; Fassinger, 1993; 1995; Hetherington, 1991; Morgan & Brown, 1991; Morrow, 1997; Morrow & Campbell, 1997; Morrow, Gore, & Campbell, 1996) and personal growth (Richardson, 1981; Signorile, 1995). Integral to this study is the way the researcher is positioned as both researcher and participant and the use of a research method which both honours and facilitates this positioning.

As a lesbian feminist researcher who is interested in working in participatory, emancipatory and collaborative ways (Grbich, 1999; Kitzinger, 1989; 1996a; 2004; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995; Stanley & Wise, 1990), particularly in the context of research which has traditionally generated knowledge whereby the research process has been intrusive and exploitative (Lather & Smithies, 1997), it is important to use a methodology which recognises the positioning of the researcher as both *insider* and *outsider* (Banks, 1998). This study moves away from androcentric research methods, particularly those scientific, psychological and medical studies which have sought to objectify and pathologise lesbians (See Crooks & Baur, 1999; Grahn, 1990; Kaiser, 1994 for critiques of these studies) or ignored their *lived* experiences altogether (See Elliott, 1985; Jordan, Vaughan, & Woodworth, 1997; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995 for critiques of these studies). Within this study, the researcher's experiences, practices, and processes are viewed as representative "of and not separable from" (Jordan & Yoemans, 1995, 394) the everyday experiences of young lesbians within an Australian culture. The researcher's experiences and reflections using this research approach are discussed in Chapter Nine, *Conclusion*, in section 9.3, *Methodological Reflections*.

Criteria which describe all of the possible positionings (for example, *insider*, *outsider*, *insider/insider* and *outsider/outsider*), a researcher can take within a study was developed by Banks (1998). This work by Banks (1998) was used to construct the researcher's stance within this particular study and is discussed in detail in Chapter Three, section 3.8. *Positioning of the Researcher*. This positioning, in combination with the research methodology and the researcher's own *post-initial coming-out* identity, highlights how lesbians, particularly young lesbians, have been made invisible within Australian society and emphasises how their *lived* experiences have to date been largely ignored and under theorised.

1.6. Significance of the Topic within the Field of Education

Schools are institutions that produce meanings and identities. These fields of power create and sustain particular constructs of sexuality. The ways adults and institutions behave towards young people affect their sexuality – not by suppressing or controlling it – but by participating in its creation

Denborough, 1996, 41.

In part, the significance of this study within the field of education is based upon the following concerns:

- ❖ Recognising the *duty of care* which educational institutions and educators have to *all* students;
- ❖ Addressing homophobia in schools by providing positive non-heterosexual role models and education which challenge traditional stereotypes; and
- ❖ Providing alternatives to existing heteronormative curriculum.

While this study is not situated specifically within a schooling context, nor was there a specific Memory Work session which focused on the participant's schooling experiences, the participants did refer to their educational experiences at various points throughout the nine Memory Work Sessions. Further, this study recognises the effect sexual orientation has on relationship building between individuals and other students and teachers within educational institutions in the formative years of adolescence and early adulthood. This study asserts that educators have a *duty of care* to *all* students in their school, not just those who identify as heterosexual and/or conform to socially determined and accepted gender roles (Beckett, Bode, Clark, Cox, Crewe, Hastings, Herbert, Martino, McLean, Page, & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1997; Elia, 1994; Jordan, Vaughan, & Woodworth, 1997; Martino, 1997a; 1997b; 1999; 2000; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1995; 1997; 1998; 2000; Thonemann, 1999; Vicars, 2006). Most non-heterosexual identified youth will question their sexual orientation whilst they are still living at home and attending school (Anderson, 1995; Burnett, 1997; Elia, 1994; Epstein, 2000; Jennings, 1999; Jordan, Vaughan, & Woodworth, 1997; Rogers, 1994; Savin-Williams, 1995; Zemsky, 1991; Zephyr Cussen, 2000). As a result, it is imperative to address and counteract the homophobia which exists within school contexts. Particularly as

Children learn prejudice from many sources – their families, the media, religious institutions – the list could go on. But the fact remains that schools are the place where children spend more of their time than anywhere else between the ages of five and eighteen, and thus play a seminal role in either confirming prejudice or combating it. It's the first public place our citizenry shares, and as such is the crucible where democratic values are put to the test. It's the place where we either learn to get along or learn to hate. Too often it's the place where prejudice becomes ingrained

Jennings , 1999 , x.

Unfortunately, attempts to address homophobia or provide positive non-heterosexual role models within educational facilities such as schools and tertiary institutions are often met with indifference or accusations of promoting a particular *life-style* or *gay* agenda (Beckett, Bode, Clark, Cox, Crewe, Hastings, Herbert, Martino, McLean, Page, & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1997; Bickmore, 1999; Jennings, 1999; Martino, 1997a; 1997b; 1999; 2000; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1995; 1997; 1998; 2000; Sears, 1999; Vicars, 2006). In fact, current policy on equity issues suggests that schools must provide a safe and understanding environment for *all* young people, regardless of their sexual orientation. Education in this area must begin with the breaking down of traditional stereotypical images. I contend here that this is not currently the case. This study generates new insights that will contribute to a growing knowledge in the area that will be valuable in addressing the needs of non-heterosexual identified students.

1.7. Dissertation Structure and Style

This study is structured and presented in the following manner. The four data analysis chapters have been organised according to the major themes which grew out of the nine Memory Work sessions and introduce pertinent summaries (in text boxes) of each of the five participants at the beginning, as relevant to the theme of the particular chapter.

Chapter One – Introduces the study and portrays an overview of the dissertation. It sets the scene for the study. Boundaries are established in terms of what the study was able to achieve within the limitations of a doctoral study.

Chapter Two – *Literature Review*; This chapter reports on current and past research in the field of lesbian studies and current trends of thinking in the area which provide a platform for, and context of, the study. It is here that the conceptual and empirical understandings about lesbian lives are presented, reviewed and critiqued. The conceptual framework is developed in such a way as to allow issues to emerge and gaps to be identified and explored throughout the study.

Chapter Three – *Methodology*; In this chapter, the conceptual framework of the methodology of Memory Work is provided. A succinct overview of how it was developed

and its placement in a theoretical paradigm is also presented. Elaboration on how Memory Work was modified to meet the requirements of a doctoral study is also offered. The methods of data collection and analysis are described and their relevance to the current research topic demonstrated.

Chapter Four – *Guide to the Participants and the Data Analysis Landscapes*; This short chapter provides a big picture of each of the five participants and the data collection and analysis process which occurred during the nine Memory Work sessions. The five participants are introduced first. Relevant family, work and education histories are presented. This is followed by summaries of each of the nine sessions where the major themes from each of the session are presented. The aim of this chapter is to provide the reader with a sense of the scope and depth of the five participants and data collection and analysis which made up this research study.

Chapter Five – *Negotiating the Family Landscape*; The first data analysis chapter provides a series of snap shot of family's reactions to, and subsequent positioning of, young *post-initial coming-out* lesbian family members. It unpacks significant family relationships and characterises them in terms of positive, negative or *shifting*⁸. These relationships are important not only in terms of how the *post-initial coming-out* lesbian positioned herself, and was positioned by others within the family unit, but also in terms of how she understood her positioning and relationships with others outside the family unit in both heterosexual and lesbian landscapes. Haug (1987) asserts that it is the acts of analysing, understanding and interacting with significant others which have the potential to modify the positioning of self within society, because it is at this very point of everyday *lived* experiences where society reproduces itself.

Chapter Six – *Negotiating the Work Landscape*; This second data analysis chapter examines the participant's work landscapes and the impact their *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identities had on their positioning and understanding of self and their position by significant others within each of these sites. As with the first data analysis chapter, this chapter also focuses on the participant's interactions with significant others within a

⁸ The term, *shifting*, is italicised and used in this study to indicate an ambivalent or constantly changing reaction to a participant's *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identity by significant family members. A detailed analysis of this relationship characteristic is provided in Chapter Five, *Negotiating the Family Landscape*.

predominately heterosexual landscape. The data illustrate that while a *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identity was only one way in which the participants defined themselves⁹ within the work landscape, it was shown to play a significant role in the decisions they made about their interactions with others within this setting and their career choices.

Chapter Seven – *Negotiating the Tensions between the Heterosexual and Lesbian Landscapes*; This chapter illuminates the tensions which existed for the participants between the heterosexual and lesbian landscapes. Exploration of these tensions uncovered issues of invisibility, stigma, oppression and an inability to locate an *acceptable* identity within the dominant landscape. Examples of participant experiences in a medical context were used to illustrate how the participants were positioned as (O)ther¹⁰ as a result of their *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identities. The data show how the participants were forced to explore landscapes outside the dominant heterosexual landscape to find acceptance and access an identity which did not require them to edit too much of their selves.

Chapter Eight – *Negotiating the Lesbian Landscape and Lesbian Selves*; The final data analysis chapter provides snap shots of a lesbian landscape in an Australian setting as it existed for the five participants, *post-initial coming-out*, at the time of the study. It highlights how the participants made sense of, negotiated, and constructed this landscape for themselves in light of their evolving understanding of their *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identities. Unlike the first three data analysis chapters which explored the positioning of the *post-initial coming-out* lesbian in two predominately heterosexual landscapes, family and work, this chapter explores their interactions, relationships and sense making within an Australian urban lesbian landscape. It highlights how their

⁹ For example, participants also defined themselves as single, in partnerships, or by their career cohort or alumni.

¹⁰ The use of the term (O)ther is an acceptable term used within feminist and lesbian related literature (see for example, Ang, 1995; Beauvoir, 1953; Grosz, 1995; Hoffman, 1998; Lal, 1999; Probyn, 1998). The term means (O)ther illustrates a positioning outside the norm. In this instance, those with a lesbian identity are positioned by significant others who are part of the normative, power holding, (heterosexual) identity as being something other than the norm. Positioning somebody as (O)ther is often used as a means of silencing. However, many lesbian identified wimmin who are aware of the heterosexual/non-heterosexual polarity power struggle resist being silenced and made invisible by using their positioning of (O)ther as a means of challenging and rupturing heteronormative assumptions by speaking out and pushing boundaries.

abilities to build strong relationships and support within a compassionate community enabled each of the participants to sustain and understand themselves as *post-initial coming-out* lesbians in other landscapes where lesbians remained invisible, or at best, existed as stereotypes built on myths and misconceptions. This chapter also exposes conflicts which existed for the participants within their lesbian landscapes and with the lesbian identity itself. Often these conflicts or issues were only acknowledged by *insiders*. These issues included, lesbian domestic violence, rejection of Male to Female Transgender lesbian identified wimmin within lesbian only venues and events, and assumed political alliances based on sexual orientation. These conflicts were identified as sites of resistance for the participants at different times and impacted on their positioning within the lesbian landscape.

Chapter Nine – *Conclusion*; A brief re-examination and highlight of the major concepts explored and addressed in chapter two and their connection and implications with the analysis and discussion in chapters four, five, six, seven and eight is presented. The contributions of Memory Work, and this study's group understanding about the positioning of young lesbians within an Australian culture is also offered. In light of this, recommendations are made for future research and practice as they relate to the lives of young lesbians *post-initial coming-out*.

1.8. Why the Title?

Purple Poppies in/and Fields of Green is both symbolic and representative of many issues pertinent to this thesis. Some that came to mind were the initial use of the colours *purple* and *green* which are synonymous with feminism and also the gay movement. Poppies are related to the *tall poppie* syndrome we have in Australia where anyone who is seen to be advancing beyond a socially acceptable, or pre-determined, level is cut down or attacked. For example, Mitchell (2001) states that "Australia has always had a problem with success. The nature of tawdry beginnings, the rampant egalitarianism, the elevation of the group or team above the individual, the fear of superlatives, the black humour – all have conspired to make us uneasy about elevating successful individuals above others. Hence the ubiquitous tall poppy syndrome. The only exception is the national obsession, sport" (6). *Purple poppies* are hard to come by, so, to be a tall purple poppie is rare and unique. They are also flowers which are attractive because of

their intense colour and sense of wild, free abandon. *Fields of green* are symbolic of the cliché “the grass is always greener on the other side”. As a society we always think that somebody else has it better than us; we tend to forget to look at all the wonderful aspects of our own lives. Lesbians, both young and old, have much to offer society in terms of experience, growth, perseverance, creativity, and the ability to love despite the many adversities we face in our lives. As a group of young lesbian wimmin, purple poppies, it is important that we are positioned both *in* fields of green as well as along side, hence the *and*. There is also the sense of growth and life captured within the title. Along with growth and life there are also the unspoken aspects of both stagnation and death, both, aspects which are inherent within the life cycle.

1.9. Research Objectives, Aims and Question

In concluding this chapter it is germane to revisit the main purpose of this study, which was:

To explore and provide snap shots of the *lived* experiences of young lesbian wimmin *post-initial coming-out* within an Australian culture.

An important challenge within the study is to make links with current literature and to challenge, question and confront existing lifespan development models which are based on heterosexual samples and stage identity theories (for example, Patterson, 1995). While these theories of development do not address or acknowledge non-heterosexual development, it should also be noted that stage based theories are currently being criticised as inadequate in mainstream developmental psychology literature (Brown, 1995; Crooks & Baur, 1999). It is important to note, though, that while this type of normative logic is sustained, non-heterosexual pathways of development, especially adolescent and young adult development, will continue to remain undertheorised.

An integral part of the current investigation includes four research questions which are explored and used to shape the data analysis chapters. These include issues which are central to the literature and of significance in a study of this nature.

- ❖ How do young lesbians deal with, and (re)construct, their relationships with family and friends *post-initial coming-out* (Brown, 1995; Elliott, 1985; Signorile, 1995)?
- ❖ How does being a young lesbian shape career development and choices (Botkin &

Daly, 1987; Campbell & Morrow, 1995; Chung, 1995; Fassinger, 1995; 1993; Hetherington, 1991; Morgan & Brown, 1991; Morrow, 1997; Morrow & Campbell, 1997; Morrow, Gore, & Campbell, 1996)?

- ❖ What are the *post-initial coming-out* experiences and tensions for young lesbians in the heterosexual and lesbian landscapes [for instance, negotiating anxiety, discrimination, stereotypes and societal expectations (Anderson, 1995; Burnett, 1998), understanding and navigating positioning as an *outsider* (Banks, 1998; Goffman, 1959); negotiating unwritten rules within sub-cultures (Barry, 2003; Burnett, 1997), and positioning and repositioning self within society (Brown, 1995; Burnett, 1998; Patterson, 1995)]? and
- ❖ How do young *post-initial coming-out* lesbians negotiate the lesbian landscape and their lesbian selves?

To fully explore these research questions, it is imperative that snap shots of the participants' lives be made clearer. Chapter Two, *Literature Review*, positions the study in the context of current lesbian studies and explores a number of key issues. These include addressing the invisibility of lesbians as well as challenging traditionally held views and stereotypes about lesbians within current research and Western society in general; recognising that the majority of research within the field of human development and sexuality, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender studies is male dominated and biased towards the United States; and exploring concepts of identity as they relate to *post-initial coming-out* lesbians within an Australian context. Chapter Two also reveals the complexities of each of these issues as they relate to data collected using Memory Work methodology to explore the *lived* experiences of a group of young *post-initial coming-out* lesbians in an Australian context.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

There is a need to take more control of our own destiny. To write our own script for our lives ... Until now, we have been grateful for the progress that has been made in areas like anti-discrimination legislation ...but I think we can be excused for losing patience. No citizen of this country – gay, straight or otherwise ... should have to feel grateful for basic human rights, such as the simple concept of having our right to love respected

Kerryn Phelps in her Mardi Gras speech at the Sydney Opera House in 1999, Mitchell, 2002, 232.

This study seeks to articulate, explore and theorise the *lived* experiences of young lesbians in an Australian context, *post-initial coming-out* using Memory Work (Haug, 1987) methodology. In order to do this it is necessary, in this chapter, to explore the relevant literature and highlight key issues as they relate to this study. First, in order to frame the parameters of the study a brief overview of relevant gay and lesbian history will be presented. This section of the review will set the historical context for the contribution of the current study, including a discussion of the effects prejudice, discrimination and violence have on the mental and physical well being of lesbians. Second, a section discussing why the current study is anthropological and utilises a social constructivist framework is presented. Third, the concept of identity as explicated in works by Goffman (1959; 1963; 1967; 1974; 1981) will be used to illustrate how lesbians are vulnerable to invisibility within current research studies and practices, and in Western heterosexual landscapes generally. This is followed by discussions of identities and positioning of *post-initial coming-out* lesbians in specific landscapes or communities.

It is my contention that the majority of research concerning homosexuality within the field of human sexuality is male dominated and exclusively reflective of experiences in the United States. Further, I will present arguments why it is necessary to challenge traditionally held views and stereotypes about lesbians. I will discuss the effects of growing up non-heterosexual in heterosexual family contexts and explore how lesbians negotiate, interpret and resist a positioning of (O)ther, or outsider, by significant others within an Australian culture.

As discussed previously in Chapter One, *Introduction*, this study focuses on a small group of young *post-initial coming-out* lesbian wimmin. The participants in the current study came out between 16 and 25 years of age. It has been shown statistically that this is the most likely age group among young wimmin to identify and come to terms with their sexual orientation if they identify as lesbian (Elliott, 1985; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Zemsky, 1991). However, at the time of the study the participants ranged in ages between 23 and 33 years of age. This places the participants in the current study in a two to ten year time frame from when they first came out. This two to ten year time frame is referred to as *post-initial coming-out* in this study. This period of time has not been previously addressed in either the literature or research, yet it is deemed here to be significant in exploring and understanding how young lesbians make sense of their identity and positioning within the lesbian and heterosexual landscapes after the initial coming out period. A focus on the *post-initial coming-out* period is one of the unique contributions of the current study to the professional literature.

Since the *coming-out* process, including the *post-initial coming-out* period, takes place in a socio cultural context, it is helpful to briefly explore pertinent historical gay and lesbian events in order to fully appreciate the experiences of the five young *post-initial coming-out* lesbians in this study.

2.1. Under the Carpet – Ignored and Forgotten

The study of sexual identity is relatively recent, culturally constructed and bounded by the parameters of Western notions of normative sexual behaviour (heterosexuality). Anything outside this notion of normative behaviour has for the most part been pathologised as abnormal, diseased or deficit in some way (Crooks & Baur, 1999; Golden, 2000; Grahn, 1990; Halperin, 1993; Katz, 1996; Vicinus, 1993). Voices from people who fall outside normative behaviour have been under represented or missing from the literature of sexual identity. In order to position the experiences of the *post-initial coming-out* wimmin in this doctoral study, it is important to explore some of the significant historical aspects of sexuality in Western culture which inform understandings of sexual identity, myths and stereotypes.

According to some researchers (for example, Golden, 2000; Katz, 1996), sexuality was not formulated as a separate dimension of personality until the 19th century.

Consequently, there was no framework which conceived that a woman could be homosexual. Prior to this time, codes of sexual conduct were deemed to be the exclusive territory of religious doctrine. Heterosexuality was seen as the norm and any behaviour or gender non-conformity which fell outside acceptable heterosexual practice was seen as deviant. "Laws against homosexual behaviors, which stem from biblical injunctions, against same sex contact, have historically been exceedingly punitive. People with homosexual orientations have been tortured and put to death throughout Western history" (Crooks & Baur, 1999, 279).

By the late 19th century homosexuality had been put under the domain of doctors, psychiatrists, and psychologists, having become medicalised and pathologised as a disease or mental illness (Foucault, 1986). Drastic *treatments*¹ were developed to remedy homosexuality. For example, castrations or hysterectomies were deemed acceptable treatments or cures in the 1800s for individuals who engaged in sexual practices synonymous with homosexuality. In the 1900s, lobotomies were performed as recently as 1951 and psychotherapy, drug and hormone therapy, hypnosis, shock treatments and aversion therapy have also been used as attempts to cure homosexuality (Crooks & Baur, 1999; Grahn, 1990; Kaiser, 1994). Even though there was a socio cultural shift in Western society regarding views of homosexuality from sinful to sick (Esterberg, 1997; Grahn, 1990), it needs to be emphasised that neither viewpoint has been positive and both points of view can still be identified in the social milieu of Western culture.

Theories about the causation of homosexuality experienced a similar socio cultural shift. Now that the realm of homosexuality had moved beyond religion's purview, the possible variety of domains that could be seen as causal expanded. These include for instance, biological causes (see Bailey & Benishay, 1993; Bailey, Pillard, Neale, & Agyei, 1993; Hamer, Hu, Magnuson, Hu, & Pattatucci, 1993; Holden, 1992; Kirsch & Weinrich, 1991; Meyer-Bahlburg, Ehrhardt, Rosen, Gruen, Veridiano, Vann, & Neuwalder, 1995; Money, 1988; Zuger, 1989) and psychosocial causes (see Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1979; Black, 1994; Cass, 1979; 1984a; 1992; Galenson, 1986; Golden, 1987; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller,

¹ The word treatment is italicised in this instance to emphasise how the word, or concept, of treatment has been used throughout history to denigrate, or stigmatise, groups of people deemed to fall outside the norm. This emphasis illustrates how people, or institutions, who have held the balance of power have used the concept of treatment as a means of fixing what has been deemed to be deficient (Crooks & Baur, 1999; Grahn, 1990).

Stiver, & Surrey, 1991; Peplau, Garnets, Spalding, Conley, & Veniegas, 1998; Surrey, 1985; Trodien, 1988).

To date there are no definitive answers regarding why some people are same sex attracted (Brown, 1995; Eilason, 1996). Exploring the underlying cause of a non-heterosexual identity is not the purpose of this current study. However, studies such as the current one, which treat homosexuals (specifically lesbians) as a normative, anthropological group are, based on the information above, recent and important innovations. This represents a feminist research standpoint (Reinharz, 1992) and as such is vital to understanding the experiences and positioning of the wimmin in the current study.

Previous studies of sexual identity/ies based on American wimmin's lives from the 1900s have identified a variety of scripts which are socio culturally designated within a historical context. Lesbians' identities as we know them today were not available within that particular cultural landscape. For example, there was a period of *particular friendships* or *Boston marriages* where two wimmin would be intimately, emotionally and romantically attached, write long letters to each other expressing undying love, and at times even live together. However, due to a lack of possibilities and understanding of wommin's sexuality it is understood that often these relationships did not include a physical, sexual element (Brown, 1995; Fadderman, 1982; Rothblum & Brehony, 1993). Even recently Brown (1995), Gramick (1984), Schippers, (1990), and Sears (1989) have opined that the awareness of same sex attraction for women begins primarily, as an affectional rather than sexual phenomenon.

To coincide with available female sexual identities, wommin who desired to be sexual with other wommin would at times resort to adopting roles *passing* for men. For instance, one female in a partnership would *pass* as male and work in a *male identified* job while the other wommin maintained a traditional female sexual role. Lesbian relationships of this type are acknowledged by Brown (1995) and explored extensively in works by Fadderman (1982; 1994). Both Brown and Fadderman recognise that this form of lesbian identity was situated within the aforementioned social, historical, and cultural context. These lesbian identities were therefore limited and linked to particular behaviours consistent with prescribed sexual roles and identities. They are not necessarily the identities and behaviours which are available or accepted today.

During this time while female same sex relationships were rejected as an acceptable sexuality in most Western cultures, the French appeared to have retained a greater tolerance, as evidenced by the existence of artists, writers, and/or financially independent women such as famous French Left Bank residents Renee Vivien, Natalie Barney, Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas. Glimpses of these wimmin's lives are available to us through their personal correspondence, diaries, and professional works which highlighted the absence of lesbian identities as we know them today within their conceptual framework (Fadderman, 1982). Retrospective examinations of these wimmin's lives help set the stage for the eventual emergence of contemporary lesbian identities.

By the mid 1900s in the United States, research on diverse aspects of sexuality became possible and notions of homosexual identity were increasingly culturally available. For instance, work by Kinsey and his colleagues (for example, Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953), produced groundbreaking research into human sexuality in the 1940s and 1950s which sought to recognise the existence of homosexuality but not necessarily find a cause. This work was the first to question heterosexuality as normative. They developed a seven point continuum representing sexual orientation ranging from completely homosexual to completely heterosexual. Their research findings based on rankings from this continuum helped to illustrate how sexual practices previously designated as deviant were in fact widespread (Gamson, 2000). By daring to ask the questions and report on people's lived experiences in an uncensored manner, Kinsey and his colleagues challenged normative stereotypes. This research then opened up the possibility of allowing people to access and create a wider range of sexual identities as a social cohort, thus transgressing deeply held beliefs about homosexuality. The radical nature of the data and subsequent sexual freedom this research presented resulted in their work being severely criticised, often unjustly. It was, and is, highly significant and facilitated more interest and research in the area of sexual behaviour and identity. It successfully addressed existing misconceptions and stereotypes in the field of sexuality and facilitated a re-evaluation of conventional moral attitudes. Kinsey's courageous inquiry into the *lived* experiences of everyday people's sexuality eased the way for future research on the topic, including the current study.

In addition to the groundbreaking and influential work by Kinsey and his colleagues, other American examples of what came to be known as the sexual revolution flourished in the mid 20th century. Several of these became important for contemporary notions of sexual identity, specifically homosexual identity. For instance, the formation of groups like the Mattachine society (Crooks & Baur, 1999; Grahn, 1990; Jagose, 1996) and the Daughters of Bilitis (Crooks & Baur, 1999; Grahn, 1990; Jagose, 1996) in the 1950s and the Stonewall riots in the late 1960s were pivotal points of change which influenced how society viewed homosexuality. Formal recognition in the 1970s by the Western medical, psychiatric and psychological communities that homosexuality was in fact not a mental illness became a major landmark in attitudes toward homosexuality. Based on the civil rights movement for racial equality, the fight for equal rights for homosexuals in relation to employment, living standards, personal safety, recognition of same sex relationships and the right to have children and be parents (Millbank, 2002) in the 1980s and 1990s are also major events in gay and lesbian history.

Despite these significant advances in cultural attitudes towards homosexuals, misinformed biases and stereotypes continue to exist and influence contemporary sexual identity choices. Unfortunately, many institutions such as some mainstream churches, uniformed medical practitioners, the media and popular literature continue to hold, and perpetuate, outdated misconceptions and stereotypes (Crooks & Baur, 1999; Grahn, 1990). As a result, young lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer identified people have for the most part been marginalised in Western culture (Allgeier & Allgeier, 2000; Brown, 1995; Burnett, 1997; 1998; Gamson, 2000; Jennings, 1994; Kissen, 1993; Savin-Williams, 1995; Signorile, 1995; Thonemann, 1999; Vicars, 2006). Negative views on homosexuality, which result in rejection, stigmatisation and being positioned as (O)ther in mainstream (heterosexual) society, mean that young lesbians and gay men are three to four times more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to commit, or attempt to commit, suicide (Garofalo, Wolf, Kessel, Palfrey, & DuRant, 1998; Garofalo, Wolf, Wissow, Woods, & Goodman, 1999; Hammelman, 1993; Hershberger, Pilkington, & D'Augelli, 1997; Hillier, Dempsey, Harrison, Beale, Matthews, & Rosenthal, 1998; Remafeldi, French, Story, Resnick, & Blum, 1998).

As previously noted, heteronormativity constrains socio cultural conceptualisations of sexual identity and behaviour (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995; MacBride-Steward, 2004; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1997; 2000). Consequently, homosexuality has not been as

researched as other areas in the field of human sexuality and sexual identity (Baird, 2005; Brown, 1995; Burnett, 1997). Additionally, androcentrism biases research away from wommin's *lived* experience (Fassinger, 1995; Kitzinger, 1996a). Thus, wommin's experience in general is less represented within mainstream research (Gale & Short, 1995; Lather & Smithies, 1997; Kitzinger, 1987; Weedon, 1987). Even within research aimed at studying homosexuality, this androcentrism privileges gay mens' experiences over the voices and lives of lesbians, with the result that lesbians remain largely invisible within Western culture in comparison to their gay male counterparts (Auger, 1992; Bent & Magilvy, 2006; Blackwood, 1993; Brown, 1995; Fassinger, 1993; Gale & Short, 1995; Hanna, 1995; Jordan, Vaughan, & Woodworth, 1997; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995; Lawless, Kippax, & Crawford, 1996; Mac Neil, 1993; Rosen, 1992; Schnelder, 1989).

A ramification of lesbian invisibility in research literature can be noted in the lack of lesbian presence in the medical domain. As an example, one only has to look at the lack of information involving safe sex practices for lesbians in particular and the failure of various government departments world-wide to acknowledge lesbians as potentially as *at-risk* for Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) infection (Albury, 1993; Axell, 1994; Gale & Short, 1995; Hanna, 1995; Kelly, 1993; Lampton, 1995; Lather & Smithies, 1997; Lawless, Kippax, & Crawford, 1996; Mac Neil, 1993; O'Sullivan & Parmar, 1989; Rosen, 1992; Short & Gale, 1995). Interestingly, the Centre for Disease Control (CDC) in the United States defines a lesbian as a wommin who has not had sexual relations with a male since 1973, regardless of the wommin's age or other relevant sexual history (Albury, 1993; Axell, 1994; Dworkin, 2005; Rosen, 1992). In other words, the recognised routes of transmission for wommin to contract HIV/AIDS are through sex with HIV positive males or through IV drug use. As a result, the CDC does not even have a category in their AIDS reports which recognises female to female transmission of the virus in a potentially lethal erasure of lesbian visibility. Instead, they have a category of *other* for unexplained virus transmission which does not fit their *normal* (expected) modes. Not surprisingly, this category of *other* contains an unprecedented percentage of wommin (Axell, 1994; Gale & Short, 1995; Hanna, 1995; Lawless, Kippax, & Crawford, 1996; Short & Gale, 1995) and unwittingly contributes to the situation that "many lesbians mistakenly believe they are not at risk" (Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center, 1995, 1). In actuality there are many documented cases of suspected wommin to wommin HIV transmission (Cochran, Bybee, Gage, & Mays, 1996; Lawless, Kippax, & Crawford,

1996; Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center, 1995; MacBride-Stewart, 2004; Marmor, Weiss, & Lyden, 1986; Monzon & Capellan, 1987; O'Hanlan, 2004; Perry, Jacobsberg, & Fogel, 1989; Rich, Buck, Tuomala, & Kazanjian, 1993; Sabatini, Patel, & Hirschman, 1983).

A further implication of androcentric research bias is evidenced by the fact that the HIV/AIDS phenomenon has been presented as a gay male defined disease by the medical profession (Bartos, McLeod, & Nott, 1993; Creed, 1994; Halperin, 1995; Hanson, 1991; Haraway, 1989; Jagose, 1996; Meyer, 1991; Nunokawa, 1991). Within the Australian context, wimmin have been predominately ignored by National HIV/AIDS reports with the exception of small research studies on peri-natal transmission (King, Lawless, & Spongberg, 1996). Drug trials for HIV/AIDS treatments often do not include wimmin. Therefore, wimmin are given treatments which are based on male only trials which do not address their specific needs or metabolic systems.

Within and beyond the field of medicine, lesbian-centred research has been neglected when compared with research focused on gay men (Brown, 1995; Gale & Short, 1995; Jordan, Vaughan, & Woodworth, 1997; Lather & Smithies, 1997; Lawless, Kippax, & Crawford, 1996). This paucity of gynocentric research underscores the importance of investigating lesbian issues and identity development as a discrete field, independent of gay men. Elliott (1985) states that "it is important to acknowledge difference as well as similarities to conduct investigations accordingly" (71). Calls such as this for lesbian-centred research underscore the significance of the current study.

As discussed previously, heteronormativity has constrained the availability of positive, wimmin centred lesbian identities. Therefore, society tends to view lesbianism in terms of a pseudo-male image with the result that "lesbian relationships, as well as lesbian sexuality, have been interpreted in terms of traditional assumptions about heterosexual relationships" (Richardson, 1981, p.113). Due to the transgression of heteronormativity, more often than not, lesbianism is portrayed in mainstream society as a direct threat to the culturally-specific female gender roles of child rearing and family care. For instance, until recently, psychological studies of lesbian and gay issues have been fraught with an inability to address and deconstruct models of "dominant, heterosexist paradigms in which assumptions about the non-normative, if not deviant, nature of lesbianism and the dichotomous nature of sexual orientation were embedded" (Brown, 1995, 18). In other

words, lesbianism was often viewed as inferior when compared to *normal* heterosexual relations. Lesbian identity was at best seen as a second rate alternative which would be readily rejected when a suitable heterosexual relationship became available. For example,

Until the work of such late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sexologists such as Willis (1922) and Hirschfield (1936) came to the intellectual foreground, lesbian relationships, when they were identifiable to the outside world, tended to be perceived as perverse relationships between women who were essentially heterosexual

Brown, 1995, 3.

Rich (1980) argues that "lesbians have historically been deprived of a political existence through 'inclusion' as female versions of male homosexuality. To equate lesbian existence with male homosexuality because each is stigmatised is to erase female reality once again" (318). Therefore, the way in which lesbianism is portrayed and stereotyped in society impacts upon the way in which lesbians identify as women, the occupations they choose and their relationships with and acceptance by their families and friends (Burnett, 1998; Kitzinger, 1989; 1996a; 1996b; Perkins, 1996).

It is important that this study explore the way in which young lesbians negotiate their positioning and existence in society and examine how this positioning impacts upon their relationships (Anderson, 1995; Burnett, 1998), personal growth (Richardson, 1981; Signorile, 1995), mental health (Gonsiorek, 1993; Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1995; Perkins, 1996; Signorile, 1995) and career options (Botkin & Daly, 1987; Campbell & Morrow, 1995; Chung, 1995; Fassinger, 1993; 1995; Hetherington, 1991; Morgan & Brown, 1991; 1991; Morrow, 1997; Morrow & Campbell, 1997; Morrow, Gore, & Campbell, 1996). Rather than just report on how a group of people are oppressed, this study provides a supportive space for the participants to share and analyse their *lived* experiences of negotiating their positioning as (O)ther in a heteronormative landscape.

The need for, and value of, positive visible lesbian role models within the dominant heterosexual landscape is also vital, particularly within the field of education. For example, Dr Kerryn Phelps wrote an article, *Why must teachers remain closeted?*, in The Age newspaper (reprinted in Mitchell, 2002),

Parents need to recognise that homosexual students need role models too. The issue of whether homosexuality should be discussed in schools is a debate we had to have. For too long it has been easy for schools to ignore the issue and hope it will go away.

Despite education departments putting a great deal of effort into producing resources to combat homophobia, it is not compulsory to implement them, and school principals have been able to hide behind the objections of a few parents as an excuse to keep a lid on the subject. But the cost is too great. Australia has one of the highest rates of youth suicide. Research identifies the struggle by some to come to terms with their sexuality in the face of ignorance and hostility as a critical underlying cause.

On Wednesday in the *Age*, Bettina Arndt made a spirited personal attack on Jackie Stricker, who is a gifted and dedicated teacher and my wife. Arndt implies the revelation of our marriage has forced the primary school at which Jackie teaches into dealing with homosexuality.

Let's call a spade a spade. The only reason for the controversy is that Jackie didn't marry a man. This single fact has uncovered thinly disguised prejudices. If a teacher made a public statement about Aboriginal land rights because she was an Aborigine, would the reaction have been the same? If children then had questions about the subject, their questions would presumably be answered, even if it was not on the curriculum.

Arndt says there are many people who are uncomfortable, threatened or hostile when questioned by children about same-sex marriage. As a parent, I understand how uncomfortable it can be when a child asks questions and you are not prepared.

Clearly, answers need to be tailored to the child's age and level of understanding. Is it so hard to say there is diversity in the world? The simple reply, 'sometimes a man falls in love with a man and a woman falls in love with a woman' would suffice.

What are these schools and parents afraid of?

Do they think that having a positive role model as a teacher, who simply said, 'this is who I am and I am happy', will turn their children into homosexuals? Let me, in passing, dispel any implications that Jackie has discussed her private life at the school. That has never been the case. There is a hidden message in all this.

Homosexuality is in the too-hard basket, even for Arndt, a parent with training as a psychologist. Her message is that teachers who are gay should stay firmly in the closet. But just as their heterosexual colleagues are free to have it known that they are married, have children, have a life outside the classroom, gay teachers should not have to keep their private life a secret (108 – 109).

Phelps' open letter highlights the need for diversity, positive role models, and acceptance in educational settings. Inherent in her letter is the call for an ability to address stereotypes and myths surrounding homosexuality in order to reduce the high suicide rates for questioning youth as a result of the stigma against homosexuality which currently exists in our society. Phelps' letter also highlights the resistance schools and parents often feel toward having lesbian and gay issues added to the school curriculum. The invisibility of homosexuality in the curriculum further adds to the isolation many non-heterosexual students and teachers feel (Vicars, 2006).

Many large institutions, particularly those concerned with education, are unsafe and difficult environments for those who are questioning their sexuality or have a non-heterosexual identity. For example, "Teachers and counsellors can be hostile or simply ill-equipped to support young women or deal with homophobia, and it can be very difficult to escape the often hostile surveillance of peers. Some Christian church communities can also be very homophobic and unsafe places for non-heterosexual people. Rural communities and small towns can be politically and socially conservative and difficultly is compounded when everyone knows everyone else's business" (Baird, 2005, 76). It is not unusual for large numbers of people, particularly young people, to leave small towns and rural areas for larger urban areas in search of acceptance and membership into accepting communities.

Research by Sears (1999) noted that while the average student realises his or her sexual orientation by age thirteen, they feel unable to seek support from families, friends, school or community due to the possible negative responses they might receive. Although there has been an increase in support available to urban gay youth in recent times, the majority of gay adolescents do not live close enough to urban centres to access this increased level of support. Overall, there are few agencies available to support young people who are questioning their sexual orientation and experiencing confusion about their feelings (Rotello, 1996). The resultant feelings of isolation make adolescents for questioning youth a challenging time (Sears, 1999). It is not uncommon for them to believe they are the only individuals in the broader society to feel this way and as a result feel acutely alone and separate from their peer group (Crooks & Baur, 1999; Nelson, 1997). Families which are rigid, moralistic and gender stereotyped, contribute added stress to gay and lesbian identified youth (Hackenbruck, 1987). Some children are rejected from home and/or support for schooling is withdrawn (Warren,

1997). As a result, it is not surprising that lesbian and gay youth are up to seven times more likely than heterosexual counterparts to attempt suicide (Remafedi, 1999). Isolation, low self-esteem, and physical and verbal abuse are frequently cited as the reasons for suicide attempts (Proctor & Groze, 1994).

As might be expected in a heteronormative culture, students more often than not identify as heterosexual. This is consistent with studies in Australia and overseas (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Harrison, 2000; Hillier, Warr, & Haste, 1996).

Both male and female students generally articulated firmly entrenched homophobic attitudes, particularly towards gay men. It should be noted, however, that students frequently only discuss homosexuality in the context of HIV/AIDS education, which either explicitly or implicitly links homosexuality with life-threatening disease. Rarely are students in our schools exposed to positive images of bisexual, gay and lesbian people
Harrison, 2000, 12.

A study by Harrison (2000) exploring gender relations and the notion of *difference* in school based sex education classes in Australian schools reports that girls within this study reflect attitudes thought to be held by many young women in response to homosexuality. This attitude “espouses tolerance but only if expressions of gay sexuality are hidden” (13). By contrast, boys in this study demonstrate an inability to display tolerance towards homosexuality among their peers. Research by Connell (1982; 1987; 1989; 2002) would suggest this is a result of the messages boys receive as they are growing up about what it means to be male; they learn strict codes of gendered behaviour and signalling, particularly in school environments. Messages about masculinity and masculine behaviour are based on a heterosexual norm and Connell (1982; 1987; 1989; 2002) argues it is these messages which often lead to a confused, or mixed, understanding of gender and sexuality.

Harrison identifies several reasons which may account for the attitudes between the young men and women in her study in response to homosexuality. For instance, she argues that homosexuality in schools is almost exclusively discussed in terms of male homosexuality. As a result, there might be enough distance created for young women to “be able to demonstrate tolerance without significant incursions into their own sense of self” (13). Harrison argues further that there is a prevailing ignorance of homosexual sexual practices, particularly in relation to lesbian sexual practices. These views are

based upon narrow definitions of what sex means (that is, heterosexual and involving penis in vagina penetration), yet are reflective of traditional silences in the curriculum around homosexual practices (Harrison, 2000; Stears & Clift, 1990; Vicars, 2006).

As highlighted in this sub-section, sexuality is a relatively recent cultural construction. Normative sexual orientation has been constructed as heterosexuality and anything outside of this has been pathologised as deficit in some way and subsequently marginalised (Golden, 2000; Grahn, 1990; Katz, 1996). The strategies students use to construct their personal lives are complex and pervasive. Homosexuality is seen as (O)ther and stigmatized while heterosexuality is culturally and psychologically enforced. Heterosexuality remains unquestioned and it is in this sense it remains a powerful hegemonic construct. Thus, the cultural construction of non-heterosexual identities, specifically lesbian, in an Australian context has been influenced by historical events, politics, and complex, often unexamined, myths, assumptions and stereotypes. This often means that lesbian identities are rendered invisible in the surrounding heterosexual landscape. Understanding this positioning of invisibility and (O)thering requires exploration of relevant theories and related methodological frameworks in the following sections.

2. 2. Queer Theory

This section discusses the contribution of queer theory in relation to the study of homosexuality, however, it also raises the limitations of this theory relative to the study of the *lived* experience of everyday lesbians. Queer theory has been influential in problematising the very notion of gay and lesbian identity. That is, it has sought to destabilise heterosexuality and homosexuality as two binary opposites (Butler, 1991; de Lauretis, 1991; Esterberg, 1997; Fuss, 1991; Jagose, 1996; Warner, 1993). Ultimately, this theory seeks to destabilise notions of heterosexuality and identity narratives as the norm. Focusing on the flux and change, queer theory attempts to shift attention from “the politics of personal identity to the politics of signification” (Seidman, 1993, 130). Rather than seeing lesbian and gay identities as something with a fixed and stable content, “queer theory sees identities as fragmentary, partial, and shifting” (Esterberg, 1997, 15).

Queer theory is embedded within a postmodern, constructivist framework (Jagose, 1996). It attempts to disrupt the notion of fixed, or given, categories of identities within a

given context (Esterberg, 1997; Fuss, 1991; Jagose, 1996). However, while it encourages us to “shift our focus from the politics of personal identity to the politics of signification, in particular, to the deconstruction of hetero/homo codes that structures the social text of daily life” (Seidman, 1993,130), Queer theory as a whole does not take into consideration how this stance potentially renders lesbians invisible yet again. That is, without labels or something to hang language onto lesbians are unable to identify, belong, or talk about their position in a way which is meaningful to their everyday life. Instead, queer theoretical discussions of an abstract theoretical discussion run the risk of becoming inaccessible to all members within a given landscape. For instance, Esterberg (1997) argues that,

queer theories often remain abstract and typically lack grounding in ordinary women’s lives. Queer theory can seem politically paralysing. The critique of identity seems to remain a deconstructive project, not a constructive one, without a vision for a future. What queer theory misses, in its attempt to take apart the sexual categories, is the role that identities play in ordinary individual’s own lives. Although some are content to remain without labels or embrace the catchall category ‘queer’, others are not. For the latter, the impulse to name the self provides an affirmation – however circumscribed by the imperatives of identity – as well as an impetus to social change (24).

Like the term homosexual, queer theory is often seen as being synonymous with gay men and the gay male landscape, with the result that lesbian lives and voices are often rendered invisible/inaudible. Consciously resisting this theoretical erasure and silencing of wimmin, this study recognises the importance of self labelling for the repositioning of the participants to enhance the visibility of lesbian wimmin within the wider Western culture. It is concerned with how the participants make sense of their non-heterosexual identities, or self labels, and their subsequent positioning within a variety of landscapes. Therefore, rather than relying on queer theory which could not adequately support the expression of the *lived* experiences of the lesbian participants, this study utilises an anthropological framework.

2. 3. An Anthropological Study

Minority groups of all kinds have been actively involved in [a] re-examination [of their lives and subsequent positioning within their culture] and the painful struggle toward a more equitable position in society. Although women do not constitute a numerical minority, their status in modern Western society has largely been a subordinate one

Kessler, 1976, 2.

According to McDowell and Sharp (1999), anthropology is the study of humanity and highlights how people build their communities, what people's lives are like and how they live on a daily basis. This framework focuses on understanding how people structure and understand their relationships and positioning to, and with, significant others (Correll, 1995; Kessler, 1976; McDowell & Sharp, 1999). As a result, McDowell and Sharp (1999) argue that anthropology is positioned to make significant contributions to research with a gender and sexuality focus. It can provide elements for the development of new understandings, particularly for populations which have previously been neglected or stigmatised based on myths and stereotypes (Correll, 1995).

Part of the purpose of an anthropological study is to uncover and understand the culture of the community, or landscape, of the sub-group under investigation. That is, to think about how the community is defined, examine the historical background which impacts upon the community, and identify what thought patterns, physical behaviour, symbols and language norms are significant, negotiated and used on a daily basis to identify and hold the group or community together (Correll, 1995). Studies of this nature also consider it vital to examine the larger context of the society in which the sub-group exists. For example, the way in which the sub-group as a community is influenced by, and understood within, the larger social context.

The study which unfolds in this dissertation provides an insight into the lives, language, groups, landscapes, positioning and relationships of young lesbians' *post-initial coming-out* and is subsequently deemed to be anthropological in nature. It also uses social constructivism as a conceptual framework. This will be discussed in the next section.

2. 4. Social Constructivism as a Conceptual Framework

Constructivist theory argues that meaning is created *between* people, not lying in wait, ready for discovery

Hoskins, 2000, 56.

Constructivists (for example, Hoskins, 2000; Mahoney, 1997; Schwandt, 1994; 1997) theorise about and are interested in the ways in which human beings, both individually and collectively, interpret or construct the social and psychological world in specific

linguistic, social and historical contexts. Charmaz (2000) states that “constructivism assumes the relativism of multiple social realities, recognizes the multiple creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and aims toward interpretive understanding of subjects’ meanings” (510). This study is intent on collectively interpreting the ways in which young lesbians are socially constructed and positioned within an Australian culture. Constructivism is also interested in analysing how young lesbians make sense of their positioning and in understanding how they actively seek to re-position themselves within this context (Charmaz, 2000; Hoskins, 2000; Schwandt, 1997).

It is argued within social constructivist philosophical perspectives that reality cannot be separated from the *lived* experience of the researcher (Haug, 1987; Hoskins, 2000; Krieger, 1991; Mahoney, 1997; Schwandt, 1994; 1997). And as a result, the “subjectivity of the researcher is already included” and regardless of the subject matter “understandings are always filtered through the self of the researcher” (Hoskins, 2000, 56). Social constructivism recognises and celebrates the positioning of the researcher as a meeting point of self, culture and context (Harre & Gillett, 1994; Hoskins, 2000; Lather, 1991; Weedon, 1987). Therefore, it is important that the positioning of the researcher within the research be brought to the forefront. Hoskins (2000) recognises that creative ways of writing can be utilised when a “researcher’s subjectivity becomes part of the inquiry” (56).

Social constructivism argues there is no objective reality which can be known or separated apart from the observer. This dissertation argues that as a result an “interpretation of context or culture is both individual and collective and needs to be understood not as an acquisitional process but as an inter-subjective process of ongoing negotiation” (Hoskins, 2000, 48). Further, it is the self which organises, constructs, and makes meaning about its own reality. So too, within this study it is the young lesbian participant who positions and re-positions herself within a given context in order to make sense and meaning of her own reality. This meaning making occurs and is influenced by a social system whereby meanings, or understanding of situations and positions are constructed by combining personal construct schemes with shared social realities. Therefore, social constructivism provides a framework for recognising that abstract concepts such as culture, discourse, homosexual, lesbian, and the self are culturally, socially and politically constructed and embedded. Research conducted within this

framework shifts into a social and political domain where the relationship between the self and specific cultures and/or contexts occurs (Hoskins, 2000; Jarzabkowski, 2001).

There are different strands of constructivism, for instance, radical and social (Mahoney, 1997; Schwandt, 1994; 1997). This study is more aligned with tenants from social constructivism which focus on understanding social interactions, processes and interactions. The emphasis of the study focuses on “how social actors recognize, produce, and reproduce social actions, and how they come to share an intersubjective understanding of specific life circumstances” (Schwandt, 1997, 19).

Within social constructivism,

the emphasis tends to shift from individual construing processes to the social construction of shared knowledges. Aspects of language including metaphors, symbols, images, words, and so on, are highlighted as the available resources for reconstituting the self. Personal constructions are shaped and constrained by culture or by the shared language and meaning systems that develop, persist, and evolve over time

Hoskins, 2000, 52.

In a study exploring how one woman recovering from anorexia nervosa was able to reposition and reconstruct herself within dominant culture, Hoskins (2000) argues that if “language is the site for negotiation of meaning (Efran & Fauber, 1995) and the self is the meaning-making process (Mahoney, 1991), then it makes sense that the place to explore how changes occurs – of how identities are reconstituted – was within the interactions between self and other, and self and discourse” (49). This argument highlights the timeliness of the study described in this dissertation which unpacks the participants’ understanding of concepts of self, identity, (O)ther, positioning, language and memories in order to explore how young lesbians reposition and reconstruct themselves within a dominant heterosexual culture. In this study, memories are used in the form of written Memory Texts, which Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, and Benton (1992) argue, contain traces of the construction of the self. Since the focus of this study is on understanding the participants’ awareness of their positioning which takes place within an Australian context, it is important to unpack the relevant concepts of self and identity as they relate to this study.

2. 5. Identity

Within the current literature in sociology, psychology, and human sexuality studies definitions of self and identity have often been employed interchangeably and subsequently become intertwined, confused, and often distorted (see Frey, 2004 for an in depth discussion). Basically, theories of identity have been divided between two schools of thought, developmental stage models and identity theory based on symbolic interactionism. Firstly, developmental psychological stage models (for example, Cass, 1979; 1984a; Coleman, 1982; Espin, 1987; Gonsiorek & Rudolph, 1991; Minton & McDonald, 1983/1984; Sophie, 1985/1986; Troiden, 1988) rely on the idea that “identity development is essentially an intrapsychic process, although occurring in the context of the social environment” (Esterberg, 1997, 15). However ground breaking and useful these stage development theories have been they are nonetheless subject to a variety of potential problems. One of the major issues to be addressed is that stage theories are susceptible to reflecting the researcher’s values and goals rather than reflecting the *lived* realities of the research participants (Esterberg, 1997; Kitzinger, 1987). The stage models, being socio culturally and politically embedded in their respective contexts, are vulnerable to unwittingly reinforcing the superiority of heteronormative patterns embedded in those same contexts. To avoid these potential problems the current study has relied on an anthropological framework grounded in social constructivism directly privileging the *lived* experiences of young *post-initial coming-out* lesbians captured through their own voices.

The second variation of identity theory has a more sociological tradition based on symbolic interactionists (for example, Frey, 2004; Goffman, 1959; 1967; Jenness, 1992; McIntosh, 1981; Plummer, 1981; Rust, 1992a; 1992b; 1993; Simon & Gagnon, 1967; Weeks, 1981; 1987; Ytreberg, 2002). These theorists have placed an emphasis not on the,

interior life of the self but on the social components of identity and the possibilities of change. For symbolic interactionists, identities refer to the names or labels that individuals attached to social positions. They are the meanings that one attributes to oneself as an object, and they carry with them expectations for particular kinds of behaviors

Esterberg, 1997, 15.

This variation of identity theory is better placed in understanding how individuals make sense of their positioning within a community, or landscape, because “identity is always relational” (Oinas, 1998, 82). The current study uses notions of identity and self as defined by sociologist and symbolic interactionist Eric Goffman (1959; 1967). Goffman argued that while there are unlimited presentations of competent and socially able selves, or actors, available to individuals, there are only a finite number of identities available to access within any given community, landscape or context (Frey, 2004).

The finite nature of these identities is the result of being shaped by the cultural ideals and social institutions within the given historical context. In other words, identities are what social structures adhere to while selves are how one understands one’s history and experiences (Frey, 2004). Therefore, “while sexualities are clearly malleable and fluid, they are fluid only within certain ranges. Societies do not organise sexuality completely arbitrarily. To many living in lesbian and gay communities, their identities feel solid and fixed – an essential and unchanging part of who they ‘really’ are – and a number of lesbian and gay organisations have crafted political strategies based on that notion” (Esterberg, 1997, 26 – 27). While these feelings of fixity may seem real, they are derived from the surrounding context which only offers a limited number of identity choices (Goffman, 1959). Despite limited identity choices, it is understood within the parameters of this study that infinite selves remain available to the individuals. These selves are edited to fit an identity which is acceptable within the particular context in order to gain acceptance and membership into the landscape, or community.

The editing of self to fit an identity occurs through the continual monitoring, or perception, of how we think others view us. That is, we gauge the success of our editing through the feedback and reactions from significant others. In this way Cooley (1992, in Scheff, 2005) argues that we live in the minds of others without being conscious of it. This process of living in the minds of others, or the management of impressions, generates powerful emotions and feelings such as pride or shame. These emotions and feelings are captured in memories and provide insight in the construction of everyday life and identity. Onias (1999), argues that the “presentation of self as a competent and socially worthy actor required in today’s western cultures is increasingly focused on disciplined body management. Feminist literature has highlighted the gendered characteristics of body management, and noted the imperative of rigid practices of body maintenance and improvement imposed on young women at an early age” (271). There

is a strong need to appear competent and in control, that is a presentation of a competent self on the front stage (Goffman, 1959), in order to continue receiving acceptance and *insider* status, or group membership. Individuals need to know they are not alone; they need to feel like they belong and are *normal* (Onias, 1999; Ytreberg, 2002). If an individual is unable to edit their selves in order to fit an available identity they risk being rejected from the group with which they are seeking membership; they risk becoming an *outsider* and invisible. This is known as having a *spoiled* identity, or what Goffman (1963) refers to as a stigmatised identity. For an individual with a non-heterosexual identity who has been rejected from the heterosexual landscape, the pressure to find acceptance and experience feelings of belonging can be extremely high. This pressure can lead the individual to engage in excessive editing of selves in order to fit an available identity within the non-heterosexual landscape to gain acceptance and *insider* status.

In this way, identity issues relating to sexuality can be discussed and understood as appearance and presentation of self as an acceptable identity on the front stage (Goffman, 1959). What individuals feel and do back stage is a different story. The back stage is private and out of public viewing. Hence, strict behaviours, styles, language patterns and appearances associated with acceptable identities are relaxed back stage. The back stage area allows individuals to negotiate the social order that sets limits to what is appropriate on the front stage in everyday social interactions (Onias, 1998; Ytreberg, 2002). The back stage acts like a pressure valve from the constant pressure to edit, maintain, and perform an available identity on the front stage. Correll (1995) argues that behaviour which occurs back stage

is more informal, and the goal becomes maintaining solidarity and high morale among[st] members. Goffman states that a basic problem of all performances is maintaining a particular definition in front of audiences. To accomplish this goal, members will often engage in morale-boosting activities such as making fun of the audience, joking with each other, and talking informally when backstage. On stage, however, control has to be maintained. Control is achieved by using subtle communications among members that the audience will not understand (272 - 273).

To summarise identity and self as they are used in this study, identity relates to the social structures one adheres. There are only a finite number of identities available to access within any given community or landscape (Goffman, 1959; Frey, 2004). Self

relates to how one understands one's history and experiences (Frey, 2004). There are unlimited selves. Goffman's theory of identity will now be examined in the following subsections in relation to issues relating to this particular study; that is, family, work, community and lesbian identities.

2. 5. 1. Identity, Family and Mother/Daughter Relationships

Identity within the context of family of origin is particularly significant for non-heterosexually identified individuals (Beeler & DiProva, 1999; Brown, 1995; Elliott, 1985; Signorile, 1995). "Family is a microcosm of society" (Bozett & Sussman, 1989, 1); it reflects the behaviours and expectations of the landscape in which it exists. Family members can take for granted the myths and stereotypes which remain unexamined in the wider society, for example, the misunderstanding that homosexuality is a phase which one could, would or should grow out of with the onset of maturity. Secondly, the belief that homosexuality is a mental illness or dysfunction which can be *cured* with the appropriate medical intervention. And lastly, a lesbian identity is a wommin's desire to be masculine. It is not uncommon for same sex friends or family members who feel uncomfortable with homosexuality to refrain from spontaneous embraces (Crooks & Baur, 1999) and avoid wearing socially determined *masculine* clothing or identifying as a feminist because of fear of being labelled lesbian (Brown, 1995).

Homosexual youth differ from many other minority groups because they do not grow up in settings with other people like themselves (Jennings, 1994). Generally they are the product of heterosexual families who have had minimal positive experience with anyone from the homosexual community. Morrow (1997) notes that work conducted by Fassinger (1995) and McCarn and Fassinger (1996) recognises that,

lesbian identity may develop differently from that of gay men because of such influences on women's development as gender-role socialization and the advent of feminism. The [confluence] of lesbian identity [with] heterosexual female socialization creates a complex set of experiences that further confound the identity development of lesbian girls, adolescents, and women (5).

Often a non-heterosexual's first experience as a non-heterosexual within their family of origin is that of difference or (O)therness. Bozett and Sussman (1989), argue that as individuals we expect acceptance and love within the family unit; there is an anticipation

of being able to be honest with one's family members. If a family unit displays negative attitudes towards lesbians and gays it is difficult for a non-heterosexually identified family member to be honest about their sexual orientation. It is therefore not uncommon for young people to believe they are the only individuals in the broader society to feel this way and as a result feel acutely alone and separate from their peer group (Crooks & Baur, 1999; Nelson, 1997). Fear of rejection by their family of origin is often their first most significant experience of not being able to edit their selves to fit an acceptable available identity.

Further, families which are rigid, moralistic and gender stereotyped, contribute added stress to gay and lesbian identified youth (Beeler & DiProva, 1999; Hackenbruck, 1987; Mattison & McWhirter, 1995; Neisen, 1987; Strommen, 1989; Tremble, Schneider, & Appathurai, 1989). Some children are ejected from home and/or support for schooling is withdrawn (Warren, 1997). As a result, it is not surprising that lesbian and gay youth are up to seven times more likely than heterosexual counterparts to attempt suicide (Remafedi, 1999). Isolation, low self-esteem, and physical and verbal abuse from family and peers are frequently cited as the reasons for suicide attempts (Proctor & Groze, 1994). Families of origin who are positive and accepting of a non-heterosexual family member tend to have had prior positive experiences with a gay or lesbian person and are more accepting and understanding of issues relating to lesbian and gay people (D'Augelli, 1989; Herek & Glunt, 1993; Hogan & Rentz, 1996; Liddle, Knunkel, Kick, & Hauenstein, 1998).

Bozett and Sussman (1989) assert that the more "prejudicial a society is toward a given group, the more difficulty its members [will] have in adjusting to family and societal norms" (1). It is not societal reaction per se but rather one's perceptions of the society's reactions; the monitoring of self as performing an identity based on the perceived reactions and feedback of significant others. If a family has a non-heterosexual family member and they live in a society which rejects non-heterosexuals, then that particular family also faces the real possibility of rejection and stigmatisation if they are open about their non-heterosexual family member (Bozett & Sussman, 1989; Crosbie-Burnett, Foster, Murray, and Bowen, 1996; Goffman, 1963; Laird, 1993; 1996; Mattison & McWhirter, 1995). It is not possible to predict the exact response of significant others to a non-heterosexual self. Rejection by the family is always a possibility for the non-

heterosexual family member; as is the possibility of rejection of the family by the wider community in which they live.

More specifically, young women can often have difficulty knowing how to position themselves in relation to contradictory social expectations (Oinas, 1998). For example, mothers are often significant within a family or home context. And,

research on fathers and teenage daughters has shown that this relationship is complicated and often (to the girl's disappointment) distant (Mann, 1996). This distance explains why emotions about the home are canalized through the figure of the mother, who is emotionally available. The girl's wish to distance herself from the mother can be described as an individualization process, where claiming the integrity of the body is crucial. This process is not ahistorical, but rather typical for a modern society that values the ideal of an autonomous individual, and devalues, even pathologizes the mother-daughter bond

Oinas, 1998, 83.

Mothers are often given the role of agent of social control which can be best understood from a sociological perspective. For example, they are expected to impart middle-class respectability which is in opposition to a non-heterosexual identity (Oinas, 1998; Widerberg, 1995). Further, "when a mother tries to pass on what she knows as the ingredients of proper femininity, she is doing what a good mother is supposed to do – passing on cultural capital" (Oinas, 1998, 84). Having a lesbian daughter can therefore threaten the mother's sense of herself as a competent social actor and responsible mother. Mothers are blamed for all negative non-genetic developmental outcomes (Caplan, 1990; Doane & Hodges, 1992; Eliason, 1996; Snitow, 1992; Surry, 1990). It is argued here that the potential for mother blaming can lead to a blurring of boundaries and expectations between mother/daughter relationships and expectations.

Families are significant in the discussion on, and understanding of, identity. They are the first sites where individuals can experience a sense of acceptance and belonging, or they can be the first sites where individuals experience rejection and a sense of (O)therness. Likewise, the work/career landscape can be significant in understanding how individuals are positioned by significant others.

2. 5. 2. Identity and Career

The work landscape plays an important role in the lives of the majority of people within the 23 to 33 year age bracket. Many individuals within this particular age range, who are in professional careers, have spent many years pursuing tertiary education and working their way into higher levels of responsibility. Research (for example, Morrow, 1997; Morgan & Brown, 1991; Morrow & Campbell, 1997; Morrow, Gore, & Campbell, 1996) indicates the significant influence non-heterosexual identities has on shaping career development and choices.

Like the actors in family landscapes, individuals in work landscapes can also act out unexamined myths and stereotypes. Research by Kissen (1993) and Smith (1993) states that homophobia is the last form of discrimination which remains unchallenged in most contexts of society. Unfortunately, acts of homophobic behaviour, both overt and covert, often occur in the work landscape. This is particularly evident in large institutions which have a reputation for reproducing and supporting the discourses of the dominant heterosexual landscape (see for example, Bensimon, 1992; Clarke, 2003; Ferfolja & Robinson, 2004; Gatens, 1998; Harris, 1997; Hirata & Kleiner, 2001; Treadway & Yoakam, 1982; Wallace, 2001). This can lead to situations where homophobic co-workers misuse knowledge of an individual's stigmatised identity as a means of trying to control the individual in the workplace. Workplace anti discrimination laws, policies and procedures can be vague or slow in implementation, thus increasing the difficult nature of demonstrating homophobia in the work landscape in cases of dispute allegations.

If an individual does not fit any of the available identities within a given landscape they can be labelled by significant others as stigmatised and consequently take on the only other identity available to them within that particular context, that of an outsider position or (O)therness (Goffman, 1963). This positioning can lead to feelings of isolation, loneliness and disconnection with colleagues in the work landscape. A spoilt, or stigmatised, identity places increased pressure on the individual to "manage their interactions in the larger, heterosexual world" (Esterberg, 1997, 21) and leads to difficult decisions in relation to employment security and being financially self reliant. A position of (O)ther is common for non-heterosexually identified individuals in the dominant heterosexual landscape and can make it difficult when it comes to the work context and choosing alternative non-deviant careers.

2. 5. 3. Identity and Membership Within the Lesbian Community

When lesbians and bisexual women present themselves to each other and to the world, they are, in effect, performing. Through these performances, they construct and reconstruct lesbian and bisexual selves. Yet the notion of play or performance does not mean that lesbianism is a role, something one can slip in and out of easily. Lesbian identity is constructed *in* and *through* such performances. In this way, women signal to themselves and others the nature of their desire for women

Esterberg, 1997, 81.

A lesbian identity can be defined within the context of 21st century Western culture as “primarily a self-ascribed definition held by a woman over time and across situations as having primary sexual affectional, and relational ties to other women” (Brown, 1995, 4). This label can also be ascribed to a woman by others, but it does not have any meaning for the woman if she does not accept or relate to the definition. Thus, it is very important that labels such as lesbian are self defined because of issues of safety, affiliation, role models, meeting potential partners and more importantly, meaningful connection with self stories. The literature (Auger, 1992; Brown, 1995; Crooks & Baur, 1999; Fadderman, 1982; Golden, 2000; Grahn, 1990; Katz, 1996; Patterson, 1995; Rothblum & Brehony, 1993) highlights how at different times throughout history the dominant culture has deemed it important to know who lesbians were as they reserved special, negative treatments for them that were not considered appropriate for women who merely *appeared* to be lesbian but were not. Further, women who were lesbian, but diligently denied their status, were treated similarly to heterosexual women. They were forgiven for their sexual orientation provided knowledge of their same sex attraction was discretely hidden from public view.

Stein (1998) states that “community provides the opportunity for the interaction: participation provides the learner with the means of experience” (2). Communities can provide a haven from an outside world which lacks understanding and/or is hostile. Krieger (1982, in Correll, 1995) defines community as “the range of social groups in which the lesbian individual may feel a sense of camaraderie with other lesbians, a sense of support, shared understanding, shared vision, shared sense of self as a lesbian, vis-à-vis the outside world. She further indicates that not all lesbian communities are located in specific geographic areas; some exist *only in spirit*” (271).

A lesbian community serves many functions. These functions include “the creation of a positive lesbian identity and the opportunity to establish intimate relationships. At the same time, the community demands from its members a high degree of conformity that limits individualism in an effort to maintain high group solidarity” (Correll, 1995, 271). Within the lesbian community there are many issues about labelling and identity. In a prior study conducted by Burnett (1997) with young wimmin new to a lesbian identity, the wimmin said they had come to recognise that there was an invisible list of *rules* regarding what a lesbian should look like, how they should act, and what their political affiliations should be. Entry into the lesbian community was difficult until these *rules* were recognised and negotiated. Research by Lemon (1993) involving fourteen, self-identified Brisbane lesbians, sought to highlight the discrepancies in theories of identity formation “which presume an ease of contact with the visible lesbian community” (2). Lemon was able to identify three basic assumptions which permeate the literature on identity formation. Firstly, Lemon identified the unsupported assumption that accessing lesbians or a lesbian community is relatively easily facilitated. Lemon’s study confirms lesbian wimmin within the Brisbane community did not find it easy to access other lesbians. Rather the wimmin had to “generate information about a viable lesbian lifestyle from stereotypical images and negative attitudes [as evidenced] through the education system, association with various religious doctrines, via the mainstream media and reinforced through familial beliefs” (71). They had to be *out* and make connections or associations before they could access a lesbian community. Secondly, the researcher identified that participants experienced a feeling of being different. It was this feeling of difference in the heterosexual landscape which encouraged them to explore other landscapes, or communities, to locate an identity which matched their self story. Thirdly, Lemon found that access to the lesbian community did not mean that wimmin would be instantly met with acceptance and affirmation of identity. That is, a wommin may face stigmatisation from the heterosexual world as well as the homosexual or lesbian community if she could not initially identify with the wimmin she met.

Community gatekeepers of acceptable lesbian identity are commonly referred to in the lesbian landscape as the *lesbian police*. One of the current roles of the lesbian police is to keep Male to Female transsexuals who identify as lesbian out of *wimmin-only* spaces (Brown, 1995; Raymond, 1982). Ostensibly, this is because of the so called male energy and male privilege that Male to Female transsexuals apparently bring with them (see, for

example, the Guidelines for Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, <http://www.michfest.com/>, and the Australian Lesbian Confest, particularly the Brisbane Confest held in the early 90s). It is recognised that the relationship between gender and sexual re-assignment is important, however, it is a topic which falls outside the scope of this current research. As will become evident, this study is more focused on the participants' reactions and experiences with Male to Female, lesbian identified, transsexuals.

The role of the lesbian police also includes ensuring that lesbians do not sleep with men, whether the men be heterosexual, bisexual or homosexual. This occurs through the threat of outright rejection or at the very least placing these wimmin on the periphery of the lesbian community. This rejection can include covert rumour spreading or overt snubbing at major lesbian events. As stated earlier, it is also not uncommon for wimmin with a history of heterosexual experience and new to a lesbian identity to find themselves snubbed by other wimmin for not being *entirely lesbian*. These wimmin may also experience a permanent underclass ranking secondary to so called *Triple Ls* or Life Long Lesbians. These constructs raise a question as to whether a person must be born and raised female to be socially constructed and accepted as a wommin, and thus lesbian, within the community. It also raises queries about whether one must have *really, always been lesbian* in order to be accepted currently as a lesbian.

If the way in which a wommin views herself as lesbian is not represented, or accepted, within the lesbian community then she has three choices. Firstly, censor, or edit, herself to fit the lesbian identities which are available to her within her lesbian community. Secondly, reject the identity of lesbian and define herself by other terms and other communities (for example, asexual, heterosexual but currently in love with a person who happens to be female, or bisexual). Or finally, to resist a label or identity and remain undefined and without full access to a community.

Prejudice, discrimination and violence are often a part of everyday life for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and inter sexed community in a world which has been built upon a heterosexist belief system (Berkman & Zinberg, 1997; D'Augelli, 1989; 1992; Herek, 1993; Herek & Berrill, 1992; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953; Kirk & Madsen, 1989; Morgan & Brown, 1991; Thonemann, 1999). A belief system of this type is, "an ideological system that denies, denigrates and stigmatises any non-heterosexual

form of behaviour, identity, relationship, or community" (Herek, 1993, 90). It is in opposition to this heterosexist belief system which lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and inter sexed people strive to create their non-heterosexual selves (Brown, 1995; Fassinger, 1993; Patterson, 1995; Zensky, 1991). One important strategy for reinforcing a non-heterosexual identity is the process of *coming-out* which is discussed in the following section.

2. 6. The Closet Space We Choose to Use – Pre, Initial and *Post-Initial Coming-Out*

Coming-out refers to the degree to which individuals are open about their sexual orientation in their everyday lives. This particular study is interested in the experiences of young lesbians *post-initial coming-out*, that is, young lesbians who have been out for a period of two to ten years. The literature to date deals with pre and initial *coming-out* issues and experiences, however, it does not explore the *post-initial coming-out* experiences of young lesbians within a two to ten year time frame and their positioning within a culture which does not value non-heterosexual identified individuals.

It is important here to report on the literature related to pre and initial *coming-out* of young lesbian women. While there are different theories in relation to the *coming-out* process, the literature (for example, Cass, 1979; 1984a; 1992; Troiden, 1988) commonly mentions several steps or stages which include acknowledging, accepting and expressing a lesbian identity (Patterson, 1995).

It is not uncommon for individuals to become aware of and suppress their same sex feelings at different times throughout their lives prior to and during the acknowledgment stage. Individuals can actively seek to have sexual experiences with people of the opposite sex and marry in an effort to suppress same sex attractions. The initial step in *coming-out* is usually a person's realization that she or he feels different from the heterosexual model (Herdt, 1992). Some people report knowing they were homosexual when they were small children. Many realize during adolescence that something is missing in their heterosexual involvements and that they find same sex peers sexually attractive (Mallon, 1996). It is argued that once individuals recognize homosexual feelings, they must confront their own internalized homophobia as they deal with the reality that they are members of a stigmatized minority group (Crooks & Baur, 1999).

Acceptance of one's identity as lesbian involves overcoming internalised homophobia, stereotypes, societal views and misconceptions and eventual acceptance of one's self (Hiratsuka, 1993). Expression or disclosure of one's homosexual identity is an ongoing problematic decision. This disclosure depends very much upon an individual's support network and different contexts, for example, the levels of openness within a work environment, family, long term or casual friendships. The conservative nature of the surrounding community will directly affect an individual's decision about whether or not to *come-out* and to whom (Crooks & Baur, 1999; Tafel, 1998).

If an individual decides not to disclose their sexual orientation, their relationships with others can become distant and strained. For example, to avoid awkwardness or dishonesty, many young lesbians just refrain from talking openly about their personal lives. "Our co-workers and co-students see us as shy, withdrawn, reserved, snobbish – when actually we are trying to protect ourselves from *their homophobia!*" (Loulan, 1995, 7). In a previous study with young lesbian women (Burnett, 1997; 1998) it was illustrated how the young lesbians themselves were made to feel guilty and take responsibility for others' (for example, parents and close friends) uncomfortableness regarding a lesbian identity.

It should be recognised that disclosing a homosexual identity to family members can be more difficult than disclosing it to others because of the nature of the relationships (Cain, 1991; Crooks & Baur, 1999). It is not uncommon for parents to experience difficult feelings or react with anger or guilt for fear they did something wrong (Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998; Woong, 1997). As a result many lesbians and gay men do not *come-out* to their families (Crooks & Baur, 1999). The publicity associated with the HIV/AIDS virus in the 1980s and associated stigma, rejection, misunderstanding attached to the disease, and the belief by many fundamentalist Christian groups that it was God's punishment for a homosexual lifestyle, became another reason why many individuals did not *come-out* to their families.

A term known as *passing* refers to the maintenance of a false image of heterosexuality (Lynch, 1992). Most people assume that everyone is heterosexual, so it is usually not difficult to *pass*. However, many individuals within the lesbian and gay community consider *passing* unacceptable because the concealment of identity can intensify social isolation and personal loneliness. It is believed that *coming-out* rather than *passing* could

actively reduce prejudice within society because of sheer numbers involved if everyone came out (Crooks & Baur, 1999).

Many homosexual adults who are parents find it difficult to *come-out* and many stay in heterosexual marriages for this reason (Green & Clunis, 1989). Approximately 60% of lesbians and gay men who have been married have at least one child (Bell & Weinberg, 1978). Custody or visitation rights are still fraught with difficulties and it is not uncommon for homosexuals to lose these rights on the basis of their sexual orientation, regardless of their fitness as parents (Ettelbrick, 1993; Hunter, Shannon, Knox, & Martin, 1998; Meyer, 1992; Millbank, 2002; Polikoff, 1991; Rubinfeld, 1994; Schwartz, 1990). Current laws in Australia, particularly within the state of Queensland, make it virtually impossible for lesbians wanting to be parents to access fertility clinics and screened sperm donations. Adoption is also currently not possible for same sex couples. There is further discrimination faced by mothers of male children in particular over the age of 10 years within the lesbian community because of *wimmin-only* spaces. Lesbian mothers also express a sense of invisibility to other lesbians in their parental role. It is not uncommon for these wimmin to feel stripped of their “lesbian identity by the more visible identity of motherhood, which is strongly tied to heterosexuality” (Brown, 1995, 8).

The terms, labels and research described in this section help set the scene to explore the current study’s data pertaining to the experiences of five young lesbian participants *post-initial coming-out*.

2. 7. Conclusion

Despite the social, cultural, and intellectual vibrancy of lesbian communities, and the presence of non-heterosexual women throughout Australian society, lesbians and lesbianism can often be invisible to the wider society

Baird, 2005, 79.

This chapter has highlighted the key issues of surrounding lesbian invisibility, stereotyping, self stories and identity formation. It has been shown that some highly significant gaps exist with the literature and are worthy of research. These include a deficiency in lesbian focussed research, little research conducted within an Australian context, and a lack of research which examines *post-initial coming-out* experiences for

young lesbians and explores how they position and reposition themselves within an Australian culture.

The purpose of this study, which focuses on the *lived* experiences of young lesbian wimmin *post-initial coming-out*, is to increase understanding in an area about which little is currently known. It is also significant that this study is Australian based and wimmin-centred.

It is proposed, based on the current state of field, that the present study is therefore significant. Thus the research question and subsequent cluster sub-questions, as outlined in the previous chapter, clarify that the purpose of the study is to explore and theorise the *lived* experiences of young lesbian wimmin *post-initial coming-out* within an Australian culture.

Chapter Three

Methodology

It is about invisible people becoming visible

Gamson, 2000, 348.

The methodology employed in this study is Memory Work (Haug, 1987). It is located within the field of qualitative research techniques and embedded within a social constructivist framework (Grbich, 1999). This chapter discusses the purpose, advantages and method of data collection and analysis in Memory Work. The researcher's positioning within this study is also discussed. In doing so, the following format is used as a means of guiding the reader from the general principles of feminist research (which are embedded within the study), to specific details of Memory Work methodology as it relates specifically to this study. Firstly, a critique of the ontological perspective of qualitative research methodology is presented. This is followed by a discussion of general feminist research principles used within the study. A detailed account of Memory Work methodology is then presented, along with a comprehensive description of the purpose, advantages and processes of Memory Work, followed by a critique of Memory Work. The chapter concludes with a comprehensive discussion of the positioning of the researcher as both an *insider* and *outsider* within the study, a detailed description of how the participants were gathered, how the research group was set up and how the sessions were managed throughout the study.

3. 1. Critique of Qualitative Research

This study is situated in the politically charged history of research within the field of gay and lesbian studies, which has occurred predominately within the discourses of medicine, psychology, sociology and anthropology. As mentioned in Chapter Two, *Literature Review*, research within the field of gay and lesbian studies has previously had a major focus on gay men and been largely American based. Moreover, research

which has focused on homosexuality has been an area of investigation which has experienced “severe social stigmatization” (Gamson, 2000, 347). It has been difficult to access non-heterosexually identified people because, as Gamson (2000) articulates, “they have been keepers of great secrets and the lovers of fragile double lives” (347). The brief history of lesbian research has been intertwined with findings based predominately on gay males, the politics of social movements, and affiliated with the pre-gay liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s such as the homophile movement and Daughters of Bilitis, which deferred to *experts* who used *science* in ways which reinforced notions of illness against the marginalized (Brown, 1995; Fassinger, 1993; Gale & Short, 1995; Gamson, 2000; Hanna, 1995; Jagose, 1996; Jordan, Vaughan, & Woodworth, 1997; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995; Lawless, Kippax, & Crawford, 1996; Mac Neil, 1993; Rich, 1980). Needless to say lesbian and gay research appears to be particularly more “comfortable with the strategies of qualitative research – which at least appear to be less objectifying of their subjects, to be more concerned with cultural and political meaning creation, and to make more room for voices and experiences that have been suppressed” (Gamson, 2000, 347).

Qualitative research is defined by Schwandt (1997) as a term which encompasses methods using “non-numerical data in the form of words” (130). It is recognised that qualitative research methods are varied in nature but “all share a commitment to naturally occurring data. [They also advocate] that systematic inquiry must occur in a natural setting rather than an artificially constrained one such as an experiment” (Silverman, 1993, 23). However, Gamson (2000) acknowledges that qualitative research “has meant and been different things in its different moments” (349). That is, research methods are also defined, understood and shaped by context, history, culture and people.

The debate about the benefits of qualitative and quantitative research has been explored extensively in other sources (for instance, Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; 2000; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Peplau & Conrad, 1989; Silverman, 1993) and it is not the intent of this study to repeat that debate here. Rather, it should be recognised that the researcher has made a commitment to qualitative research principles and methods, specifically, to engage in research where the boundaries and power relations between the researcher and subject are broken down. That is, the research is done *with* rather than *on* subjects.

Further, there is a commitment to examine and understand structures and relationships which shape wimmin's lives on a daily basis which can only be achieved by gathering richly descriptive data.

Within the field of research, regardless of the subject or context, quantitative research and analysis is traditionally perceived to have "more power than qualitative research – the predictive potential of broad-scale research projects [is] assumed to be more legitimate than qualitative analyses" (Hoskins, 2000, 54). While statistical analysis has been viewed as the "bedrock of research" (Silverman, 1993, 20), this form of research, more often than not, has been used to construct and promote heteronormative discourses and has unintentionally allowed participants who identify as *other*, for example, non-heterosexual identified people, to fall between the gaps or become pathologised beyond recognition. Opportunities for rich descriptive data as produced by qualitative research methods are often overlooked and the contexts and cultures which encompass the research participants are consequently disregarded (Butler, 1991; Clough, 1994; Gamson, 2000; Lewin, 1995). Therefore qualitative research methods which focus on "meaning creation and the experiences of everyday life, fit especially well with goals of visibility, cultural challenge, and self-determination" (Gamson, 2000, 348) and thus serve the purpose of the current study.

The aim of this study is to generate new knowledge in an under researched area that focuses on the *lived* experiences of young lesbians *post-initial coming-out* in a contemporary Australian culture. The intent is not to produce broad ranging generalisations but rather to create new insights for consideration relevant to a wide number of professionals and institutions who potentially interact with young *post-initial coming-out* lesbians.

3. 2. Propositions and Principles from Feminist Research Which Underpin the Study

Feminist research seeks to address the androcentric, positivist, ontological *truth/s* or reality/ies which dominate traditional research and have deterred wimmin from exploring, investigating and writing about their lives and experiences in a way which is personally meaningful by placing less value on their experiences and methods of exploring their

experiences (Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1991; Duelli Klein, 1983; Johnson, 1999; Kitzinger, Coyle, Wilkinson, & Milton, 1998; Mies, 1983; Peplau & Conrad, 1989; Reinharz, 1992; Roberts, 1988; Small, 1997; 1999; Stanley & Wise, 1983; Westkott, 1979; Wilkinson, 1986). Further, as Acker, Barry, and Esseveld (1991) state, it is only by examining and understanding inequities which render wimmin invisible and without voice within our society that change can occur. For instance, “the fundamental problem which propelled second-wave feminism was that women’s oppressed position in the social order had been justified as the natural outcome of biological sexual difference” (Somerville, 2004, 47 – 48). To counter this state of affairs, there are several key principles which support feminist research.

Firstly, feminist based research should encourage the exploration and confrontation of power relations (Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1991; Butler & Wintram, 1991; Duelli Klein, 1983; Johnson, 1999; Kitzinger, Coyle, Wilkinson, & Milton, 1998; Reinharz, 1992; Roberts, 1988; Small, 1997; 1999; Smith, 1990; Stanley & Wise, 1983; Westkott, 1979). Secondly, inherent in feminist based research is the recognition that everyday people can become involved in their own research (Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1991; Duelli Klein, 1983; Mies, 1983; Peplau & Conrad, 1989; Reinharz, 1992; Small, 1997; 1999; Westkott, 1979). Third, feminist research principles recognise that research should be done with, on and for wimmin, without comparison or reference to male based experience as the norm (Bernard, 1973 in Wilkinson, 1986).

Another key principle of feminist research is the connection between the personal and the political. Hoskins (2000) sees this connection in feminist research by the way,

that [it] brings life to abstract theoretical positions. The micro context of everyday experience is blended with the macro context of social discourse. The way in which the subjectivity of the researcher is included allows for an acknowledgment of interpretations of the phenomenon under study which are embedded within the researcher’s discursive relationships. By making these explicit, the reader has the ability to see the discourses that have framed the interpretations. This reflexive move lays bare the constructs that were used to make the interpretations in the first place and locates the researcher within specific discourses that have framed her seeing (Lather, 1993), thus acknowledging her own positionality (56).

A fifth key tenet of feminist research is the principle that feminist theory should recognise, explore and address the vulnerability and personal placement of the researcher within the research (Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1991; Duelli Klein, 1983; Johnson, 1999; Mies, 1983; Peplau & Conrad, 1989; Reinharz, 1992; Small, 1997; 1999; Smith, 1987; 1990; Stanley & Wise, 1983; Westkott, 1979). The placement of the researcher within the current study is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, Section 3.8, *Positioning of the Researcher*. Personal reflections of the researcher in relation to the overall methodology and her positioning within the study occur in the last chapter, Chapter Nine, *Conclusion*, in Section 9. 2. 1., *Personal Reflections on the Overall Memory Work Process*.

These five major feminist research principles were used by the author as a basis for choosing the research methodology, Memory Work, discussed in Section 3.3, *The Creation of Memory Work*. They also underpin the conceptual framework of this research study which seeks to explore the everyday *lived* experiences of young lesbians *post-initial coming-out*.

3. 3. The Creation of Memory Work

Memory Work lies within the ontological perspective¹¹ of qualitative research methods and is informed by constructivism (Grbich, 1999; Haug, 1987; 1992a; Hoskins, 2000; Koutroulis, 1993, 1996; Mahoney, 1991; 1997; Small, 1997; 1999), critical Marxist theory and practice (Haug, 1987), and feminist research principles (Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1991; Duelli Klein, 1983; Haug, 1987; 1992a; Johnson, 1999; Kitzinger, Coyle, Wilkinson, & Milton, 1998; Mies, 1983; Roberts, 1988; Small, 1999; Stanley & Wise, 1983; Westkott, 1979; Wilkinson, 1986). The Memory Work method concentrates on revealing the processes of social construction which have been captured in the memories and reflections of individuals in a way which breaks through culturally sustained discourses. That is, memories are recognised as essential in the construction and understanding of self. They “contain the traces of the continuing process of appropriation of the social and the becoming, the construction, of self” (Crawford,

¹¹ Ontology reflects upon the assumptions which concern the essence of the social phenomena being investigated. An ontological perspective is a world view about a particular experience, in this case, a feminist, qualitative view of research and research methods which in this instance is being used to explore themes within the everyday lived experiences of young lesbians *post-initial coming-out* in an Australia culture.

Kippax, Onyx, Gault, & Benton, 1992, 39). In the process of constructing a self it is essential to reflect. In this process of reflecting, problematic events and possible resolutions are remembered. Haug (1987) argues that the basic foundation of Memory Work is that “anything and everything remembered constitutes a relevant trace – precisely because it is remembered – for the formation of identity” (50). Memories which are gathered through the process of Memory Work constitute self in a way which case studies and interview accounts cannot (Crawford, et al., 1992). Memory Work offers “multi-layered accounts with a variety of different narrative modes, compared with in-depth interviews” (Oinas, 1999, 267).

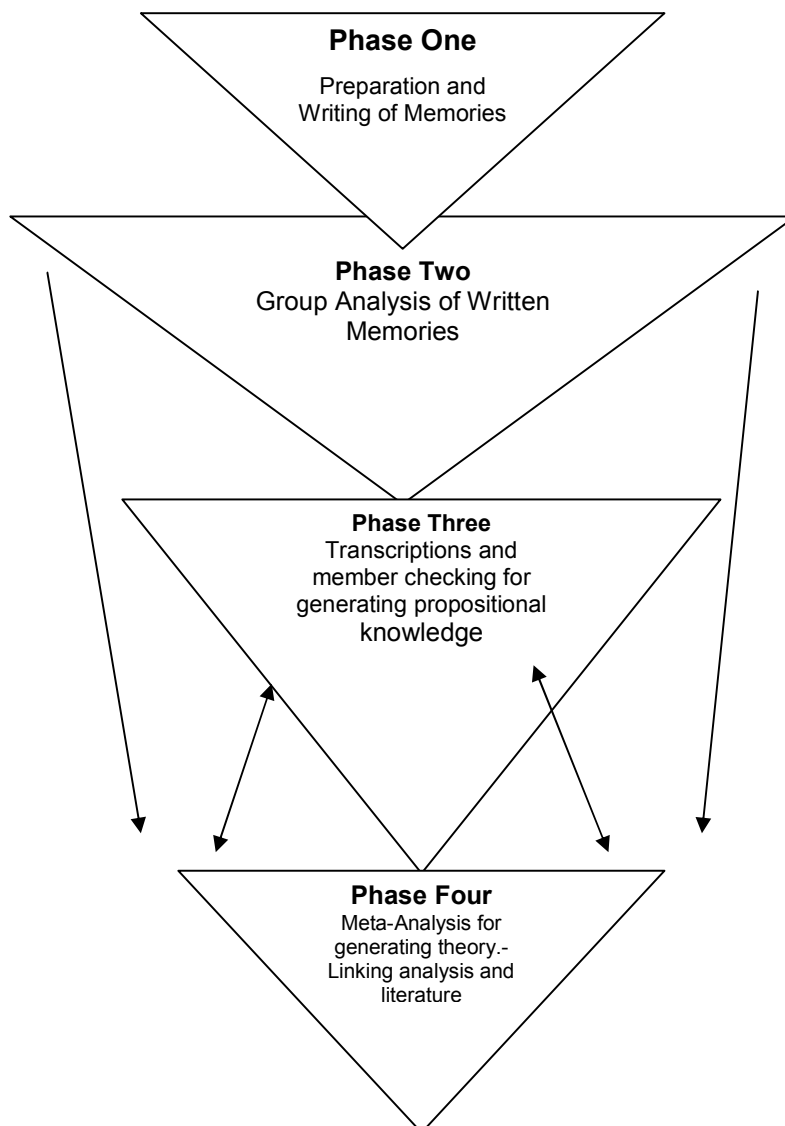
The methodological conception of the Memory Work process was developed by German feminist Frigga Haug (1987; 1992a; 1992b) who sought an empirical method which would investigate the structures and relationships within which women live and the ways in which they understand and negotiate them. Haug was particularly interested in the process whereby individual women integrate into society and was keen to investigate how they construct and position themselves within existing social relations (Grbich, 1999).

To date, Memory Work has been used in a number of disciplines. For instance, Small (1999) used it to investigate women’s and girls’ experiences as tourists while Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw, and Freysinger (1996) and Hohnen (1996) used it as a means of exploring women’s leisure time. Frey (2004) used Memory Work as a means to explore and challenge Western culture’s understanding of masculinity. Stephenson (2005) used it as a way to explore HIV subjectification; “the changing meanings and lived experiences of HIV” (39). Cotterill (1992), Farrar (1994), and Koutroulis (1993; 1996) all use Memory Work themselves and offer a positive critique of the usefulness of Memory Work in relation to women’s issues. These three authors each argue it is a viable and timely feminist research method because it involves regular people in their own research. In this study, it was an appropriate method because it valued and connected the everyday *lived* experiences of the participants in ways which enabled them to examine, understand and negotiate the socio-cultural structures and relationships which informed and shaped their understanding of selves. Ingleton and O’Regan (1998) have used Memory Work as a means of exploring the development of confidence in mathematics teaching and learning. Kaufman, Ewing, Montgomery, Hyle,

and Self (2003) used Memory Work as a means of exploring their relationship to nature, and therefore science. Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, and Benton (1992) used it to understand the ways in which gender shapes emotions from childhood to adulthood. Oinas (1998) used Memory Work to explore gender identity and adolescence with a focus on the defining power of the male gaze. Forsythe and Lander (2003) used it as a means of investigating the historical, cultural, educational, situational influences and individual attitudes of young people who do not take up smoking. The current project revisits and extends the method with a view to generating new knowledge and understanding of issues in the area of lesbian studies.

3. 4. How Memory Work Works

Figure 3.1
Overview of Memory Work in the Context of Generating Theory



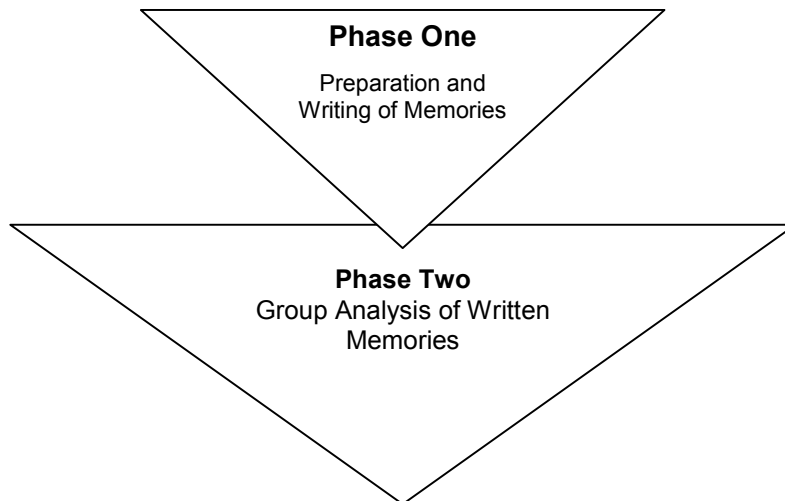
The use of Memory Work required the formation of a small group of wimmin where each member of the group was also a co-researcher. That is, each member took on the active roles of both researcher and subject through sharing memories. Each participant recalled their earliest memory about a group nominated, predetermined topic. For instance, in this study the group decided to brainstorm issues they found significant *post-initial coming-out*. These issues included, but were not limited to, relationships with significant family members and their career choice. A brief summary of themes and resulting issues for each of the nine Memory Work sessions can be found in Chapter Four, *Guide to the Participants and the Data Analysis Landscapes*. Each participant, in turn, chose one topic per meeting. Consequently, each member's contribution was seen as worthwhile and valuable, and each had ownership or a vested interest in the group (Belenky, Clinchy, Golberger, & Tarule, 1986; Crawford & Kippax, 1990; Davies, 1990; Kippax, Crawford, Benton, & Gault, 1988). Small numbers were important to ensure that each member was heard in keeping with the conceptual underpinnings of Haug's (1987) work.

Prior to each Memory Work session, participants were asked to write their Memory Text about the theme previously negotiated by all participants. This Memory Text was written in the third person (Crawford & Kippax, 1990; Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, & Benton, 1992; Kippax, et al., 1988). Members were also asked to choose a pseudonym or use the pronouns she, her or *the girl* to maintain confidentiality outside the group. It has been argued that the inclusion of biographical facts, justifications of actions, or recollection of supposed guilt, shame, or pride is excluded by the third person genre (Crawford, et al., 1992; Davies, 1990). At times, participants found it difficult not to justify their actions or include biographical facts in their written memories. However, as the group continued to meet, the process of writing in the third person became easier. The participants became more confident, both with the process and each other, and thus became less inclined to feel the need to explain or justify their actions.

After each participant had read their memory in turn without interruption, the group then attempted to find, collectively, similarities and differences within the memories, as well as tried to interpret and analyse the underlying social, cultural and political structures which were inherent within the context. As two of the five members within the group had been involved in a separate Memory Work group (see Burnett, 1997) several years earlier, they were able to offer suggestions and model the process for the three members who were new to the method. Written examples of Memory Texts and other Memory Work groups' experiences were also provided to each of the participants (Please refer to Appendix 11.1. for examples of written material provided to each of the participants).

3. 4. 1. Phase One and Two

Figure 3.2
Phase One and Two



Haug (1987) recommends that her work be seen in three phases (as per the first three phases of Figure 3.1, *Overview of Memory Work in the Context of Generating Theory*), which are always inter-related and connected. As the name suggests, there are phases, not stages of the method which one must reach in order to progress to the next level. The first phase involves the writing of the actual memories. This is done individually by each of the participants prior to meeting. Crawford, et al., (1992) have delineated this phase into six essential components:

1. "Write a memory
2. of a particular episode, action or event
3. in the third person
4. in as much detail as is possible, including even 'inconsequential' or trivial detail (it may be helpful to think of a key image, sound, taste, smell, or touch)
5. but without importing interpretation, explanation or biography.
6. Write one of your earliest memories" (45).

The second phase of the method is the group analysis of each of the memories. Once the memories have been read aloud to the group they cease to be "personal accounts and [become] historical fragments of time that [everyone can] comment and elaborate on" (Oinas, 1998, 79). Crawford, et al., (1992) have suggested the following guidelines for this process:

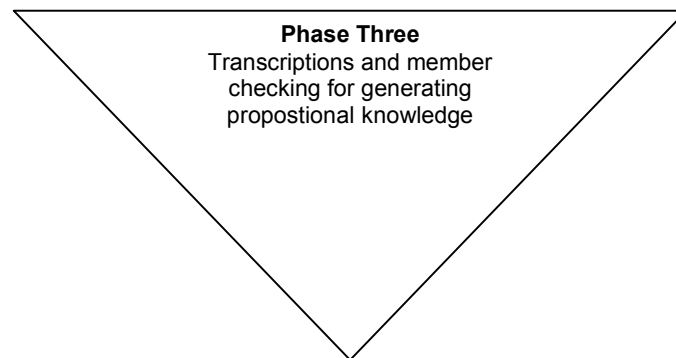
1. Each memory group member expresses opinions and ideas about each memory in turn, and
2. looks for similarities and differences between the memories and looks for continuous elements among memories whose relation to each other is not immediately apparent. Each member should question particularly those aspects of the events which do not appear amenable to comparison. She should not, however, resort to autobiography or biography.
3. Each memory-work member identifies clichés, generalisations, contradictions, cultural imperatives, metaphor, and
4. discusses theories, popular conceptions, sayings and images about the topic.
5. Finally, each member examines what is not written in the memories but what might be expected to be included (Adapted from Crawford, et al., 1992, 49).

Phase One, the writing of the Memory Text in third person, took place prior to the group meeting without any discussion between the participants about what they might write. The only guide provided to each of the participants at this phase was the theme, cue or statement, which had been previously decided upon and acted as the impetus for the writing of the Memory Text. Phase Two was the process which occurred during the meeting where each of the participants were physically present in the same room. It was

not unusual, in this study, for this phase to last between two and four hours in duration. The meeting was audio taped, with the permission of the participants, to enable transcription of the session to occur.

3. 4. 2. Phase Three

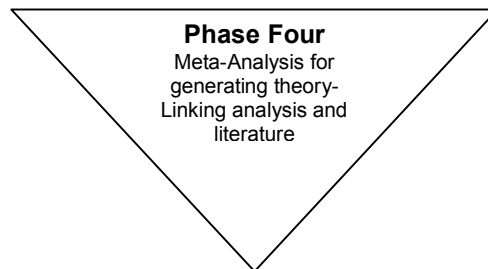
Figure 3.3
Phase Three



The third phase involved a process of member checking and validation of the data to date. As reported earlier, the discussions from phase 1 and 2 were audio taped with the permission of each group member. This allowed the researcher to prepare to take the data to the next level of analysis, Phase Four, whereby the research questions formed the focus of the analysis. Phase Three enabled the written transcripts and initial group analysis of the audio tapes to be taken back to the group for further discussion and validation so that every member maintained ownership over the data. The written transcripts and initial group analysis were sent to each of the participants for validation and further comment. This process of member checking, or validation, was integral to the study. The third phase also allowed the researcher to begin identifying recurring themes both within individual group sessions and across sessions necessary for the meta-analysis in fourth phase of the research.

3. 4. 3. Phase Four

Figure 3.4
Phase Four



It was necessary to introduce a fourth phase into the Memory Work process for the purpose of meeting the requirements of a doctoral study. The fourth phase involved a more intense examination, or a critical reading of analysis whereby the researcher made comparisons between the group's experiences and the literature, explored similarities and differences and examined the micro and macro levels of culture, discourse and politics across each of the nine Memory Work sessions.

This phase allowed the researcher to uncover four thematic categories of landscapes,

- family,
- work,
- heterosexual, and
- lesbian.

These landscapes, or significant sites, grew out of the nine Memory Work sessions and related literature. These landscapes were then used to organise the four data analysis chapters (see Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight). This fourth phase also provided the basis for addressing the research questions based on the findings of the study. Recommendations for future research, in conjunction with findings from current literature, (as discussed in Chapter Nine) also grew out of this phase.

3. 5. The Rationale of Using Memory Work for This Study

Previous studies (for example, Bailey & Benishay, 1993; Black, 1994; Elliott, 1985; Galenson, 1986; Gramick, 1984; Rogers, 1994; Zemsky, 1991) involving young lesbians, although limited in number, have used a variety of research techniques ranging from statistical surveys to qualitative interviews. While important, many of these studies have failed to provide richly nuanced descriptions of the *lived* experiences and perceptions of young lesbians living in an Australian context that emerge in this study. Memory Work can enhance understanding in this respect because there is an “emphasis on telling rather than asking” (Small, 1999, 33). This methodology also has a unique ability to uncover and understand the processes of the social construction of self in ways which other qualitative methods cannot.

This study aims to begin to build a research community of young lesbians doing research *with* and *for* young lesbian wimmin by engaging the participants in the dual roles of researcher and participant. It aims to create an environment whereby the members can engage in meaningful dialogue, act as *critical friends* and develop networks for and with each other. Memory Work methodology has these cooperative elements embedded within its process. The methodology used is also designed in such a way as to assist in member, or validity, checking processes in the final two phases of the methodology (Haug, 1987; Kippax, Crawford, Benton, & Gault, 1988; Small, 1999) through ongoing analysis and reflection. This process of group remembering, analysing and reflection produces rich data, via the use of memories, which both fractures a discourse and locate fractures within a discourse, to provide an understanding of processes involved in the construction of self.

Memory Work is appropriate for the purpose of this study for a number of reasons. Firstly, it recognises and celebrates everyday experiences as the basis of knowledge. Secondly, it confronts the problems (for example, researcher bias, and participants providing answers they think the researcher wants to hear) often encountered by the hierarchy created when a researcher engages in research *on* rather than research *with* the participants. Memory Work as a research methodology “breaks down the barriers between the subject and object of research” (Small, 1997, 6) consistent with feminist research principles discussed in Section 3. 2, *Propositions and Principles from Feminist*

Research Which Underpin the Study. Specifically, the researcher also becomes a subject.

Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, and Benton (1992) argue that Memory Work methodology allows participants, such as young women, and the researcher to connect or engage with their past experiences while at the same time providing a context in which the previous actions and current practices "are given direction and evaluation" through ongoing individual and collective reflections (38). Further, memories contain the traces of the continuing process of appropriation of the personal, social and cultural selves. Memories contain elements of social construction which the method uncovers and processes in a way which promotes an understanding of self. The focus is not on the *truthfulness* or *accuracy* of the memories per se, but rather on why the incident was remembered and what insight it can provide in gaining an understanding of how one constructs a self.

The issue of wide spread implications and applicability, or propositional knowledge, and its place in Memory Work (Haug, 1987; Hollway, 1989; Kippax, et al., 1988) is a significant reason for engaging in this type of work. Memory Work breaks down the notion that "our experiences appear unique and thus [are] of no value for scientific analysis" (Haug, 1987, 43). Crawford, et al., (1992), Haug (1987), and Kippax, et al., (1988) argue that because the data are developed from participants within a specific personal, social and cultural context, they are considered valid simply because they are a product of that domain. That is, as human beings we live collectively and it is "within the domain of collective production that individual experience becomes possible. If, therefore, a given experience is possible, it is also subject to universalization. What we perceive as *personal* ways of adapting to the social are also potentially generalisable modes of appropriation" (Haug, 1987, 43). The data reflect a *lived* reality and experience. It is not autobiographical, but rather, a cross sectional, anthropological snapshot of the particular social group and context. It is recognised that knowledge is limited to the particular social context within which it was constructed and as a result there will be no attempts to generalise the findings of the current study beyond Australian, educated, lower to upper middle class young lesbians. However, everyday *lived* experience is connective by nature and other cohorts may in fact relate to, or see themselves in, the experiences of the participants reported in the current study. This is in

fact a major strength of qualitative research and one of the main reasons why the author chose to utilise a methodology drawn from that tradition.

As young wimmin, Memory Work methodology facilitates our ability to recognise "the commonality of experience" (Haug, 1987) and uses reflection as a key component of data collection and analysis (Davies, 1990; Kippax, et al., 1988). Further, Butler and Wintram (1991) state that when wimmin are brought together to share their experiences they "offer each other support, validation and strength, and a growing sense of personal awareness, in a way that is difficult to achieve otherwise" (1). For the purpose of this study, this is a significant consideration because of the ways in which lesbian lives are rendered invisible within the heterosexual landscape.

3. 6. Critics of Memory Work

There have been a few issues concerning Memory Work identified by researchers who have used this methodology. The majority are concerned with meeting the requirements of doctoral studies whilst remaining true to the methodology (Koutroulis, 1993; 1996; Small, 1997; 1999). For example, Grbich (1999) and Koutroulis (1993; 1996) both deliberate that friendship groups may not always be ideal for this research technique because friends are more likely than not to *censor* what they *tell* ; they are less likely to be reserved than peers who are not friends. However, the use of friendship groups for this type of research can be ideal as long as boundaries and group rules are developed collectively and member checking takes place at all levels of analysis. Participants who are already friends are more likely to feel comfortable discussing complex and personal issues with each other. There is also less time taken to build group cohesion than if a group of non-friends were used for this type of research. Concerns about participant vulnerability for this study were addressed by open and continuous dialogue about decision making, ground rules and power relations during the data collection phase.

Grbich (1999) and Mitchell (1993) also suggest that the relative level of education of the participants can also influence the analysis process. This concern is also directly related to meeting the requirements of a doctoral study. Attempts were made to address this concern by being sensitive to participant interpretations and by providing an analysis of the data which was not disconnected from the participants (Koutroulis, 1993; 1996;

Small, 1997; 1999). Regarding the data analysis process, Small wrote that there is a danger, if it (data analysis) remains unrecognised or unaddressed, that “the hierarchical relationship between researcher and subject, which feminists have sought to dismantle is being maintained” (Small, 1997, 12).

The level of education attained by participants and their familiarity with theoretical analysis can also affect their level of security with the overall process. If they find the process highly daunting, they can potentially experience minimal transformation, emancipation or change as a result of participating (Grbich, 1999; Koutroulis, 1993; 1996). Potentially, participants could even feel worse about themselves and perhaps feel more deserving for their oppression. While this criticism of the methodology is still being argued and debated, for the purposes of this study, the researcher decided to involve women who had experienced a university setting through study and/or work, in an attempt to minimise the potential feelings of uneasiness around participating in a doctoral study using Memory Work.

3. 7. Positioning of the Researcher

Telling a personal story becomes a social process for making lived experience understandable and meaningful (Ellis & Bochner, 1992, 80). But in order to build bridges between private and public lives, the social context or culture needs to be more fully understood

Hoskins, 2000, 57.

An integral part of this research is the positioning of the researcher within the study and the use of a research method which both honours and facilitates this positioning. It is important, both in personal and professional contexts, for lesbians to be, and remain, visible within our Western culture. One of the aims of positioning the researcher as both *insider* and outsider within the research project is to interrogate, through the study, current misinformation and negative stereotypes presented in our society.

Personal construct theory, as developed by Kelly (1955), and used by Hoskins (2000), argues that “it is impossible to see without one’s construct system, ultimately dispelling the myth of pure objectivity and neutrality” (50). Thus, within this study, the experiences, practices, and processes of the researcher are viewed as part “of and not separable from” (Jordan & Yoemans, 1995, 394) the everyday experiences of young lesbians

within an Australian culture. It is this positioning of the researcher as both an *insider* (a *post-initial coming-out* identified lesbian) and an *outsider* (an academic researcher writing a doctoral thesis) which will consciously inform the study.

Forsythe and Landers (2003) use work by Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein (1997) who “urge researchers to take account of their *positioning*, which includes all the subjective responses that affect how the researcher sees data, including autobiographical data. They distinguish between fixed positions, subjective positions, and textual positions” (153). Fixed positions are referring to the age, generation, gender, class, nationality, and race of the researcher. Subjective positions refer to the “researchers’ life history and personal experiences” (Forsythe & Landers, 2003, 153), while textual positions refer to the “researchers’ language choices for representing their” memories (Forsythe & Landers, 2003, 153).

This study moves away from research, particularly medical studies, which have tended to ignore lesbians and their *lived* experiences altogether, and which have participated in the search for one right truth or knowledge (Elliott, 1985; Jordan, Vaughan, & Woodworth, 1997; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995; Small, 1997; 1999). Emphasising this shift away from traditional quantitative research, the author has included her own interpretations in the process and analysis of the Memory Work groups conducted.

Although reflexivity in research has become the trademark of interpretive research (Denzin, 1997; Josselson, 1996; Krieger, 1991; Richardson, 1990; 1997), it is not common practice for researchers to write themselves into the research. Making the interpretations of the researcher visible to the reader sets up a different way of thinking about research

Hoskins, 2000, 55 – 56.

Therefore, within this study, a view of a method of researcher positioning as developed by Banks (1998) was used. Banks (1998) recognises the researcher’s life experiences and values influences their research questions and the way in which they construct knowledge. He recognises that researchers can take up four positions – *insider/insider*, *insider/outsider*, *outsider/insider*, and *outsider/outsider*. The *insider/insider* is part of the community and culture and can speak with authority about it. An *insider/outsider* is socialised within the community and culture but has “experienced high levels of cultural

assimilation into an *outsider* or oppositional culture” (8). An *outsider/insider* is socialised within “another culture and acquires its beliefs, values, behaviors, attitudes, and knowledge. However, because of his or her unique experiences, the individual rejects many of the values, beliefs, and knowledge claims within his or her indigenous community and endorses those of the studied community” (8). The *outsider/insider* is then seen by the new community as an *adopted insider*. The *outsider/outsider* has been socialised within a community different from the one being studied and has a “partial understanding of and little appreciation for the values, perspectives, and knowledge of the community he or she is studying and consequently often misunderstandings and misinterprets the behaviors within the studied community” (8). Researcher positioning is deemed important here because of the feminist research methodology used for the study.

There were a number of sensitive areas which the researcher needed to be aware of in relation to this study. For instance, at times there was a sense of leading a *double life* both in relation to being *out*, yet at times closeted as a lesbian, and in terms of the expectations academia places on researchers and research participants. There was a constant re-positioning of self for the author within the institution and within the lesbian community and between the public and private lives of all of the participants involved in the study. It was essential for the author to protect the privacy of the other four participants, yet at times this was complicated because of her *insider/outsider* status within the study. Decisions about how much information the author needed to provide in order to establish her *insider* status within a particular sub-culture (in this instance, an Australian lesbian community within an urban setting) while maintaining a sense of privacy with her life outside an academic setting needed to be negotiated.

There was also the delicate balancing act required of the researcher between not dominating collective discussions with academic knowledge while providing structure useful for the production of a doctoral study. Small (1999) in her doctoral study (which used Memory Work to investigate females’ experiences as tourists), was aware of “being sensitive to participants’ interpretations of the discussion” (12). Both Small (1997; 1999) and Koutroulis (1993; 1996) were able to address this balancing act by incorporating a written *meta-analysis* within the process. This is the fourth phase of the Memory Work process the author developed for the purposes of this study. Both Small and Kourtroulis

recognised that their interpretations were not necessarily a better analysis than that provided by the co-participants, but grew out of a need to meet the requirements of their respective doctoral studies and therefore incorporate an academic perspective on the issues discussed. The author took a similar approach with this study.

There was also an essential tension and desire to find a way, a common language and understanding which would enable a number of *communities/landscapes* (heterosexual and non-heterosexual; researchers and participants; academic and non-academic) to communicate with, acknowledge, and inform each other in meaningful dialogue/s. The goal was to make space/s within existing cultures and communities to explore *differences* with respect and openness in ways which would promote understanding and break down invisibility, negative stereotypes and myths affecting *post-initial coming-out* lesbians.

3. 8. Method

This dissertation is aimed at exploring the *lived* experiences of young lesbians *post-initial coming-out* with the desire to increase understanding and knowledge about issues, experiences and concerns involving young lesbians using Memory Work methodology.

3. 8. 1. Selecting Participants

For the purposes of this study a group of five young lesbians between the ages of 23 and 33 were gathered as participants. This places the participants in a two to ten year time frame from when they first came out. As discussed previously in Chapter Two, the participants in the current study came out between 16 and 25 years of age (it has been shown statistically that this is the most likely age group amongst young wimmin to identify and come to terms with their sexual orientation if they identify as lesbian {Elliott, 1985; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Zemsky, 1991}). This two to ten year time frame is referred to as *post-initial coming-out*, a term coined by the author for this research. To assist with group dynamics, the author drew participants from a group of wimmin who had a connection with each other through friendship groupings or support group connections, for example, Brisbane Lesbian Youth in Social Support (BLYSS). In an attempt to manage differences, the participants all had English as their main language,

however, a number of them were bilingual. Each of the participants had had some experience within a university setting, either through completed or partially completed degree/s or current/former employment within a university context. They all came from lower to upper middle class socio-economic backgrounds. For the purposes of this study it is recognised that lesbians who are 1st generation immigrants, or are from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds (NESB), have additional issues to contend with in regards to sexual orientation based on cultural and religious beliefs and family expectations which differ from lesbians from an Anglo Saxon background (de la Peña, 1994; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1996; Quintanales, 1999; Sears, 1995; Tremble, Schneider, & Appathurai, 1989). As a result, the author chose to include only participants who were naturalised Australian citizens. It is also recognised that participants who have some experience within a university setting will feel more at ease with and knowledgeable about participating in a research project connected with a doctoral study. This criteria for the selection of participants allowed the study to highlight the needs, experiences and positioning of this specific group within the Australian urban lesbian community.

3. 8. 2. Setting Up the Group

It was important that each member in the group understood the principles of Memory Work and the different characteristics of group structures and dynamics. To facilitate this understanding, each participant was provided with written material outlining the Memory Work process and examples of Memory Texts obtained from other memory groups (for example, Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, & Benton, 1992; Haug, 1987) (see Appendix 11.1). As well, participants were advised of the anticipated commitment requirements in relation to the duration of the study, meeting schedules, and writing requirements, before they agreed to participate.

The initial meeting addressed the expectations, concerns and issues about the methodology and study. It did not include the first Memory Work session, but was rather a group effort toward understanding the process and developing ground rules. An open discussion about decision making and power relations within the group was also facilitated during this first meeting, and was ongoing in subsequent sessions as required. Kolb, Rubin, and McIntyre (1984) state that groups constantly make conscious and unconscious decisions, however, it is important to observe how decisions are made within the group structure, or dynamics, and to “assess the appropriateness of the

decision to the matter being decided upon and to assess whether the consequences of given methods are really what the group bargained for” (129). Ultimately, the success of the study depended upon all members within the group feeling free to openly discuss how decisions were made. Much of the initial meeting was dedicated to this. Time was also given during the initial meeting to brainstorming a collective understanding of the ground rules for the group. These rules included issues such as protecting privacy and dealing with conflict, with the aim of setting boundaries and expectations which avoided placing undue stress and/or unrealistic expectations on friendships. These last two issues in relation to friendship groups, undue stress and unrealistic expectations, were issues raised by Grbich (1999), Koutroulis (1996), and Small (1997; 1999) in their respective research studies.

3. 8. 3. Maintaining Privacy

To maintain the privacy of each of the participants and in keeping with methodology components as outlined by Crawford, et al. (1992), each participant was asked to choose an alternative name. These pseudonyms were used in the writing of the dissertation and in the writing of the participant’s individual memories for each of the sessions.

3. 8. 4. Setting up the Sessions

After a suitable night was decided upon by the group, a timeline was developed outlining when and where the meetings would occur, the approximate length of each meeting, and a timetable for when participants could expect to receive transcripts from previous meetings. During the initial meeting and the first Memory Work session the participants developed a list of possible topics or themes to be used for each of the meetings. From previous research using Memory Work (Burnett, 1997), it was found that developing a large list of possible topics was beneficial as it allowed greater freedom and choice whilst also reinforcing to the group that they were not bound by the initial list of topics. Issues regarding transportation, overnight accommodation, and recommendations or strategies regarding missed meetings were also finalised during this initial meeting. As a result of the planning undertaken in the initial meeting, each of the five participants

successfully attended all of the nine Memory Work sessions, no small accomplishment in itself.

3. 9. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined Memory Work methodology and its positioning within the ontological perspective of qualitative research techniques. It has also highlighted how Memory Work is embedded within a framework of social constructivism and informed by feminist research principles and theory. Memory Work methodology was chosen due to the recognition that “how one interacts with dominant and marginalized discourses becomes a valuable site for exploring processes of changing identities” (Hoskins, 2000, 63). Hence, the timeliness and significance of this study, which explores the *lived* experiences of young lesbians and how they are positioned, and interact, within dominant heteronormative and marginalised discourses of an Australian culture, have been demonstrated.

Chapter Four

Guide to the Participants and the Data Analysis Landscapes

Whatever is unnamed, undepicted in images, whatever is omitted from biography, censored in collections of letters, whatever is misnamed as something else, made difficult-to-come-by, whatever is buried in the memory by the collapse of meaning under an inadequate or lying language – this will become, not merely unspoken, but unspeakable
Rich, 1976/1979, 199 – 202.

As with any dissertation the end document does not fully reflect the sheer volume of data collected or analysed. This short chapter is included here to provide the reader with a big picture of each of the participants and the nine Memory Work sessions conducted for this study. It is envisioned that this will allow the reader a better contextual understanding before launching into the four detailed data analysis chapters which follow and provide a comprehensive look at the family, work, heterosexual and lesbian landscapes *post-initial coming-out*.

To begin with, each of the five participants are introduced. Each snapshot presents pertinent information about them at the time of the study. These brief snapshots are followed by a short overview of findings from each of the nine Memory Work sessions that were conducted as part of this study, leading into the first of the four detailed and comprehensive data analysis chapters.

4. 1. The Participants

The five young lesbian wimmin who participated in this study were aged between 23 and 33 years of age. Each of them had self identified as lesbian for between two and ten years at the time of this study and subsequently fell into the category of *post-initial coming-out*. In this study, the term *post-initial coming-out* indicates that the participants have worked their way through the turbulent *coming-out* process (Eliason, 1996) and are currently in a dynamic process of finding niches for themselves within a variety of environments; in this instance, the family, work,

heterosexual and lesbian landscapes. This *post-initial coming-out state of being or positioning* indicates a period where the participants were developing, both individually and collectively, ways of connecting with, negotiating and sustaining their lesbian selves within the various communities. They were engaged in the challenges of “making visible and recognizable who we are and what we are doing [which] always involves a great deal more than just language” (Gee, 1999, 17). As Gee (1999) states, this involves “acting – interacting – valuing – talking - (sometimes writing - reading) in the *appropriate way* with the *appropriate* props at the *appropriate* times in the *appropriate places*” (17).

Each of the participants had known each other through various friendship groups and a young lesbian social support group which had been active for approximately six years¹. However, the social support group had disbanded because of a lack of funding approximately one year prior to the beginning of this study. There were five participants for this study; Rosie, Lucy, Sam, Ani and Tulli. All names were pseudonyms and chosen by the individual participants.

Rosie was in her late twenties. She had completed several tertiary level degrees at both undergraduate and post-graduate levels. She was the eldest child in her family and had one sibling. At least one other member of Rosie’s immediate family identified as non-heterosexual. Rosie had been in a committed same sex relationship for approximately five years.

Lucy was in her late twenties. She had partially completed an undergraduate degree. Lucy was the first participant to co-own a house with her long term partner. She was the eldest child and has two siblings. She was the only female child. While Lucy was born in Australia, her parents were first generation migrants of non Anglo Saxon decent.

Sam was in her mid to late twenties. She was the only participant who had full time employment in the field of her undergraduate degree at the time of the study. Sam was the eldest child with one other female sibling. She had become involved in a relationship just prior to the commencement of data collection for this study.

¹ The strengths and limitations of having the participants known to each other through various friendship and lesbian social support groups have been discussed in the previous chapter (see specifically sections 3. 6. *Critics of Memory Work*, 3. 7. *Positioning of the Researcher*, and 3. 8. 2. *Setting Up the Group*) and in the final chapter (see specifically section 9. 2. 1. *Personal Reflections on the Overall Memory Work Process*).

Ani was in her late twenties. She worked part time within the field of her undergraduate degree at the time of the study. Ani was keen to pursue post-graduate studies. She was the eldest child with one other male sibling. She was involved in a long term relationship.

Tulli was in her early thirties. She worked part time in the field of her undergraduate and post-graduate degrees at the time of the study. Tulli was the eldest child with one other sibling. She had been involved in a long term same sex relationship for approximately nine years at the time of data collection.

Each of the five participants possessed a strong sense of self as a lesbian identified wommin despite ongoing struggles and positive and negative experiences in relation to their non-heterosexual identities. These experiences are articulated in more detail in the following four data analysis chapters as they relate to the family, work, heterosexual and lesbian landscapes. However, what follows here is a short overview of each of the nine Memory Work sessions which were drawn on in the four main data analysis chapters.

4. 2. The Memory Work Sessions

A brief summary and analysis of each of the nine individual Memory Work sessions are presented here in the order they were conducted. All five participants, Sam, Rosie, Lucy, Ani and Tulli, were present for each of the nine Memory Work sessions. While these sessions are not discussed in detail at this point, a description of the manner in which they occurred is provided in this chapter. The themes for each of the nine Memory Work sessions were brainstormed during an initial meeting which occurred prior to the first Memory Work session. As discussed in the previous chapter (see sub-sections 3. 8. 2. *Setting Up the Group*, and 3. 8. 4. *Setting Up the Sessions*), the initial meeting addressed the expectations, concerns, and issues about the methodology and study. It enable the participants to develop a set of ground rules and list of possible themes for the actual Memory Work sessions.

4. 2. 1. Session One – *Breaking Through the Politically Correct Glass Ceiling*

While each of the participants had met previously for a briefing session on Memory Work methodology (in keeping with the theoretical framework of the study), and

brainstormed some possible topics, this session was the group's first attempt at an actual Memory Work session. As stated in the previous chapter, *Methodology*, possible themes were suggested by each of the participants in the briefing session and at the end of this first session as topics of personal interest and/or those which they felt related to their lives as young lesbians *post-initial coming-out* in an Australian context. The theme for the first session, *Breaking Through the Politically Correct Glass Ceiling*, was suggested by one of the five participants as an interesting launching point for the study. While it did go well and some productive themes and analysis grew out of the session, it also proved to be an important learning session for each member of the group. For example, the participants realised that the overall theme, *Breaking Through the Politically Correct Glass Ceiling*, was both too specific yet at the same time not specific enough to allow them the space to write memory texts which might be related to the topic. That is, they stated that they found the theme difficult in helping them locate a memory. However, the Memory Texts from the two participants who had been part of a different Memory Work group years earlier did help to model the third person style and technique associated with the methodology. As a result there was considerable difference in the style of themes used for the remaining eight sessions. The remaining eight sessions had themes which were less wordy and more specific in topic, yet broad enough to capture a variety of memories and emotions.

Overall, this first session allowed the participants to tease out their own expectations and understandings of the process. It also enabled participants to compare and contrast these expectations and understandings with the other participants. This allowed the development of a shared understanding and responsibility for the overall process to begin. At times during the nine sessions this understanding was challenged, yet it ultimately was redeveloped into a strong and comfortable process. This was especially the case in the last three sessions as depicted by the length, analysis, strength and responsibility undertaken for the overall process by each of the participants. Each of the participants indicated a desire to continue the process, yet they were conscious of the amount of data collected and time constraints related to the doctoral study. They also acknowledged the depth of insight, strength of the group analysis in each of the sessions as well as the inner growth, or shift, each participant experienced as a result of engaging in the Memory Work sessions.

Significant findings which arose from this first session centred on the political nature of the lesbian community and the way in which multiple political agendas were

employed to silence or empower members. For instance, participants used examples of how they saw Male to Female lesbian identified transgender wimmin excluded and silenced by lesbian identified wimmin born wimmin separatists in politically driven events such as Lesbian Confest². Issues of tokenism in relation to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Indigenous people which arose specifically within the lesbian community were also raised by the participants when expressing their overall dissatisfaction or disappointment with politically motivated events. For example, one participant recounted a memory of a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender open air rally where a speaker (Anglo Saxon in descent and what the participant perceived as being 20-something and probably middle class), was acknowledging the Indigenous owners of the land. The minute's silence which followed to remember those who had been killed and the speeches about land rights and a call for the government's apology to the stolen generation also did not sit well with the participant, mostly because of the overwhelmingly obvious lack of Indigenous people present, both as speakers and within the crowd. Her knowledge of how Indigenous people had been treated within the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender community over the years also heightened her feelings of discomfort about the tokenism of the event. This Memory Text enabled the participants to discuss and analyse what they perceived, and had personally experienced, as politically driven tokenism within the local Lesbian and Gay community.

As well as addressing political issues within the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender community, this session also examined the assumptions and stereotypes within the general heterosexual community about many of the groups and events associated with the wimmin's movement, like *Reclaim the Night*³, as being lesbian run and controlled. These assumptions and stereotypes led directly to significant others within the heterosexual landscape positioning each of the participants as being automatically involved and aligned with these events, regardless of the participant's individual political alliances or physical capacity to attend or assist with these events. For example, one of the participants had mobility restrictions because of her health which made it difficult for her to attend these events due to the lack of facilities which catered to her needs. Significant others, both within and outside the lesbian landscape, did not understand her physical needs and were unable to reconcile her lack of attendance at these events. Another participant

² Lesbian Confest is an Australian conference for lesbians held every two years. Its location changes every two years, but is mainly held in capital cities.

³ *Reclaim the Night* is a yearly street march and festival held around Australia. It aims to highlight violence towards wimmin and children.

was disheartened by events like *Reclaim the Night* that excluded supportive males from marching and perpetuated the myth that only men were responsible for physically and mentally abusing and hurting women and children. All of the participants in this study were aware of, and supported, events which worked towards community education of lesbian domestic violence. They were aware of the contradictory elements inherent within events like *Reclaim the Night* and some felt torn between their involvement or lack of involvement as a result of these issues.

4.2.2. Session Two – Family Dynamics

This session highlighted the impact family, both family of origin⁴ (that is, birth family) and self defined or constructed family (this is a process whereby individuals actively constructed a family of choice who are supportive and accepting of them [Kuhn, 1995]), had on each of the participants in terms of how they understood their lesbian selves and perceived and positioned themselves within the wider context of society.

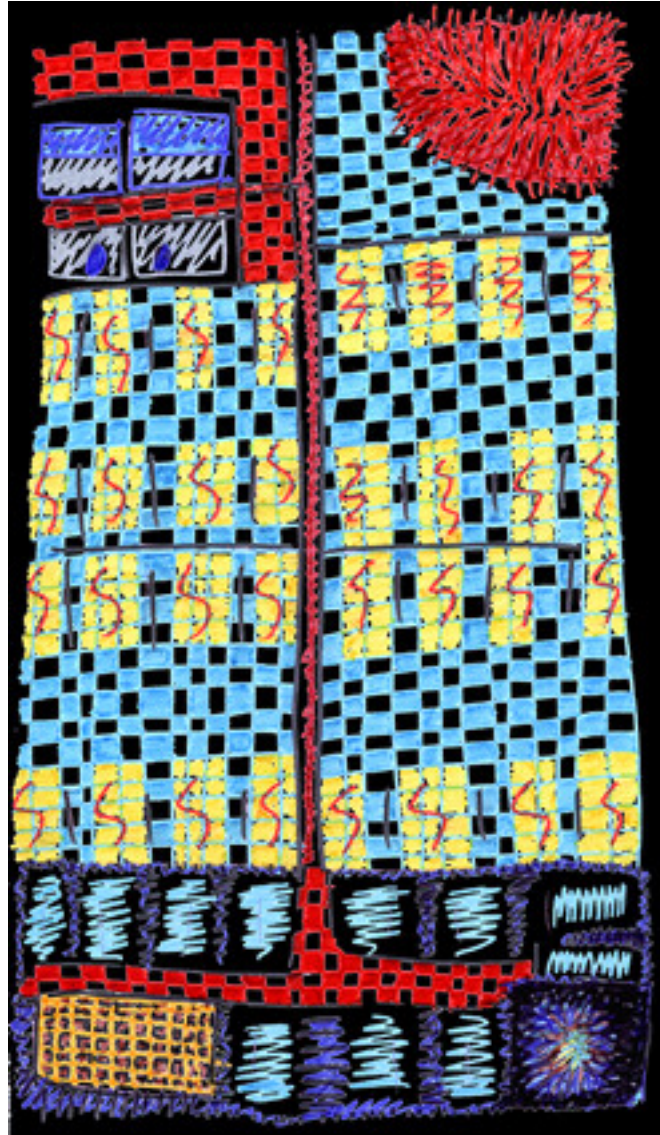
Relationships within the family of origin with regard to supportive and non-supportive family interactions were examined and deemed significant to the participants' understanding of self. The exploration of myths and stereotypes surrounding lesbianism which are perpetuated within our society were also explored, particularly within the context of interactions with the family of origin. These relationships are addressed in detail in the first of the data analysis chapters, *Negotiating the Family Landscape*.

4. 2. 3. Session Three – Confronting the Health System

Both this session, *Confronting the Health System*, and session four, *Negotiating Sexuality and Career*, took place during a weekend camping trip. This trip was suggested by participants as a means of strengthening the bonds between the group as well as allowing two sessions to take place over one weekend. Participants also saw it as a means of enjoyment, relaxation and the possibility of engaging in some art work as another medium to represent some of the themes growing out of the sessions (See Figure 4.1, *The Hospital Ward*, designed by Rosie to accompany her Memory Text for this particular session). Tensions which grew out of this camping trip are discussed in more detail in the Chapter Nine, *Conclusion*.

⁴ Family of origin is a term commonly used in this literature (For example, Eliason, 1996).

Figure 4.1
The Hospital Ward



This session highlighted several important issues. Firstly, it highlighted the feelings of frustration, intimidation and powerlessness experienced by each of the participants when dealing with the medical profession in general. It also brought to the forefront the high levels of anticipation and mental preparation each participant went through in order to prepare for the routine questions which assumed a heterosexual identity every time they interacted with medical professionals, except when they were able to access staff at medical centres specifically for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender community. However, participants confirmed that access to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender focused medical centres and staff was hampered by

location, transportation, income and access to private health insurance.

Overall, the participants experienced high levels of homophobia and felt caught in a system which continually preserved outdated myths and stereotypes at all levels of the medical profession (for example, General Practitioners, Nurses, Specialists, Psychologists, Psychiatrists, and Medical Centre Office Clerks), when faced with accessing health care needs for themselves and/or significant others.

4. 2. 4. Session Four – *Negotiating Sexuality and Career*

The second data analysis chapter, *Negotiating the Work Landscape*, grew out of this session as a result of the important role career and the associated inherent decision making processes had for the 23 to 33 year age bracket of the participants involved in this study. Issues were identified and explored around how career choices and options for each of the participants were affected by their respective lesbian selves. The participant's self defined positioning and positioning by significant others within their work contexts and that of the wider context of society were also explored. While a *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identity was only one of a multitude of factors the participants used to define who they were, it played a substantial role in the decisions they made about career choices and their interactions with others in a workplace setting.

The role of tertiary education as a means of establishing and maintaining employment within a particular field was significant in terms of commitment, time and financial obligations. That is, each of the participants had engaged in further education and all had struggled financially in order to secure the necessary qualifications to pursue employment in their chosen careers. The possibility of conflict with employers and/or fellow work colleagues because of a participant's lesbian identity resulted in profound decision making and imposed constraints in terms of possible image construction within the work context. For instance, many of the participants had to make difficult decisions in relation to their personal appearance in order to avoid conflict and *pass* as heterosexual within their respective sites of employment. Participants also had to decide if they would be open about their identity and same sex relationships, who they would tell or not tell within their work place, and how much personal information they would share in general; a right which was taken for granted by the heterosexual population.

Additionally, there was a hypersensitivity to colleagues' potential feelings towards people with non-heterosexual identities. As a result, participants were acutely aware of how they portrayed themselves within the work landscape depending upon their status, that is, whether they were in a temporary or permanent role, and the amount of time and energy they had invested in breaking into their desired career path. Ultimately, participants took risks and made informed choices based on their experiences of homophobia in the work context, which in turn influenced their long term career options.

4. 2. 5. Session Five – *Meeting the Partner's Family*

This session identified how the tensions inherent in meeting a partner's family were further complicated by a lesbian identity. Interactions with a partner's family were complex and made more difficult when a partner's family could not understand or accept the lesbian relationship. The session was able to highlight how the participants were able to create and negotiate new ways of communicating with their partner's family.

4. 2. 6. Session Six – *Unexpected Challenges and Oppositions*

This session explored a collection of memories and events which described a variety of unexpected challenges in the participant's day to day *post-initial coming-out* lives. Many of the incidents highlighted the fluidity and vagueness of homophobia, and the subsequent difficulties experienced by the participants in challenging situations which were non-confrontational yet acted nonetheless to silence and isolate them.

Participants were able to delve into issues surrounding boundaries, respect, power and control as they related to their specific, yet similar, experiences. When participants were able to challenge unacceptable behaviour directed towards them as lesbian identified wimmin they were often made to feel invalid, neurotic or paranoid. They were labelled as overly assertive and therefore unacceptable.

4. 2. 7. Session Seven – *Negotiating the Lesbian Landscape*

This session was significant in that it sought to identify and unpack the lesbian landscape as it existed at the time of this study for each of the five participants, *post-*

initial coming-out in an Australian context. It highlighted the invisibility of the lesbian landscape/s in general society and the important and pivotal role non-language verbals (for example, dress and hair styles which did not conform to society's view of what constituted feminine fashion sense, use of jewellery such as wimmin or lesbian symbols or pinkie rings, and symbols of rainbows or upside down triangles in pink or black incorporated into dress, jewellery or body art) and language-in-use (for example, using non-gendered terms such as partner rather than husband/wife or boyfriend/girlfriend, and discussion about particular geographical locations synonymous with high populations of lesbian and gay people, cafes, bookshops or events being slipped into conversation) played in identifying and maintaining sub-group landscapes.

4. 2. 8. Session Eight – *Lesbian Couples in Public Spaces*

This session identified and explored three issues. Firstly, the non-language verbals used by the participants to recognise other lesbians and lesbian couples in public spaces. Secondly, issues around participants being comfortable to display affection to a same sex partner in public. And lastly, issues related to participants' feelings of safety in relation to proximity to home or *safe place houses or businesses*⁵ in terms of the possibility of personal injury and the blurring of home life (being *out*) and work (being potentially closeted). If participants were unable to be open about their *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identities at work, then they preferred to place very definite boundaries between their private and work lives. That is, they tended not to socialise with potentially homophobic work colleagues and experienced uncomfortable feelings if they unexpectedly ran into work colleagues after hours in geographical locations or venues which were synonymous with the lesbian and gay communities. This session mainly focused on how the participants developed boundaries between their private and public lives and the strong importance each of them placed on feeling safe in a variety of contexts or environments.

⁵ The practice of businesses or private houses displaying a universally recognised safe place sticker for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender community was introduced in the 1980s in response to the high levels of physical and verbal violence experienced by members of the community and the limited resources and understanding by the general population to counteract these violent encounters.

4. 2. 9. Session Nine – *Lesbian Sex and Negotiating Relationships*

This session focused primarily on the negotiation of lesbian sex in terms of understanding and establishing relationship boundaries (for instance, monogamous or non-monogamous/open relationship, casual sexual liaison or potentially more permanent relationship) rather than specific details about what constituted lesbian sex for each of the participants. It highlighted how the participant's understood and negotiated the boundaries (monogamous or non-monogamous) in their respective relationships and how they felt and reacted when they thought these boundaries had been tested or crossed by either their partner or members of the lesbian community. Stereotypes as they related generally to lesbian relationships were explored as were issues surrounding the public (specifically how the participants felt they portrayed their relationship/s both in the lesbian and heterosexual landscapes) and private image (specifically how they acted within the privacy of their own homes out of the eye of significant others) of the individual relationships for each of the participants.

4. 3. Conclusion

This chapter described each of the nine Memory Work sessions as they were conducted for this study. The aim was to provide the reader with a big picture of the process and pertinent issues of the *post-initial coming-out lived* experiences of young lesbians in an Australian context. Each of the nine themes for the Memory Work sessions were unanimously chosen by the participants. The following four data analysis chapters explore and investigate the landscapes of family, work and the heterosexual and lesbian community/ies for the participants *post-initial coming-out*. The next chapter, *Negotiating the Family Landscape*, is the first of the four data analysis chapters.

Chapter Five

Negotiating the Family Landscape

A family without secrets is rare indeed. People who live in families make every effort to keep certain things concealed from the rest of the world, and at times from each other as well. Secrets, perhaps, are a necessary condition of the stories we are prompted by memory to tell about our lives
Kuhn, 1995, 2.

Family, both family of origin¹ (that is, birth family) and self defined or constructed family (this is, where individuals actively construct a family of choice who are supportive and accepting of them, but not necessarily blood related), impact greatly on how a woman perceives and positions herself within the wider context of society (Kuhn, 1995). The impact of family of origin on each of the participants was particularly evident in this study where the extra dimension, or complexity, of a lesbian identity was involved. As a result of the significance of the family theme throughout the nine Memory Work sessions, this data analysis chapter will focus specifically on how the participants negotiated their family landscapes and how this negotiation contributed to the re-evaluation, understanding and re-building of their *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identities.

More specifically this chapter will explore -

1. Significant relationships within family of origin and this impact on *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identity and positioning;
2. Significant events and/or rites of passage within the family structure; and
3. The impact of a same sex partner within the family of origin and the joint exploration, between same sex partners, of negotiating new ways of communicating, participating and creating space for inclusion of the same sex partner.

¹ Family of origin is a term commonly used in literature within this area (For example, Beeler & DiProva, 1999; Eliason, 1996; Forsythe & Landers, 2003)

A short overview of each of the participant's family landscape are presented in a text box format as a means of focusing the reader's attention on relevant information on each of the five participant's experiences and family contexts. The formation of these overviews has grown out of the nine Memory Work sessions but has been summarised by the author.

Sam

Sam's family of origin had always been accepting of her, her lesbian friends and partners. Her mother played a key role in portraying positive images of non-heterosexual people throughout her formative years through discussions about family and friends who identified as lesbian or gay. She was sensitive to the fact that Sam may have identified as lesbian from an early age and chose gifts which did not reinforce social gender norms (such as dresses and dolls), but rather those which sent strong messages to Sam that *difference* was acceptable and okay. For example, she chose books with positive female role models which did not conform to socially determined notions of femininity, articles of clothing which did not restrict her movement, and toys which were of interest to her and allowed her to construct and develop spatial awareness. Relationships with Sam's current partner's family were significantly different from her own in that her partner's parents were older, from a non-urban setting and had limited or non-existent experience with lesbians or gay men. Sam's partner had not openly discussed her identity or their relationship with her partner and as a result the partner's parents viewed the relationship as that of good friend and flat mate.

Rosie

Rosie's family were also accepting of her lesbian identity and current long term same sex relationship. One of Rosie's parents *came out* as non-heterosexual during her pre-adolescent years and this resulted in her parents separating. However, this did not produce any long term animosity between her parents and extended family but rather helped pave the way for her own lesbian identity being a non issue within the family. Like Sam, Rosie's partner's family were not accepting of homosexuality in general and in particular their relationship. Rosie and her partner, after many years of perseverance, were beginning to make small breakthroughs with her partner's parents at the time of the data collection for this study.

Ani

Ani's parents had also separated but unlike Rosie, Ani was in her early twenties when this occurred. Her father was very accepting of her lesbian identity and was a significant relationship in her life. Ani's mothers' acceptance fluctuated between denial and distain to acceptance and tolerance depending on context and who was present. Ani's mother was a significant presence in her memory texts which highlighted the problematic relationship that existed between the two of them. Ani's partner's family were unable to accept her or their relationship.

Tulli

Like Sam's partner's family, Tulli's family were from a non-urban setting and had limited or non-existent experience with lesbians and gay men. As a result of family dynamics, Tulli was not able to discuss her lesbian identity openly with her family of origin. Instead, she lived many hours away from her family of origin and quietly challenged them from a distance. Her only sibling was accepting and tried where ever possible to include her long term partner in significant family celebrations and events like Birthdays, Christmas, and Easter. There was also evidence of a dysfunctional mother/daughter relationship which are explored more fully in the relevant section later in the chapter.

Lucy

All members of Lucy's immediate family of origin, whilst loving, were unable to accept her lesbian identity or her relationship with her long term same sex partner. This was despite living in a large urban setting and having knowledge of a number of extended family members and/or friends who identified as non-heterosexual. Like Tulli, Lucy also had an atypical mother/daughter relationship which are explored more fully in the chapter.

One of the main focal points within this chapter is to explore how the participants re-evaluated, understood and re-built their lesbian selves within a heterosexual socially situated context, particularly through the influence of relationships with significant people in their lives, in this instance, family of origin. It is important to investigate here how the lesbian micro-cultures and identities were influenced, either positively or negatively, by the heterosexual macro-culture in which they exist. This is a focus which remains unexamined in the literature about Australian lesbian lives and identities *post-initial coming-out*.

This chapter firstly examine the participant's relationships with parents with regard to positive, non-supportive and *shifting*² relationships within family interactions. Within this, the myths which exist and are perpetuated within our society about lesbians are also explored. Secondly, as the participants' relationships with their mothers developed into a significant theme, they are examined separately within the general section on parents. This is followed by exploring the important role siblings played in making sense of *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identity for each of the participants. Further, this chapter also examines the subsequent positioning of each participant within their family of origin. Other children in the family, for example, cousins, nieces and nephews, also played an important role within the identity formation process. Their role in the participant's subsequent decisions to maintain contact with their family of origin and perpetuate family relations is also explored. The chapter is concluded by a discussion on family traditions and celebrations and the impact of acceptance or non-acceptance of a same sex partner on the participant's overall sense making, positioning and relationships with significant

² The term *shifting* has been italicised to emphasize, for the reader, the dynamic and uncertain

others in their family landscapes.

5.1. The Ties That Bind Us – Families and *Post-initial Coming-out* Lesbian Identities within an Australian Context

Relationships with families, but specifically parents, are complex, and influenced by wider social and cultural contexts, particularly when there is a lesbian identity involved (Beeler & DiProva, 1999). For example, outdated medical profiles of particular sub-groups of people can inadvertently support the cultural belief system of a family influenced by ethnicity, language and religion. While each of the participants were born in Australia and had English as their first language, at least three of the participants were from second or third generation immigrant backgrounds. The unspoken and unexamined cultural ties and expectations from each of these cultures were more influential in the wommin's lives than might first be imagined. Just exactly how influential is articulated in this chapter.

Culture and language were definitely factors which shaped Lucy's parents' initial and continuing reaction to her lesbian identity. Not only did they actively seek *professionals*³ (for instance, solicitors, counsellors, doctors, psychologists and psychiatrists) who would reinforce their value system, but they specifically consulted medical practitioners who would use their medical training to reinforce archaic myths about homosexuality in ways which undermined Lucy's understanding of her lesbian self. For example, a number of doctors and psychologists told Lucy and her parents that this attraction to wommin was just a phase and that Lucy could become heterosexual if she tried hard enough and met the right man. These *professionals* were often also from the same country of origin as Lucy's parents. While the issues of ethnicity, language and religion are not the main foci of this research, their influence on relationships within a family of origin cannot be ignored when examining, as is the case here, each wommin's, negotiation of the family landscape. Consequently, an analysis of family relationships and the construction of

nature this type of relationship had for the participants in this study.

³ The terms *professionals* and *medical professionals* has been italicised through this document as a means of drawing the reader's attention to the broad range of people who fall within this term. While each of the participants did eventually locate *medical professionals* who were knowledgeable of lesbian issues they did encounter many who lacked understanding and perpetuated current myths and stereotypes about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

post-initial coming-out lesbian selves within an Australian context cannot be complete without reference to them.

5.1.1. Significant Relationships - Parents

As suggested previously, the participants' relationship with their parent/s was significant and complex. One type of relationship identified in this study included families whose interactions were positive. These positive relationships involved the parent/s' acceptance of their daughter and her lesbian identity. Sam and Rosie's parental relationships were situated within this first category. Their respective parents recognised their daughter's lesbian identity as just another aspect of their daughter or their daughter's way-of-being. A different type of relationship between family and daughter can be characterised as primarily negative due mainly to the non-acceptance of a daughter's lesbian identity. This second type of relationship was experienced by Lucy and to a lesser extent Tulli. A further type of relationship was neither solely positive or negative, but shifted across both of these dimensions, depending on the context, between token acceptance and total rejection. Ani's relationship with her father could be categorised as predominately positive, however her relationship with her mother could be characterised in this way as a *shifting* relationship. Each of these three categories, 1. positive relationships, 2. non-supportive relationships and 3. *shifting* relationships, is explored in the following sections.

5.1.2. Positive Family Interactions

Firstly, positive family interactions were evident and reported upon during the data collected in the nine Memory Work sessions in Sam's family, both immediate and extended. Their continued acceptance of her sexual orientation was significantly different to the experiences of some of the other participants within the group, for example, Tulli and Lucy. Sam's family's initial response to her *coming-out* and continued support through the *post-initial coming-out* period was a level of acceptance which all of the participants in this study desired.

I'd grown up with the expectation that it would always be that way [acceptance of lesbian identity] because [of the way] I was brought up. My mother, never hid anything within the family and including my father's side, I knew exactly which aunt [the family thought was lesbian] because she [my mother] was up-front about it all. My mother would talk to me about these things, like my father's sister, there [were] so many signs that would suggest that she was a lesbian given that she was living with a friend for over ten years. They bought a house together (Sam, GA S2, FD, 37⁴).

Sam's family's acceptance of her lesbian identity, her friends and partners was always positive. Throughout her life they always spoke about same sex issues in a positive and constructive way. For instance, Sam highlighted how her mother would always talk to her about lesbian issues but in particular, family members who were thought to be non-heterosexual in their orientation. Sam felt, upon reflection, that her parents may have guessed her non-heterosexual orientation early in life and prepared her accordingly by discussing same sex issues in a positive manner. Sam and her mother highlighted particular signals, or signs, in their numerous conversations about an aunt, on her father's side of the family, which would possibly indicated a lesbian identity. On a recent visit, Sam asked her aunt how she identified,

I sort of even said, "Well are you gay?" And she said, "No, I'd love to be a lesbian but I'm just not". So she kind of denied it to me but at the same time it's been a discussion in the family (Sam, GA, S2, FD, 38).

This type of conversation facilitated Sam's positive construction of her own identity. She stated that growing up she did not feel that being gay had any negative connotations attached to it. She felt that it was an identity which was just as acceptable as heterosexuality. Open discussion about homosexuality also extended across Sam's mother's side of the family and her openly gay family friends. These openly gay family friends were regular visitors to the household and contributed to the building of supportive relations within the family. As Sam stated:

[It's] always been talked about as a legitimate way to sort of live your life. I would not have ever anticipated that they [Sam's family] could view it negatively to be gay because they've had gay friends, they've really accepted it, like they've always made it clear that you can do whatever you

⁴ Throughout the data analysis chapters each inserted transcript will be coded as Participant's pseudonym (Sam), Group Analysis (GA) or Memory Text (MT), Session Number (S2), First capital of the theme of the session (Family Dynamics = FD), and Transcript page number (37).

want with your life and be accepted (Sam, GA, S2, FD, 38).

Sam's experience reflects current findings in research (for example, D'Augelli, 1989; Herek & Glunt, 1993; Hogan & Rentz, 1996; Liddle, Knunkel, Kick, & Hauenstein, 1998) which suggests that people who acknowledge, in a positive sense, or have had a positive experience with a gay or lesbian person, are more likely to be accepting of lesbian and gay identities and understanding of issues relating to lesbian and gay people. Sam also argued that a sibling's negative experiences with illicit drugs also helped the family put her identity into perspective. By comparison, accepting a daughter's lesbian identity signified fewer problems for Sam's family than accepting one's daughter as a drug user. This further highlights the significance of the contexts in which a woman negotiates family landscapes.

Before I came out my [sibling] really broke a lot of rules and got into drugs and really terrible [partners] and stuff. So me being gay was like everything else was great, like I was studious, at uni, [and] like doing well in the rest of my life so even if they had had an issue or a problem with it in some way it was never going to compare to my [sibling] (Sam, GA, S2, FD, 38).

In this case, identifying as a lesbian was perceived as a legitimate way to live and certainly less rebellious than drug abuse.

In a similar way, Rosie's family was also supportive of her *post-initial coming-out* identity construction and of her emerging relations with her same sex partner. An immediate member of Rosie's family had *come-out* many years before and had borne the brunt of the family's initial rejection and misunderstanding. Her memory text recounted a conversation with an uncle who talked to her about her gay parent's *coming-out*. What was significant for Rosie in this particular memory text was that it was, as she stated, the context of acceptance which allowed her to re/construct an understanding of her family dynamics. It helped her make sense of past family interactions that remained previously unexplained and unexamined at the time of her parent's *coming-out*. For example, the absence of visits to and from immediate and extended family members. This conversation with her uncle was recounted in the Memory Text and revealed how Rosie was able to make sense of her *post-initial coming-out* lesbian self and subsequent positioning within her family unit. Unlike Tulli and Lucy, Rosie had a positive homosexual role model in her immediate family who was accepted within the family unit and played a

key role in her life. It was the recognition of homosexuality with a supportive family context that facilitated her identity construction.

In both incidents described above, each of the families had experienced positive interactions and knowledge of lesbian and gay people and issues prior to the participant's initial *coming-out*. These families were able to accept and support their lesbian identified daughters/sisters and their friends and partners. As a result of this acceptance, Sam and Rosie acknowledge that their supportive families affirmed and facilitated their identity formation *post-initial coming-out*. This was markedly different when compared to those participants who had non-supportive family interactions.

These data support the idea that *post-initial coming-out* negotiations are shaped by the socio-historical and socio-cultural constructs within families of origin. Some histories and cultures are conducive to positive experiences and negotiations whilst others actively work against the recognition and acceptance of lesbian identities. Negative experiences of this type are discussed in the following section on non-supportive family interactions.

5.1.3. Non-Supportive Family Interactions

Neither Ani, Lucy, or Tulli had the type of communication with their parents that could be classified as completely honest when considering their feelings, emotions or lives. While the data suggest that dysfunctional communication lay at the heart of each of their respective family structures, it was compounded further by their *coming-out* and recognition of their *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identities and relationships. Fear, unexamined myths and stereotypes about homosexuality, and religious beliefs were also key aspects which impinged on the type and level of communication between Lucy, Tulli and Ani and their respective family members. This resulted in the construction of non-supportive family interactions *post-initial coming-out*.

Relationships and communication with family, immediate and extended, impacted on how the participants shaped their lives. While positive interactions with lesbian and gay people does, in many cases, lead to increased acceptance of lesbian or gay identified family members and members of the general public, as suggested in the previous section, this study clearly indicates that this is not always the case. This lack of

increased acceptance appears to occur particularly when complex social influences such as culture and religion were involved. For example, Lucy's family rejected her uncle just prior to his death, when it was revealed he was dying of an AIDS related illness. Lucy's Memory Text revealed that she was fearful of disclosing her lesbian identity. She was also concerned about the subsequent consequences as she did not want her family to reject her in the same way. As a result she had always kept her lesbian identity as covert,

Like I always thought, even knowing what I was feeling inside, I always thought I'd end up with a family, a husband you know, and kids and what have you. I never ever thought there would be a time in my life where I would actually be a lesbian, you know, like actually be able to live that. Cause I saw my uncle and he was a beautiful man, he was so generous and everything, you know, like to see my uncles throw stones at his coffin when he died from AIDS, like, I didn't want to live like that (Lucy, GA, S2, FD, 45).

Lucy's family's reaction to the death of her uncle from an AIDS related illness left an indelible impact on the way she viewed homosexuality and her expectations about family. Further, it silenced Lucy and prevented any public identification of herself as lesbian.

Unexamined myths and stereotypical images of homosexuality also impacted greatly in Lucy's construct of a lesbian identity and privatised the *post-initial coming-out* experience. This can also be said to a lesser extent for Tulli and Ani. Specifically, during the nine Memory Work sessions there were discussions about three main myths and stereotypes which transpired in relation to family dynamics and landscapes. The first myth centres on the misunderstanding of homosexuality as a phase which one could, would, or should grow out of with the onset of maturity. The second myth that was the focus of discussion centred around the belief that lesbianism was a mental illness or dysfunction and could be *cured* with the appropriate psychotherapy or re-training by *medical professionals*. Finally, the third misconception identified by the participants was that a lesbian identity indicated a wommin's desire to be masculine. Each of these three myths are illustrated in the following paragraphs.

While there is research (for example, Carlson & Steuer, 1985; Christie & Young, 1986;

Hooker, 1957; LaTorre & Wendenburg, 1983; McDaniel, 1989; Pillard, 1988) which identifies and refutes the myths associated with homosexuality that were prevalent in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, many of the participants' parents, for example, Lucy, Tulli's and to some extent Ani's mother, still lived out these myths as unquestioned truths. That is, they believed that, despite the consistency and length of time their daughter held a lesbian identity, it was still a phase through which she would pass. It is difficult to say whether this belief pattern was *wishful* thinking on behalf of the parent/s or a belief of an unquestioned and misinformed *truth* purported by the medical profession prior to the 1970s. The current study did not address this question. However, there are sufficient data to articulate that unexamined myths in relation to homosexuality were influential in three of the participants' interactions and relationships with their parents. Lucy described a conversation with her mother in one Memory Text, "Her mum ask[ed], "When are you going to grow out of this phase?" Lucy replied, "This is not a phase". Her mum's sobbing turned to wailing. Lucy remember[ed] the last time she had this conversation with her mum and realise[d] she would have this conversation again next week and the week after and the week after" (Lucy's MT, S2, FD, 2). In Lucy's case, her mother's belief that lesbianism was, for her daughter, a phase, was persistent and unshakable and concluded in this specific family context that a lesbian identity was unacceptable as a long term lifestyle choice.

This belief system, that lesbianism is a passing phase, was further evidenced in the group analysis when Lucy recalled her experience with the medical profession, in particular a series of doctors who supported and reinforced her parents' beliefs. These experiences became embedded in her own thought patterns and beliefs to the point that she believed that lesbianism was some form of mental illness or dysfunction. This was evident as she contended during one memory session,

Lucy: Well if you want to look at it in a clinical sense it's not normal. Like if I went to a psychologist and [said] I'm a lesbian, they would immediately assume that there is some kind of problem there ...

Ani: The psychologist I went to, who was a psychiatrist ... and it was the only time I got a response out of him was when I said I'm a lesbian.

Lucy: That's what they're taught in psychology, that is what you're taught.

Tulli: Yeah I know but it's been taken off the list (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, DSM-IV).

Lucy: That it's a mental, it is a behavioural problem.

Ani: Really?

- Sam: No, it's been taken off the list.
- Tulli: No it's been taken off the list, it was 1970 in the States and 1973 in Australia and New Zealand. It was taken out of the DSM-III as a mental illness, it's not seen as a dysfunction or a behavioural issue any more.
- Lucy: That's funny because like when I came out to my parents, or when they came up here and they found me and I went back [home] to get my clothes and for the whole five days that I was there I went [and] saw every single doctor you could possibly think of and all of them thought I was like abnormal.
- Rosie: But I think that the difference is that your parents sought out people who would reinforce their ideas.
- Sam: Yes.
- Rosie: Rather than just going to any old psychologist they tried to find ones who they knew would have the same value system as them ... [It is hard to communicate with someone who's] original language doesn't even have words for what you are. There's no way for them to understand it easily, they can't even talk about it in their own language (GA, S2, FD, 9 - 10).

Clearly, Lucy's parents viewed the world not only through heterosexual eyes, but through mediatory filters that Lucy reported were cultural and religious constructs as well.

In this case, factors such as culture, religion and language need to be considered here as significant in shaping the family's reaction to a child's *coming-out* and retention of a lesbian identity (*post-initial coming-out*). These additional factors impacted upon Lucy's interactions with family and their beliefs about lesbianism. This led to Lucy having to interact in two very separate landscapes. One was as an *out* wommin when she was physically removed from her family of origin and their associated friends in the lesbian landscape. The other interaction was with as a covert, or hidden, *post-initial coming-out* lesbian in the heterosexual landscape of family and family friends. Lucy's complex dual interactions with her family, friends, and work colleagues added an extra dimension which restricted her ability to freely express herself and interact with others without self editing, monitoring or censorship. This fractured identity constructed a complex world for her *post-initial coming-out*. The bi-fractured worlds which she crossed as lesbian wommin/heterosexual daughter generated emotional burdens that shaped her world in complex and demanding ways. For instance, she had to consciously edit and monitor what she could and could not say or share with her family. This meant that she was always on guard and felt disconnected from herself and her family. This double life was also experienced by Tulli but to a lesser extent.

The third myth or stereotype which was perpetuated by Lucy's parents and the medical advice they sought was a belief that identifying as a lesbian was the result of an innate desire to be masculine. They believed that if a woman wanted to be with another woman physically, then one of them must want to be a man, that is, a Female to Male identified transgender person. Transgenderism refers to a phenomenon where the physical attributes of a person do not match their mental image and identity construction and understanding of themselves, in this case, a male trapped inside a female body (Allgeier & Allgeier, 2000; Eliason, 1996; May, 2005; Raymond, 1982). Lucy did not feel like she was a male trapped inside a female body. She did not identify as a Female to Male transgender person, rather, this was an assumption by significant others (parents and medical professionals) which illustrates their way of understanding Lucy's lesbian identity. This misconception had a complex impact on Lucy's understanding of her *post-initial coming-out* lesbian self. However, Lucy was able to manipulate these myths and family relations to sustain her lesbian identity and her partnership, albeit with great difficulty. Despite the presence of family, medical and cultural myths, her commitment to her construction of self as lesbian, *post-initial coming-out*, was maintained through her strong support network of friends.

As suggested previously, the impact of culturally mediated family values upon a *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identity cannot be ignored. As lesbian is a Western identity term it is not surprising given Lucy's ethnic background as non-Western, where there was no equivalent language within her family of origin's culture and language to describe lesbian or gay people, determined the relations within her family, immediate and extended. Public knowledge of same sex relations in Lucy's family of origin country resulted in physical punishment, shame on the family name, and excommunication from the community. The history of the family relations resulted in the belief that Lucy identifying as lesbian was problematic.

Rosie: I think though, Lucy, with your [experience] is that you had that one gay figure in your life and it was a mixture of trauma and ...

Lucy: Yeah.

Tulli: Yeah and negativity (GA, S2, FD, 46).

Complexities involving culture and language can be illustrated further via Lucy's intricate relationship with her father, both in terms of his non-acceptance of her lesbian identity and in terms of breaking down the traditional child/parent relationship. The following transcript describes how Lucy's father removed her from his will because of her lesbian identity. Interestingly, the scene of the removal was during a major family function. Quite publicly, the family solicitor presented Lucy with papers to sign which effectively wrote her out of her father's will and denied her existence within the family. This event occurred in a public setting with a large number of immediate and extended family members and friends present which meant Lucy felt unable to question her father without embarrassing the family further or causing a scene. It appears to have been well calculated in an attempt to avoid discussion or confrontation.

Lucy: The [Insurance] guy came to my [sibling's] wedding and I was standing at the door greeting people and taking them to their seats and he says to me oh when you've got a moment I've got some papers for you to sign. When I got to his table I think about three or four hours after everyone had eaten and stuff ...

Tulli: Not really appropriate to do at a family function!

Lucy: Not really appropriate to do it then! He just said to me oh your father's changed his will, we need your signature and I knew exactly what it was going to be. Once dad's made up his mind that's it (GA, S2, FD, 35 - 36).

Lucy's father also found it hard to accept Lucy's lesbian partner despite their long term relationship. Even after many years, he tolerated Lucy's partner's presence in the house on short visits, but did not speak or interact with her in any way. In fact, he was prone to sit in another room of the house when Lucy and her partner were awake and then cry the minute he thought they were asleep.

Further, exploration in the group analysis of a parent/s' inability to accept their daughter's lesbian identity demonstrates how this non-acceptance was often played out through the use of *emotional blackmail*⁵ as a means of controlling the daughter's ability to talk about

⁵ The term *emotional blackmail* has been italicised here to highlight both the importance of the term and the different explanations the participants attached to it.

her identity or her same sex relationship or same sex attracted friends or community within the home setting. Sometimes this blackmail was indicative of other unrelated family dysfunctions but often it was used as a means of silencing an aspect of the daughter's life and *saving* the family's public image as *heterosexual and happy*.

Lucy and Tulli were both able to identify their family's use of *emotional blackmail* and the effect it had on them. They were both able to use this knowledge as a means of regaining some form of control over their respective lives. The technique of *emotional blackmail* was significant in both of their lives. It was a powerful force used in a sustained way by both mothers and fathers and without warning. It kept both Lucy and Tulli in a constant state of vigilance and uneasiness when interacting with their families. There were many manifestations of *emotional blackmail* expressed by the participants in this study. For example, families who resorted to the use of *emotional blackmail* techniques used it in instances where the daughter's lesbian identity had the potential to be known outside the confines of the immediate family structure. Where the information had the potential to *damage* the family in some way, for example, *emotional blackmail* was used to silence speaking about lesbian identities in order to *save* the family's face or public image. The following excerpt from Lucy's Memory Text illustrates what many of the participants interpreted as *emotional blackmail* because they saw it as Lucy's mother making Lucy feel guilty about the impact of her lesbian identity on her family and their public image as a well adjusted heterosexual family,

Lucy couldn't hear her mum. "Mum are you there?". Tears burst through the telephone to Lucy. "What's wrong mum? Has something happened?" "No, I'm just missing you". More and more tears fell with sobbing. "You left me, left me by myself". Lucy's stomach churned. Her head was saying hang up. Just get off the phone. But her heart was saying, don't be so insensitive. Tears started rolling down Lucy's face and she started weeping. Her mum said, "Its very hard for me to live here when you're not with me. Everyone asks me all the time about you. And I just feel ashamed because I know what you're really doing. I know what your life is really about. I can't even buy clothes anymore because you're not here with me. How do I know which [change room] door is the men's or the lady's?". Lucy's mum didn't speak English fluently. Lucy's heart sank into her toes. She didn't know whether she would vomit or faint (Lucy, MT, S2, FD, 3).

The impact of this Memory Text is unpacked in the following group analysis where the participants discuss their respective family's shame and expectations of them.

Lucy: I'm jealous of you guys. You have that thing with your parents where you can just like, there's not that emotional blackmail, you know, whenever you call them? You guys are lucky.

Ani: Yes. I don't get it with my mum but I get it with other members of my family.

Lucy: My parents are ashamed. They won't tell them [extended family and family friends].

Tulli: Yeah mine too. And it's like that's what struck me in your [Lucy's] memory and in my memory was the whole emotional blackmail kind of control thing and like particularly with your's [Lucy's], like people asked about you all the time but what [is your mother] supposed to tell them? Like your mother is saying, I know the truth and [let's] keep it in the immediate family [because] I couldn't possibly let anyone outside the family know ...

Rosie: Because it would be a negative reflection on them.

Tulli: Yeah that's right, it's that whole saving face ...

Lucy: Yeah, cause my father has built his name up for so long and is so respected in the community ...

Tulli: Yeah so somehow you're responsible for keeping up your family's name.

Ani: Yes (GA, S2, FD, 7 - 8).

Given the negative images of lesbians which exist within the Australian macro-culture of heterosexuality, it is clear that the families of the participants, in relation to recognition of lesbian identities, valued outside people's opinions more importantly than the acceptance and love of their own child. It was the perception of Lucy and Tulli, that the positioning of the family within society impacted upon their parent's relationships with their children.

Goffman (1959) and Bozett and Sussman (1989), explain the importance of the perceived perception of the positioning of the family within the minds of significant others as the monitoring of the performing of an identity, in this instance, a happy heterosexual family. If the family has a non-heterosexual family member and they live in a society which rejects non-heterosexuals, then that particular family also faces the real possibility of rejection and stigmatisation if knowledge of their non-heterosexual family member becomes public. Thus, the way in which each participant interpreted other people's actions, especially within the contexts of family, undoubtedly influenced the way in which she interacted within that context and ultimately how she felt about herself.

Identity construction within non-accepting families for lesbians is undoubtedly problematic. However, it is clear that this set of relationships was not always malicious. Interestingly, Lucy identified a difference between *emotional blackmail* used maliciously and that used by her family as a means of expressing love, care or concern.

Lucy: I don't know about you but for me it's not emotional blackmail. I know that clinically that [is] what they call it but I deeply feel for my mum because I know that what she's going through is really hard.

Tulli: Yes.

Lucy: Cause you know we were really close and I did betray her by not telling her but ...

Ani: Did you betray her or was it just ...

Lucy: Well cause we talked about everything, you know, and instead of saying it was a girl I was saying it was a guy and she assumed everything was normal when I think that if she had known earlier maybe she would have taken me to a therapist earlier like they did, I don't know, I'm just thinking out loud (GA, S2, FD, 8).

Lucy argued that her mother's non-acceptance was more closely linked to her care and concern, and that her mother did not engage in *emotional blackmail* as the term was understood by the other participants.

A family of origin's value system, or accepted code of conduct, appeared to be another critical factor in shaping family reactions to, and interactions with, a lesbian daughter. That is, the type of communication which existed between the participant and her parent/s was underpinned by a set of *values* and communication style that characterised all of the daughter's interactions within the family unit. For instance, if the communication was free flowing, constraint free and open, like in the case of Sam and Rosie, then parents were openly accepting of their daughters' lesbian identity, friends and partners. Participants reported that they could share their lives openly and honestly without filtering information which may harm, offend or potentially sever their relationship with their parents. However, as in the case of Lucy, Tulli and Ani, if the communication was stilted and hampered by thinking which was strongly influenced by homosexual myths and stereotypes, then fractured communication became part of the everyday lived experience of the participants. This is consistent with the findings of Gramling, Carr, and McCain (2000) which affirms that all identity construction is generally mediated through the nature of family relationships and communication patterns within family units.

It is argued here that family styles of communication, as reported by the participants, could be said to be a reflection of different dysfunctional family prototypes (Due, 1995; Eliason, 1996; Herek, 1993; Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998) which were heightened and intensified by the revelation of a lesbian identity. For example, Ani recognised that her mother appeared to have difficulty speaking about her lesbian identity without tension. Both mother and daughter were often misunderstood by the other. As confirmation of the dysfunctional nature of their relationship *post-initial coming-out*, Ani relayed a conversation she had had with her mother about this time in her life,

My mum and I actually had a conversation a few weeks ago and she said, I don't know how it came out, she said it's not that I didn't like it when you *came out*, it's just that I didn't like your girlfriend at the time. And I thought well that's pretty stupid because that's not what the arguments were all about but anyway she said I knew when you were in about grade nine that you were gay because it was just something you said. And I said well what did I say? She couldn't remember what I said but she said I knew when you were in grade nine that that's what was going to happen (Ani, GA, S2, FD, 41).

This chapter has described to this point, the nature of positive and non-supportive relations within families that have impacted on the construction of lesbian identities, *post-initial coming-out*. The third category of relationships discussed here is what is labelled *shifting* relationships. This category moves between the two extremes of positive and non-supportive relations and was most commonly experienced by Ani in her relationship with her mother. The following transcript is an excellent illustration of this type of relationship and case in point,

Ani: [When it comes to relationships with family], I'm just out on my own.
Lucy: Well I feel like you have a taste of both worlds, you have that emotional blackmail but you also have that other world as well. So you're life can be turbulent.
Ani: Yeah cause like you never know, like you think, particularly with mum, you think that it's all going to be alright and then she'll come out with ...
Tulli: Some incredible ...
Ani: Yeah, some stupid statement, like ...
Lucy: It's always big, isn't it?
Ani: Like I love your partner dearly but I wish that she had a penis or something like that (laughter) ...
Tulli: And I just look at her dumbfounded and go well I'm really pleased that I don't (laughter) (GA, S2, FD, 11).

Another example of Ani's relationship with her mother, provided below, further highlights the tokenism of her mother's acceptance. Often, Ani's lesbian identity was used as a point scoring device with new friends who were perceived to be more liberal. The actions described within this example are also likened, by Rosie, to the *coming-out* or *closeted tango*⁶ often experienced by those with a non-heterosexual identity.

Tulli: But it's interesting cause it's like, with your mum, it's a real leverage point with new friends, it's like I'm cool and groovy because my daughter and her partner are lesbians and like I'm so cool and groovy and other times with like older family friends it's like we just don't mention it. Tulli is a family friend. Do you know?

Lucy: Yeah.

Tulli: So it's really inconsistent (GA, S2, FD, 12).

The mother/daughter relationship is central to this particular analysis because mothers are given the role of agent of social control in Western culture (Onias, 1998; Widerberg, 1995). This relationship is more fully explored in the next section. In fact, this study identifies the mother/daughter relationship as the most significant relationship within families of origin in terms of scaffolding the development of *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identities.

To summarise this section, the data suggest that dysfunctional communication within the family of origin was further complicated by a *post-initial coming-out* lesbian family member and resulted in what is identified in this study as non-supportive family interactions. Unexamined myths and stereotypes about homosexuality and fundamentalist religious beliefs were key aspects which impinged on communication with, and understanding of, the non heterosexual family member. These non-supportive interactions also appeared to increase participants' feelings of alienation, fear of rejection, and difficulty in creating a cohesive and positive narrative, or story, of self as a *post-initial coming-out* identified lesbian. Instead, these non-supportive interactions led to complex dual interactions which restricted everyday interactions and required continual guarded editing and censorship of self in an effort to survive in the bifurcated worlds of their lives; that is, the family/ work world (heterosexual landscape) and the

⁶ The term *closeted tango* has not been cited elsewhere in the literature. It was a term developed and used by one of the participants in this study. Hence, it is italicised to emphasize its' unique relevance to this study.

local lesbian world (non heterosexual landscape). The mother/daughter relationship appeared to play a significant role in the positioning of a *post-initial coming-out* lesbian in the non-supportive family structure. These relationships are explored in the following section.

5.1.4. Mirror Reflections - Mother/Daughter Relationships

There have been a number of studies which explore generally the relationship between mothers and daughters (for example, Arcana, 1981; Boyd, 1989; Chodorow, 1978; Doane & Hodges, 1992; Hirsch, 1981; Irigaray, 1993; Maroney, 1986; Phillips, 1991; Rich, 1977; Snitow, 1992). However, few (for example, Rafkin, 2001) have focused on how this relationship is complicated or enhanced when the daughter identifies as lesbian. While the mother/daughter relationship was not the central focal point of this research, it emerged as a significant theme within the study as a factor that affected communication and the re-positioning of the lesbian daughter within the family structure, *post-initial coming-out*.

Of significance, there has been much written within the field of psychology which critiques the discourse of mother-blaming (for example, Caplan, 1990; Surry, 1990; 1991). This literature, emanating from psychology and medicine, has “supported and nurtured mother-blaming, by utilising negative labelling and blaming diagnoses that pathologises mother’s behaviour, ignoring the role of all others in the child’s environment” (Koutroulis, 1996, 137). Thus, mothers are blamed for all negative non-genetic developmental outcomes. Further, as medical and psychological discourses have also engaged in the pathology of lesbians, it is not surprising that the literature which has emerged has blamed mothers for the non-heterosexual identity of their children. These theories have infiltrated society and been accepted as unquestioned *truths*⁷ by the large majority of heteronormative society (Eliason, 1996; Griffin, Wirth, & Wirth, 1986). As can be evidenced by this study, it is not uncommon, either initially or

⁷ The term *truths* has been italicised in this instance to draw the reader’s attention to the stance taken within this research that there are no given truths as such which exist in society. Rather, it is the stance within this research that knowledge is socially constructed. However, it is acknowledged that homophobic misconceptions and stereotypes are often portrayed in Western society by misinformed groups of people as *truths*. For instance, the belief that overpowering mothers are responsible for producing gay sons, all of whom are assumed to be effeminate, is a

long term, for a mother to feel responsible for the non-heterosexual identity of their child and for some members of society to blame the mother for the alternative sexual identities of her child. This was clearly evident for Lucy, Tulli and to some extent Ani.

As Lucy states, and as is reflected in the literature (for example, Fox and Inazu, 1980; Phillips, 1991) when it comes to communication between mothers and daughters, most daughters do not feel entirely comfortable talking about sex related topics. While a lesbian identity is not wholly and solely about sex (Brown, 1995; Eliason, 1996; Gramick, 1984; Kitzinger, 1987; Sears, 1989), it does contain a sexual component which may be outside the realm of experience, knowledge and understanding of the mother. Based on evidence from the participants, it is argued here that this consequently increases anxiety for both and reluctance on behalf of the daughter to bring up any discussion related to her sexual identity. This was made even more complex for Lucy when her mother stated in a general conversation that if her daughter ever considered a lesbian identity “she would put her nine feet under ground or shove her back up and get a refund” (Lucy, GA, S2, FD, 47). Further, as current research supports, Lucy and Tulli both viewed their lesbian selves as something separate from the relationship with their mothers and, consequently, had a desire to keep that aspect of their lives out of the maternal gaze. Both wimmin argued that this allowed them to maintain and protect their autonomy, and to articulate their lesbian identity, *post-initial coming-out*, in contexts outside mother/daughter relationships.

Another interesting, and slightly different, dynamic unfolded in the cases of Ani and Lucy. Ani and Lucy’s mothers were on the most part able to accept other family members and friends who were openly lesbian or gay, but were unable to accept their own respective lesbian daughters to the same extent, and with the same understanding and compassion.

Rosie: And like having your uncle, your family loved him for his social aspect but then when he had AIDS everyone would beat him up and then when he died everyone threw stones at the coffin, like you had this totally negative reinforcement of that type of homosexuality so ...

Lucy: But my mother, you know, would always be the one that he would run too. You know what I mean? Like my parents were the people that he ran to when he

commonly held misconception.

wanted a *mum* to hug him, you know? When he wanted a *mum* to tell him that he was okay and that she loved him. My mum fulfilled that role and this is where I think that my friends when they would hear my mum talk about these issues with my uncle, they would think why haven't you come out?

Rosie: She was very supportive of everybody else's relationships ... But not her own daughter (GA, S2, FD, 46 - 47).

The idea that sometimes the participants' mothers could be supportive of others with a lesbian or gay identity was problematic for the participants. That is, the participants found it difficult to understand how their mothers could be accepting of other people outside the family unit with a non-heterosexual identity but not accept their own daughters. Neither Ani nor Lucy were able to reconcile what it was about the relationship that made it impossible for their parents, in particular their mothers, to accept them as lesbian.

Ani: I remember once I was talking to her [mum] and I was in about grade ten and I saw something on the news and I was talking to mum about it, you know and she said oh good for them for making a stand and I don't know whether I said something then or years later but I said you know, what if it was me? And she said I don't want it to be you but it's good for other people. So as long as it's not their own.

Lucy: It's funny that you know, like my mum when I asked my mum well what if the tables were turned, you know and it wasn't [my brother] who was perming his hair and like cause my brother permed his hair and what have you and always wore his best clothes and was such a trendy boy. I said what if the tables were turned and I turned out to be a lesbian and mum said that she would just kill me (GA, S2, FD, 47 - 48).

A further contradiction within the mother/daughter relationship was experienced by Tulli and Lucy where they were expected to observe particular mother/daughter interactions such as paying respect, honour and deferment. *Post-initial coming-out*, Tulli and Lucy were required to simultaneously take up a dual positioning of both *insider* and *outsider* within the family. That is, they were included in the family as an *insider* when their lesbian identities were invisible. However, when their *post-initial coming-out* identities were not invisible they proved problematic for the family and resulted in the daughters' exclusion or *outsider* status at different family events or during important family decision making processes. There was a blurring of boundaries and expectations by the mothers. The participants reported feeling their respective mothers had one set of expectations for them as daughters and a different set of standards for other relations. This was yet another example of *shifting* relationships:

Rosie: Certainly Lucy's family dynamic was totally different ...
Sam: Yes.
Rosie: Like there was a definite child/mother or emotional peer [dynamic] but [definitely] a child/mother relationship there ...
Tulli: Yes, and I have that with my mum too. It's like mother/child but best friend, kind of buddy, can't cope without you kind of thing.
Lucy: Yes.
Tulli: A no boundaries kind of relationship?
Lucy: And she was, she is my best friend, like my mum is my best friend.
Tulli: Yes (GA, S2, FD, 17).

Lucy and Tulli did not want to sever ties with their mothers. In order to have some form of relationship with their mothers they had to hide their lesbian selves and portray one which gave the impression of an identity which the mother deemed acceptable. Lucy and Tulli felt torn between maintaining some form of relationship with their mothers and living their lives as lesbians.

Ani's relationship with her mother could also be categorized as a *shifting* relationship. During the session on *Family Dynamics*, Ani experienced some unexpected emotions and reactions to the Memory Text she had written during the group analysis. Ani's memory text was about a situation which occurred in the family kitchen where a teasing by her sibling revealed the *secret* outings after school which occurred between the sibling and their mother without Ani's knowledge. Ani's mother's immediate reaction was to dismiss these outings as *nothing* or of *no importance*, and subsequently described Ani's reactions as childish. Ani's feelings and reaction to this information caught her off guard, both in respect to what she felt and the way she reacted towards her sibling and mother having a special relationship. For instance,

The anger and frustration at her mother was boiling over. There was more screaming. She could not understand why such a basic activity was hurting her so much, but those outings were symbolic of a much deeper unspoken meaning. Even though she knew her feelings of jealousy were juvenile, she still became upset – it was like she was no longer a member of the family (Ani's MT, S2, FD, 5).

One could argue that anger and frustration were not unrealistic emotions given the situation. However, it is interesting that in both the Memory Work Text and in the following group analysis context, the emotional response caught Ani off guard and made

her feel confused about why she reacted in this manner. The fact that in her Memory Text she actually wrote that she felt like she was no longer a member of the family was significant and could have a direct insight into the intensity of emotions she experienced. While Ani's mother's words stated that Ani was part of the family, Ani perceived her mother's actions in an entirely different way. Ani's mother's actions confirmed Ani's concerns about her inferior standing within the family unit and supported her unspoken belief that her mother valued her sibling over her. She perceived this lack of support to be directly linked to her initial *coming-out* and her acknowledgement of a lesbian identity.

While Ani did not experience the complicated mother/daughter relationships of Lucy and Tulli, she did have a more volatile, complicated and *shifting* relationship with her mother. Ani's partner was able to act as a mediator between mother and daughter and assist Ani in the communication process, however, the damage and misunderstanding created previously during the *coming-out* phase, was deeply embedded in a problematic mother/daughter relationship.

Tulli: But, like your relationship with your mother [Ani] is different to Lucy's relationship with her mother? It would seem Lucy, that you are much closer to your mum?

Ani: Yeah.

Lucy: Sister or a best friend.

Tulli: Yes, whereas Ani's relationship with her mum at times has been quite strained and they don't seem to know how to communicate with each other, they're not ...

Lucy: So there isn't trust there to begin with.

Tulli: Oh, there is. But it's a funny kind of dynamic, they both need and then when one of them sort of gives to the other it can be misinterpreted and kind of slapped back in the other person's face and so then they don't try.

Lucy: Actually, it sounds like they are similar to each other (laughs).

Tulli: Yes.

Ani: Yes. dad always said we were too much a like, yes.

Tulli: So it is this real tango of a dance that they do (GA, S5, MTPF, 23 - 24).

While Lucy and Ani revealed a different dynamic in their mother/daughter relationships, both participants needed reassurance from their mothers, consciously or subconsciously, that they were loved and respect as daughters *and* lesbians.

Sam and Rosie had good relationships with both of their mothers, but as stated in the earlier section on positive family interactions where relationships were supportive, there was little to discuss within the group and participants just went on with their lives.

However, where relationships were complex and at times problematic, such as those described by Lucy, Tulli and Ani, participants were more likely to discuss these interactions at length in a process of sense making, both of the mother/daughter relationship and their identity.

This section has highlighted how the dynamics of the mother/daughter relationship were particularly significant when there was tension about the daughter's *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identity for the mother. In these instances the mother/daughter relationship was complex and often problematic. Tensions within these relationships can be linked to popular perceptions which are loosely derived from psychological and medical literature which nurture the idea that mothers are responsible for negative non-genetic developmental outcomes (these perceptions and related literature are discussed in more detail in work by Caplan, 1990; and Koutroulis, 1996). Since non-heterosexual identities are viewed as negative identities within Western cultures like Australia, it is not surprising that some of the mothers of the participants in this study felt responsible for the non-heterosexual identities of their daughters. These feelings of being somehow responsible for the non-heterosexual identity of their daughters manifested itself in different ways in the mother/daughter relationship. For example, for the participants who had non-supportive mothers identified how at times they felt unaccepted, unsupported and unable to communicate effectively with their mothers. There was a distinct separation between a lesbian self who was around the mother and a lesbian self who was not around the mother; including a recognition of having to be different around their mothers as a consequence of their non-heterosexual identities.

Other significant relationships for the participants in this study were those they had with their siblings. These relationships are discussed in the following section.

5.1.5. Significant Relationships - Siblings

The relationship each of the participants had with their siblings was, based on the data gathered within the Memory Work sessions, significant. Siblings were often used by the participants as sounding boards or as a means of assessing their role within the wider family, as well as evaluating their individual relationships with other significant family members. Research suggests (for example, Strommen, 1989), that siblings are often the

first family member an individual will come out to during the initial *coming-out* process and data here confirm this to be the case. This study recognises that siblings continue to play an important and significant role during *post-initial coming-out* in shaping a wommin's lesbian identity. That is, the role siblings play in communication within the family structure, particularly with parents, and their contribution to the positioning of the lesbian within the family unit should not be underestimated. The following example can attest to this.

Ani explained how her sibling's continued indifference to her lesbian identity was used as a means of teasing rather than an inability to accept her sexuality. This sibling did, however, use her non-heterosexual identity against her where their mother was concerned.

My brother used to just come out with things like, your friends are cute and I can't have them or he'd run around the kitchen with a lemon and go here girl suck on this (Laughter). He never had a hassle with it at all. He just teased me about it in a stupid sort of brotherly way but not a hassle with it. I mean he did take it to his advantage and used it for his own good (Ani, GA, S2, FD, 11 - 12).

Ani was further able to illustrate this point of *using it for his own good* in the discussion which occurred during the group analysis. During Ani's reflection on her memory she recalled a time when her brother let it slip that he and mother had been having after school *mother/son adventures* which excluded Ani further from the family as discussed in the previous section. Ani felt her mother's lack of enthusiasm for wanting to go places with her reinforced her mother's lack of acceptance of her. Ani and her mother had never bonded in the same way that her mother and brother had and her mother's negative attitude towards her only increased when she *came-out*. Ani's brother was aware of this dynamic and used it as a means to illustrate the different relationships the two siblings had with their mother. The difference could have been gender related where the mother had different expectations for daughter and son. For example, the brother was allowed to be sensitive because he was creative, arty and musical but Ani's actions were judged by the mother as gender non-conforming and indication of her sexuality.

Ani: I think that might have been what contributed to my mum's reaction with me cause I'd left school and like flunked out of it badly and gone to a TAFE college, got into drugs and drinking a hell of a lot more though she didn't really know about that, and my brother got his belly button pierced and she found out that he was smoking and all these things happened and then I *came-out* and I think ...

Sam: It was bad timing?

Ani: Yes it just all sort of happened at the same time (GA, S2, FD, 38).

This experience is also confirmed by a similar encounter of Sam's. One of Sam's siblings had some involvement with drugs and had been the victim of an abusive relationship with an opposite sex partner at an early age. While Sam's parents demonstrated through discussion and actions that they would not have a problem if Sam identified as a lesbian, there was also the added bonus that all other aspects of her life were going well, in comparison to her sibling, and they had no reason for alarm. Unlike Sam, Ani's difficulties with education, drugs and alcohol, resulted in her mother seeing Ani's lesbian identity as just one more aspect to reject or be concerned about. On the other hand, Sam was compliant and successful in most areas of her life. Thus during the *post-initial coming-out* process, Sam's claiming of her lesbian identity was not considered problematic.

Lucy was very close to one of her brothers. He knew about her lesbian identity and was very supportive of her; however, as soon as their parents became aware of Lucy's identity, he rejected her and continues, at the time of data collection for this study, not to have any physical contact (in the form of hugging and kissing) with her. Concerned about the shifting nature of her relationship with her brother, Lucy stated:

Lucy: It's gone a bit bizarre with me and my brother. Like me and my brother were very, very close, we went to clubs together, he dated my friends, you know we were close ... then when I *came-out* he doesn't touch me, first of all he doesn't touch me and when he kisses me he kisses me in the air, he gives me air kisses now, like it's just bizarre.

Rosie: The thing that is so strange about that though is that he was the only person in the family who knew about your sexuality before you had a partner, like before I came out and he and his partner, his girlfriend who then became his wife, were completely supportive and were completely supportive of me, they knew about our relationship before the rest of the family did (GA, S2, FD, 32 - 33).

Lucy correlates this changing relationship with the introduction of her brother to a new form of religion. This change appeared to have played a big part in Lucy's life and

impacted greatly on her interactions with her youngest sibling, his wife and children, as well as the way she felt about herself.

Lucy: I'm like a show. Like when I go to [my brother and sister in law's house] I'm like a show, all her friends come over and just stare at me.

Ani: Freak show?

Lucy: And it's like you came over to meet me? You came over to visit [my sister in law]? What are you here for? Why do you all sit on the one couch, opposite me and stare at me?

Rosie: And they [the brother and sister in law] never say anything to you [Lucy] while I'm there. It only happens when I'm not there.

Ani: This is what a lesbian looks like!

Rosie: Yeah basically like after they drop me off they'll then start hassling Lucy to try and convert her to Christianity and what ever (GA, S2, FD, 33).

As a result of her brother and sister in law's new religious beliefs, Lucy is placed at arm's length from their family and looked upon by her brother's friends as a freak.

This section has shown how relationships with siblings were significant for the participants in two important ways. Firstly, these relationships enabled participants to assess their positioning and acceptance both within the immediate and wider family of origin unit. Secondly, sibling relationships acted like a sounding board to evaluate the participant's individual relationships with other significant family members.

While it is recognised here that relationships are not static but instead dynamic, the data from this study highlight and confirm the effect and importance relationships with family of origin had on the *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identified participants for this study in terms of how they were positioned within their family unit as *post-initial coming-out* lesbians within an Australian context.

5.1.6. Significant Relationships - Children

Children, in the form of nieces, nephews, and cousins added an extra dimension to family relationships and impacted upon the participants' lesbian identities and their inclusion, or exclusion, within their respective family units. None of the participants had their own children at the time of data collection, although several were considering having children in the future. In all instances of this study, children within the participants'

families were accepting of the lesbian family member and her same sex partner despite instances where the family of origin were non-supportive. In most instances the children were unaware of the exact nature of the relationship but had an understanding of the importance of the connection. For example,

Tulli: The kids have been able to form relationships with the [lesbian family member and their same sex] partners but the adults, some of the adults, haven't because the kids don't have all the prejudices and don't have the ...

Rosie: Not just that, but it is easier for us to form relationships with the kids because they don't discriminate [against] different people. And they don't have prior established relationships, they are forming relationships with everybody new.

Ani: And hopefully then their parents will see that if they get on well with you and their relationships might change with you?

Tulli: Yes (GA, S5, MTPF, 27).

The presence of children within the family raised additional unexamined myths and stereotypes about lesbians to those discussed in section 5.1.3, *Non-Supportive Family Interactions*. Three myths in relation to homosexuality and children were particularly relevant to this study. Firstly, the myth that all homosexuals are paedophiles, secondly, that homosexuality could be *caught* or *passed on* like a virus or disease and also that children were particularly susceptible to *catching* homosexuality, and lastly the belief that lesbians lacked maternal instincts in comparison to their female heterosexual peers.

The data from the Memory Work sessions confirm the belief that homosexuals are paedophiles still held strong within non-supportive family structures and the heterosexual community in general; particularly where participants' careers involved direct contact with children. Research clearly indicates that firstly, the majority of homosexuals have their initial homosexual experience with someone in a similar age range. And secondly, 79 to 92% of all convicted paedophiles in jail are heterosexual males who molested a child of the opposite sex, that is, female (Bell, Weinberg, & Hammersmith, 1981; Crooks & Baur, 1999). Research such as this clearly confronts the myth of seduction that permeates societal thinking. Related to this was the belief that homosexuality could be *caught* or *passed on* if someone was in close physical proximity to a non-heterosexual person. As is illustrated in the data below, parents of the children within the participants' families had the potential to become particularly distraught if these misconceptions were not addressed within the family or within the field of education when an openly gay or lesbian person was working with children.

Lucy: Now I am going to say something and you guys are going to hate me for it. But there are a lot of parents out there that will not put their children with a lesbian ...

Tulli: I know all the myths, and I know what people believe and I know they think that if you let homosexuals be with your children then that means that your children will have a greater chance of being homosexuals. That they can catch it and also that that all homosexuals are paedophiles. And the two myths simply aren't true.

Lucy: I wasn't meaning that the myths ... you see like when you are with children around that age, a really young age, they are really impressionable ...

Sam: But it's good if they have a good impression though of a lesbian.

Tulli: If they have positive interactions with a diverse range of people, then when they grow up, they are more likely to be accepting.

Lucy: Definitely, I totally agree with you.

Tulli: Yes (GA, S4, NSAC, 16 - 18).

These two myths, the homosexual as paedophile and homosexuality as something which can be caught or passed on, highlight how heteronormativity is inadvertently perpetuated within our society and how the concept of rejection is taught from a young age. All of the participants were aware of these myths and were consequently very careful, or in some instances overly cautious, where children were concerned. They did everything they could so that their relationship with the children in their family unit would not be severed by homophobic adults within their family structures. Participants were also respectful of the hierarchy which existed in the family in terms of who was told of their lesbian identity and in what order. Many different approaches in terms of communication and connection making were used by each of the participants depending on the context and relationship of the family member. The more important the relationship to the participant, the more care was taken in whether the topic was discussed in the first instance and then how the topic was approached. For instance, the impact Lucy's sexuality had in terms of her relationship with her sibling's children, that is, her nieces and nephews, was a prime example of this.

Rosie: Actually, [Lucy's] youngest brother, doesn't like us being around his kids at all because he's really worried, they're new born christians, and he's really scared. But the thing I find so interesting is that Lucy basically looked after [her nephew], the oldest of the grandchildren, for the first year of his life all of the time because the parents weren't used to parenthood and they wanted to party and they were doing lots of drugs ...

Lucy: Like to the point where I went to the doctor and he was trying to get me some breast milk or glucose for the child.

Rosie: So she raised these children and then when they found out ... and it wasn't that they found out that she was a lesbian cause they kind of suspected that earlier,

but when they found out she was with me and in a relationship as a lesbian that relationship with the child was then cut completely.
Lucy: I'm actually not allowed to be alone with them at all.
Ani: What are they scared of?
Rosie: That they were so close that it would *catch* (GA, S2, FD, 29 - 31).

Lastly, the belief which exists in our society that lesbians lack both maternal instincts and the ability and/or desire to have children (Eliason, 1996; Gramlin, Carr, & McCain, 2000) often impacts greatly with her interactions with children within the family unit. This myth is embedded within the medical and psychological discourses of the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s and 1970s (Eliason, 1996) which inextricably, and without basis, presented sexual identities other than heterosexual as deviant and dysfunctional and therefore incapable of possessing maternal instincts. This myth sought to position the lesbian outside social norms of what it meant to be a woman and subsequently as outside a family unit. It also had the potential to position women who identified as heterosexual but did not want children (as distinct from heterosexual women who could not have children) as potentially lesbian. The desire and ability to produce children, as characterised by these medical and psychological discourses, viewed reproduction as an innate heterosexual female characteristic. It was argued that women who fell outside heterosexual norms could not, and should not, engage in reproduction. It is argued here these myths are designed to further ostracise lesbian identities from mainstream society. This section has articulated the relationships that occurred between significant family members, in particular, mothers and daughters, siblings and children within the family of origin unit. It has illustrated the different types of relationships and the impact these relationships have on a *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identity within an Australian context. As outlined at the beginning of the chapter the next section will explore transitional roles, significant events, and/or rites of passage within the family structure. The particular focus will be to investigate how family structures impact on the participant's sense making and positioning as *post-initial coming-out* lesbians both within their families and the wider community.

5.2. Families and Traditions

Families have their own unique ways of celebrating culturally relevant celebrations and traditions, such as Christmas, Easter, Birthdays, Weddings, and Funerals. Two

examples of unique celebrations for families of participants in this study included the making of Christmas puddings in a *Pudding Party*⁸ three to four weeks prior to Christmas and an event known as *The Family Christmas Tree* where immediate and extended family met to have a Christmas dinner and exchange presents prior to Christmas to alleviate the pressure of increased travel and family demands on the actual day of Christmas. Related literature (for example, Albro & Tully, 1997; Aura, 1985; Eliason, 1996), in combination with participant experience in this study, confirm that culturally relevant celebrations and traditions usually reinforce heteronormative ideals and ways of life. The socio-cultural marker of the wedding ceremony is an example. This ceremony reinforces heterosexuality as the norm, denies legally recognised same sex unions and subsequently reinforces the invisibility of lesbians in general.

Two points are of significance here. Firstly, the importance of including same sex participants and their partners within family traditions and celebrations. And secondly, the creation and recognition of meaningful lesbian specific rituals and symbols both individually and as a community. These “events and symbols become visible metaphors for important relational connections. Feelings of connection are nurtured and made more concrete when lesbian women have rituals, symbols, and privileges consistent with the experiences of their heterosexual counterparts” (Gramling, Carr, & McCain, 2000, 666). Participants within this study publicly celebrated their *coming-out* birthdays with friends, and sometimes family of origin, and participated in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community organised events such as Pride and the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras as a means of connecting and making their identity visible.

Data from this study confirm the significance of traditions within family of origin and the subsequent positioning of the *post-initial coming-out* lesbian within their family of origin unit as a result of these traditions. These traditions and the shifting role/s of the participant within their family unit is examined firstly in the next section where a same sex partner was on the periphery of the event/s. This is followed by an exploration of the impact of a same sex partner on the family unit, where their inclusion, or exclusion within family traditions and ceremonies, not only confirmed the participant’s lesbian identity to all family members, but also impacted upon the participant’s positioning within their

⁸ The terms *Pudding Party* and *The Family Christmas Tree* are italicised here because they are the titles given to family events by the individual family units.

family unit. The data show that the inclusion or exclusion of a participant and their same sex partner in family traditions was significant in terms of how they felt about themselves, their relationship and their positioning within the family unit. This section concludes with a discussion on how the participants made sense of, and negotiated new ways of communicating, and finding spaces within their own family of origin units as well as their partner's families.

5.2.1. Traditions and Shifting Roles Within the Family Unit

Same sex partners need to be included in important family life cycle events, such as family traditions or crises. Data from this study support the idea that the inclusion of same sex partners within family traditions or the inclusion of a same sex partner as a result of an unexpected family crisis situation does facilitate a shift of the lesbian participant's role within their family unit from one of *outsider* to one of being included (Beeler & DiProva, 1999; DeVine, 1984; Mattison & McWhirter, 1995; Robinson, Walters, & Skeen, 1989). For example, participants in this study were able to identify when their role within the family changed from that of *child* to adult within their family structure. Sometimes this change was the result of the family finally accepting a long term same sex relationship, the end product of a family crisis or merely a result of the participant maintaining a lesbian identity for a considerable period of time and making significant progress with their lives despite family acceptance or rejection.

This change in positioning in the family structure had a significant impact on each of the participants, both in the way they viewed themselves as individuals and members of a family unit, and in the reworking and repositioning of existing family relationships. Shifts within the participant's family position is examined first, where a same sex partner was on the periphery of the event/s, that is, they were present but only played a small role or looked on. The same sex partner in these instances, was not central to the shift in the participant's role within their family but their presence was significant nonetheless.

At the time of data collection, Ani was experiencing a transitional role within her family of origin. As a result of her grandmother's illness, family secrets were being uncovered and family issues were finally being addressed by the majority of family members for the first time. As a result of these discussions, Ani experienced multiple and conflicting

messages about her space within the family unit, partly because of her area of expertise from tertiary study and partly from expectations of various family members for her to participate in the decision making process within the family unit.

Ani: I'm finding that at the moment, like say in the last two or three years, my [grandmother] has become quite ill and I've been *allowed*, I suppose, in a certain way to know about her history, which is a fairly horrific history, and been expected to be the family social worker, the family counsellor, and the [medication] decipher person, and at the same time be the daughter, the niece, and the grandchild. And the daughter, the niece and the grandchild aren't allowed to know very much but the counsellor, social worker, organiser of hospital, pharmacy person, is allowed to be privy to all this other information but it's only if I'm in that role. It is quiet difficult to mould the two and to get people to understand.

Lucy: That you're still the same person?

Ani: Yes.

Lucy: That would be really hard!

Ani: And for me to try and not be emotional when I'm like in the social worker mode, because this is my grandmother, my first grandmother who's become ill and for people to listen to me and say well I don't want to put her in a Nursing Home even though my social worker self says it's the best thing for her and people not understanding how I can be like that when I'm supposed to have one mind. And trying to tell them ...

Rosie: I think that's a new experience that's actually really common at this kind of age ...

Ani: Yes.

Rosie: Like I think that that's the kind of generational thing that kind of happens (GA, S2, FD, 18).

Data from this study as well as related literature (Beeler & DiProva, 1999; DeVine, 1984; Hoff, 2001; Mattison & McWhirter, 1995; Pittman, 1987; Robinson, Walters, & Skeen, 1989), support the findings here that a family crisis, such as the illness of a grandparent, can help to facilitate a participant's role transition from *child* to adult within the family unit. Rosie's perspective was that a "family crisis completely changes the way that you're perceived within your family, particularly once you're at a certain age, I mean if you're under 15 you're always going to be a little kid that they're not going to worry about so much and family change happens and you just get taken for a ride but once you're in your 20s, I mean I think it depends what age you are in your own family as well" (Rosie, GA, S2, FD, 22). Ani's experiences with her family would also support this idea. This transformation from *child* to adult within the family unit enabled the participants to feel more confident within themselves, independent and, where previous family reactions to the participant's lesbian identity were negative, mixed or indifferent, was often the beginning of more open lines of communication or acceptance of the participant's

lesbian identity and same sex partnerships.

Distance or leaving the family home, as a result of either tertiary study or employment, was also significant in assisting with a change in role and family expectations. The participant was no longer financially and emotional dependant upon parents to the same extent they were when living at home. Although, in some instances there was still a financial dependence, it was to a lesser degree than when the participant was living in the family home. There was a gaining of independence which allowed them to explore their lesbian selves away from the family unit and establish a stronger understanding, or perspective, about themselves. For instance, the participants talked about a *rite of passage* they had to pass through. In some cases this was precipitated by a family crisis, as described earlier, but for others it was reaching a certain age or gaining independence by moving from the family home or some other form of distancing from the immediate family through study or employment.

It is also important to recognise here that intertwined with this shift in role or positioning within the family structure was the family's understanding and respect for the participant's chosen employment and level of education. That is, if the family could see a tangible purpose or outcome for the participant's field of employment or education, then there was a shift within the family structure from *child* to adult. However, if the family could not understand or relate to the participant's employment or education, then the participant was, intentionally or otherwise, not valued as highly within the family structure. For example,

Lucy: Okay. You know with families, like if you don't have a social worker degree, or if you don't have something that's sort of like what they call or classify as respectable, then you would never have gained that experience.

Ani: Well see that's the interesting thing, they don't respect what I do cause they've build up a small business, that's become quite a successful business so they don't think that the work that I do is all that necessary cause it's not ... yes, so that's another really interesting part, if you don't respect what I'm doing why are you asking for my opinion? Hmmm.

Lucy: Yes.

Rosie: Except that they do if you can apply it to something that they want.

Ani: That's right, to something they understand.

Rosie: It's the same as in Lucy's family, like if you can work for the [culturally connected] welfare society or you know a community organisation and you give something to the community, therefore it's valuable ... but if you do that in your own private life

you're wasting it.
Ani: Yes (GA, S2, FD, 20).

The second significant aspect of traditions and shifting roles within the family was the role and/or inclusion of a participant's same sex partner and the impact this had on the participant's role within their family unit. For instance, as discussed earlier in this chapter, Rosie and Sam's families were accepting and supportive of their lesbian identities and their respective same sex partners. Both families actively included the same sex partners in family functions and traditions. In contrast, Tulli and Lucy's families actively sought to exclude their partners from any part of family life and ignored their daughter's/sister's sexual orientation wherever possible. However, towards the end of the Memory Work sessions for this study Lucy's family were beginning to show signs of accepting Lucy's partner and include her in family functions which involved immediate family members only. Ani's family, as indicative of *shifting relationships* discussed earlier, oscillated somewhere between these two extremes depending on the context and which family members were involved. For the first three years of Ani's relationship with her partner her family on her mother's side ignored her relationship and actively sought to reject her partner from any involvement in family functions. This is discussed more fully in the next section that describes same sex partners negotiating new ways of communicating with significant family members.

Where families were non-supportive of a lesbian member, the family as a whole or individual members would often want to blame somebody or some thing outside the family structure for *causing* a female member's lesbian identity, quite often, the same sex partner was blamed. The rejection of a same sex partner from the family structure could be the result of the family believing the partner was *responsible* for their daughter or sister's lesbian identity. That is, if the same sex partner had not been there, then, their daughter or sister would pass through this phase, realise she was really heterosexual, find a suitable male, settle down, marry and have children.

- Ani: Cause it's the partner's fault that their daughter is a lesbian.
- Rosie: It can also be the opposite where it is okay for the partner to be a lesbian but it's not okay for the daughter. It's okay for the daughter's friends to be lesbian and her partner can be a lesbian but it's not okay for their daughter ...
- Sam: Yes, they can have gay friends and they can mix with lots of gay people but when it's their child ...
- Rosie: Yes, the parents might have heaps of gay friends but that doesn't mean they will cope when it's their own.
- Tulli: And often it's a completely different role for the partner to be in. Whereas like, they're accepted in every other relationship in their life, but they're not accepted by their parents, by their partner's parents and so like, they're still the same person and they are still a nice person but nothing they do can make their partner's parents accept them or like them, and it's a really hard place to be in.
- Lucy: Yes, it's true, because parents have so many hopes and whether we like it or not, they put all those hopes in to us. You know whatever they haven't done in their life, they want us to do. And being a homosexual or gay or lesbian, or transgender is not normal in their lives.
- Tulli: Yes (GA, S5, MTPF, 11 - 12).

Participants confirmed that being seen as, and labelled, *the partner* was a significant role with its own anomalies. Taking up the space of *partner* often meant being seen as an *outsider* and subsequently held at the periphery of significant family gatherings and decisions. While this experience can be similar for heterosexual couples, the data confirm that a lesbian identity brings added complexities not experienced by heterosexual peers. For instance, acceptance into the outer circle of the family was significant for a same sex partner,

- Rosie: My family has it's close moments and there's the partners who are like the outsiders and they all get together. Well particularly the wimmin would get together and commiserate the relationship within the family.
- Tulli: We tend to do that a bit with Ani's family as well cause it's such a large family on her Dad's side, but not so much on her Mum's side cause that's small and it's a bit like a mine field at times (laughter).
- Lucy: You're the outsider.
- Tulli: Yeah the whole Catholic family, lot's of children, dynamics, how does this all work kind of thing.
- Ani: I suppose when you're plunged into a family that gets together every weekend, just about, not so much any more but there's forty of them, I suppose it's kind of daunting.
- Tulli: Yes it is overwhelming.
- Lucy: It doesn't matter if you're married to the person or whether your gay or lesbian, you're always going to be identified as that person's partner, You know what I mean?
- Tulli: Yes.

Lucy: It's like a circle but then there's another circle and you're on that side (GA, S2, FD, 16).

The analogy of an inner circle and an outer circle of immediate family and partners of immediate family at family functions appeared to explain the dynamics of this situation clearly. Partners felt included but at the same time somehow excluded from the inner sanctum of the family. This was regardless of a heterosexual or non-heterosexual identity. However, entry into the outer circle of the family was a significant signifier of acceptance within the family unit when the partner had a non-heterosexual. Lucy's acceptance into the outer circle of her partner's family was an important time in her life. It allowed her to experience connection making and acceptance within a family unlike her experiences with her family of origin. However, this connection or communication with her partner's family was affected dramatically with the death of another outer circle member, a sister in law, with whom she'd been able to bond. Without the presence of this particular sister in law to act as a link to other outer circle members and explain family history, Lucy felt disconnected and lost.

Other times partners were actively rejected from the family through body language or visual clues from family members. For instance, for the first five years of their relationship Rosie's partner's father was unable to sit in the same room when she was present in the family house. He also refused to make direct eye contact with her when he was unable to avoid her and would physically cry the minute he thought enough time had passed for Rosie to be asleep. However, over time and with significant work on Rosie's behalf, acceptance had occurred in small steps and behaviours. This allowed her to reposition herself in new territory, as an outer circle family member.

As this section has illustrated, a change in the positioning in the family structure had a significant impact on each of the participants. It also helped facilitate the reworking of existing family relationships. Often these changes were the end result of a family crisis, leaving the family home as a result of pursuing tertiary study or employment opportunities, or the family finally accepting a long term same sex relationship. The next section explores how the participants, when positioned as partners, negotiated new and unfamiliar family rules and developed innovative ways of communicating.

5.3. Negotiating the Role of Partner, Family Rules and Developing New Ways of Communicating

Along with recognising each family's traditions and ceremonies, for example, *Pudding Parties* and *The Family Christmas Tree* celebrations, is the recognition of each family's own unique ways of functioning. Participants in this study highlighted how important celebrations were to each of them. Each participant, when they themselves took on the role of partner, identified how they negotiated new ways of participating or creating a space in each other's family of origin. There were unspoken rules and expectations, family secrets and hidden understandings. Some of these were further complicated by cultural and/or religious beliefs as discussed earlier, physical or mental ill health, and dysfunctional factors within the family like alcoholism or drug dependence. While these are also factors commonly faced by heterosexual couples, a lesbian identity and same sex partner often complicated communication and understanding; they introduced a new dynamic to the family which was different to that which would have occurred if they had been a heterosexual partner. Data support the idea that the acceptance of a lesbian identity into a family compounded the complexities of negotiating a space within a same sex partner's family of origin.

Tulli: Yes. And also like each family is different, each family has its own dynamics and its own way of working. And so coming in on someone else's family can actually be quite difficult because you don't know what all the unspoken rules are and the way that ...

Lucy: That's right.

Tulli: Everyone interacts and who is allowed to do this and who's not allowed to do that. And how some rules are different for girls maybe in the family but then within the same family, a boy can do something completely different and they are just totally oblivious to it.

Ani: And you don't know what secrets people know, and what they don't know, so you're not sure if you're supposed to say something. And if you say the wrong thing or if you tell the wrong thing to the wrong person, and it is better just to shut up and stay in the corner (GA, S5, MTPF, 16).

Same sex partners had the added stress of negotiating unfamiliar family rules, developing ways of communicating with their partner's family, and manage potentially negative or homophobic reactions within their first meeting and in some instances for many years into the future. In addition to these factors were those surrounding culture and language. Emotional expression common in second or third generation immigrant

families was often unfamiliar to Anglo Saxon same sex partners. In one example, Ani and Lucy highlighted how emotional expressions were played out in their respective families' non Anglo Saxon heritage and cultures. Raised voices and the physical expression of emotions were not shunned but rather actively encouraged as reasonable ways of expressing strong emotions. However, these passionate expressions, while accepted within the immediate family unit, could sometimes lead to confusion and the unnecessary escalation of events. In these instances, the display of emotions and exaggerated body language could be misinterpreted if the people present were unaware of the cultural derivation.

The similarity and recurrence of homophobic reactions from family members who were non-supportive resulted in participants, when taking on the role of *partner*, (in these situations) becoming caught up in the need to make a good impression whilst simultaneously experiencing and managing strong feelings of anxiety. As a result, it was easy for a situation to be misinterpreted. For instance, Lucy described a situation where her partner's grandfather mistook her for a man and then overheard her partner's parent jokingly telling his partner in a humorous way about the mistake. Lucy felt betrayed by her partner's parent as she did not feel this was the way someone would act who assured her she was accepted within the family.

Rosie: Part of the [problem was] the assumption that the anxiety, you took the comment personally rather than they [Rosie's parent and partner] were laughing at pop.

Lucy: Right.

Rosie: It could be they were laughing at pop in his eighties for being so wrong and his life must be terrible or what on earth was he thinking and laughing about him whereas because you were anxious about the experience you automatically took it personally.

Tulli: So misinterpreting?

Rosie: Well, just expecting the worse and expecting to have your fears fulfilled.

Sam: Yes and taking things the wrong way, cause you're expecting them to be negative when maybe it wasn't intended that way.

Rosie: Yes.

Tulli: But like I would've been so with Lucy, like I would've been angry too.

Rosie: Cause I understand, I understand completely that it's a normal reaction but it also is because we have an expectation of some kind of potential problem happening ... and it isn't always.

Tulli: So it is like set up in our minds.

Ani: Yeah, like you just know that some old relative is going to have this huge faux pas and you are just waiting for it to happen and you know it's going to

be really, really, really, really bad and when it happens you just go, “Okay, well its over and done with, it’s gone, thank God let’s have a chuckle about it and the rest of the evening will be fine (GA, S5, MTPF, 19).

At a surface level, it could be argued that Lucy was being oversensitive. However, given the anxiety producing context of the situation, a major family celebration with extended family and friends, and Lucy’s previous position of acceptance by her partner’s family and her rejection by her own family, the effect of being mistaken for a man in combination with what appeared to be a lack of support in a humorous retelling by her partner’s parent resulted in Lucy questioning her position and acceptance within her partner’s family. This undermined both her sense of self and sense of belonging.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, cultural background impacts greatly on communication within a family unit. Communication difficulties can increase twofold for same sex partners who are unfamiliar with the culture and ultimately result in actions being misinterpreted and misunderstood. Sometimes partners were invited into the inner circle of the family. These moments were significant and often laden with cultural subtleties. For instance, on a rare visit to her partner’s family’s house, Rosie was invited to a large family BBQ. All the siblings, their partners and children as well as uncles, aunts and cousins attended. In the middle of lunch the mother approached Rosie, as partner, unexpectedly and casually asked if she would help her hang out the family washing. Initially, this invitation appeared strange and insignificant, but Rosie was able to trust her instincts that it was somehow a significant request which would have far reaching implications. It was in fact the mother’s way of tentatively saying I am trying to accept you, I am trying to accept that you are my daughter’s partner. Unfortunately, the invitation was also taken as a direct insult by a brother’s wife who had strong religious convictions and issues with non-heterosexual identities. She, like Rosie, was also of Anglo Saxon decent, but had been included into the family from the beginning without any hesitation. The brother’s wife had previously always been assigned the task of helping hang the family’s washing and took great umbrage as a result of her religious beliefs of the gesture which indicated the beginning of acceptance by the family. The hanging of the family washing was a cultural symbol of being accepted into the family unit. The sister in law’s religious beliefs made it difficult for her to accept anyone with a lesbian identity, family or otherwise.

This memory was unpacked further by the participants during the group analysis of the memories. Anglo Saxon interpretations of the invitation to hang out the family washing during a family function were identified and compared with the participant's initial interpretations of this request and then relocated within the cultural understanding of Rosie's partner's family.

Rosie: We were sitting there, all together and then mum comes out and says, "Oh, do I want to go and hang out the washing?", and I am kind of going, "Okay", and so I get up to do the washing and meanwhile, [partner's brother's wife] is mortally offended and wants to get up and take the entire family and leave. And had a huge fight with her husband in the middle of it all, and like with her children and everything, simply because I was the one asked to hang out the washing, and that was me being accepted in the family. Whereas they wouldn't want her touching their underwear, you know what I mean?

Sam: Yes.

Rosie: But they were quite happy for me, to touch their underwear but not her and it was a big kick in the face for her and for me it was like, "Okay. I just sort of got up and went and did it". But then of course, the other girls came out with me, like the other wives and stuff, the sister-in-laws all came out and hang out and the kids all came out and we all hung up the washing together, and it turned out that it was like the girl bonding time in the family, and it was me totally being accepted. But of course, from our culture, it would have been a complete insult.

Tulli: Yes.

Rosie: You want to go out and hang your laundry out during a family function which means you're isolated in the sense of the backyard. Everybody else is in the front yard and it could've been ... you know? And if somebody puts their hand out for a handshake, you've got to know when they're actually offering you a hand for a handshake or a slap, and this is a huge handshake. I think in other cultures you might think it is a slap (GA, S5, MTPF, 20 - 22).

Seeking new ways of communicating with their partner's family were important skills and strategies many of the participants sought out in order to gain acceptance and create a space for themselves within the family structure. For instance, Rosie was an avid photographer and always took many photos of partner's parent's grandchildren during her rare visits. She would then frame these photos and send them as presents to her partner's parents and family as gifts. She saw this as a way of saying to them I am not trying to take over your family, rather, I respect your family and would like to be part of it.

Tulli: So you're negotiating new ways of communicating?

Rosie: Or, negotiating new ways of participating in the family.

Lucy: In the culture.

Rosie: Without insulting them or being too confronting to them, that allow them to warm to you and to convince them that you are exactly the same person that they

warmed to before they knew. And that you weren't deceiving them, because it's a long process for people to realise, and they need reminders and to confirm, you know, or for them to test. They don't know you before they meet you, and so, they're taking firmly whether what you told them in the first half an hour is actually true about you or whether you were lying and misrepresenting yourself for their acceptance (GA, S5, MTPF, 22).

Developing new ways of communicating with the partner's family's required risk taking and patience. If acceptance was forthcoming it was often after an extended period of time and unexpected. It brought a new set of risks and uncharted way of communicating, as illustrated in Tulli's description of the first acceptance she received from her partner's grandparents after several years. As she describes in her text, "there were no scripts to follow, no pre-determined role she was supposed to take. It felt new and scary" (Tulli's MT, S5, MTPF, 5). This was uncharted territory and everyone was breaking new ground together. Previously Tulli had been expected to drop her partner at the door of family functions and then collect her after it was over. It had been made very clear which functions were family only and who was considered family and who was not. While it had been difficult to cope with, Tulli explained that at least she knew where she stood, she was used to being rejected by that particular side of the family. Tulli recounted how she had found the inclusion as a recognised family member difficult at first but eventually adjusted to her new role.

Ultimately, each of the participants recognised that they were seeking acceptance both of their identities and their same sex relationships within their family of origin and within their partner's family.

Tulli: There's the expectation, like everyone hopes they will be accepted but there is that expectation that you know you won't be.

Ani: And even though you know you won't be accepted, it still upsets you when you're not. Even though you know you are not going to be accepted, it still upsets you when you are not accepted. On so many levels you know that it's not going to happen and you still get fits of despair.

Rosie: I think also the way that each of the people in the partnerships, like the couples, are responded to is different. Like I think that the person from the family can sometimes be accepted but yet their partner is completely excluded. So like the response to the daughter in the family being a lesbian might be like, "Oh but you're our daughter and we've known you all our life that's okay. Maybe it's a phase thing, but that's okay we will support you and that's alright". But that doesn't mean that they are going to accept the partner. And the partner can still be horribly excluded" (GA, S5, MTPF, 10 - 11).

Sometimes the acceptance was forthcoming and unconditional, particularly in supportive family units such as Sam's and Rosie's. Other times the acceptance took many years, as was the case for one side of Tulli's partner's family.

While the role children play has been discussed previously, their significance with same sex partners is worth highlighting here. Same sex partners being asked to care for or tend to children within the family was also seen as an acceptance of, and invitation into, the immediate family unit. However, this acceptance was often complex and not necessarily extended to the lesbian identified family member as was illustrated earlier by Lucy's experience with her nephew and niece. Families who accepted the lesbian family member and her partner without reservation did not appear to have issues with the paedophilia myth discussed earlier when it came to homosexuals interacting with children. For example, "I've got a couple of cousins who basically Tulli has been there since they were born and two of them in particular just love her to bits and one of them used, when he was younger, call us TulliAni or AniTulli. It was like just one name but if he was talking to me it as like AniTulli but if he was talking to Tulli it was TulliAni and it's never been an issue, his parents have never discouraged, like we would baby-sit them and everything" (Ani, GA, S2, FD, 31). Another significant moment in Tulli's acceptance into this side of the family was the expectation that Tulli would form part of the all important and revered *cousin's table*⁹ at large family functions. This came to represent a *ritual of acceptance* of Tulli by her partner's cousins at all family functions.

"I'm the eldest of 16 cousins. The top 8 are really, really close cause we're close in age and they've really accepted Tulli over the last few years, to the point like when we were younger we'd always have like the *cousin table* at weddings and stuff like that and we'd try to rebel against that and then the last few years at the family Christmas get togethers we decided to have our own *cousin table* and our aunts and uncles would try to get in it and we'd be like no, no this is the *cousin table*. But they have allowed Tulli to come and sit at the *cousin table* and like we've made it up so that it's such a sacred place to be and that we all sit there and have our chance to chat about everybody else and we don't get to [do that] at any other stage and it's like yes she's [Tulli] one of us now. Which is a really wonderful thing to think" (Ani, GA, S2, FD, 25).

⁹ The term *cousin's table* is italicised as it was a title assigned by the family to a particular location, or setting, within family gatherings and was a significant space for the cousins within this family unit.

Other family units which were less accepting appeared to be concerned about whether they had been betrayed or misled when the same sex couple had tried to allow the family to get to the know the partner as a friend first, and then as a same sex partner. For example,

Lucy: Did your parents feel that Tulli betrayed them, but did they feel, like my mother felt that I betrayed her. Cause all my life I didn't tell her that I was ... well, I tried to, don't get me wrong, I tried many times.

Rosie: Like shaving your head and listening to all lesbian songs ...

Lucy: No, not like that. I mean like trying verbally to say to her but it just didn't come out right, you know what I mean? And so, I always made it a friend, you know like, did your mum find that you betrayed her because you didn't ... like the trust wasn't there? Cause I had to rebuild that ...

Ani: Well, that was never said anyway, if that is how she did feel, she [my mum] certainly betrayed me by reading my diary (GA, S5, MTPF, 23).

As these examples illustrate, participants in this study tried many different strategies, for example, the helpful friend strategy, the being persistent and waiting strategy, the making connections through children strategy in an attempt to open lines of communication both with their own family of origin units as well as with their same sex partner's family. Despite their best attempts, some participants were unable to open or maintain meaningful lines of communication. This was particularly evident in family units which fell into the non-supportive or *shifting* relationship categories as identified earlier in this chapter.

5.4. Conclusion

This chapter sought to explore three main areas which were significant to the participants as they negotiated their family landscapes. Firstly, significant relationships within family of origin were identified and the impact of accepting a lesbian identity and subsequent positioning of *insider* or *outsider* within the family unit was explored. Secondly, significant traditions within the family structure were identified and explored in terms of the participant's lesbian identities. Finally, the impact of a same sex partner within the participant's family of origin unit was examined in terms of how the participants negotiated new ways of communicating, participating and creating space and recognition within their same sex partner's families.

Participants whose families were supportive and untroubled by their lesbian identity had few objections when compared to those whose families were non-supportive or fell into the category of *shifting* relationships. It was the latter two categories where the participant's positioning within the family of origin unit and relationships with significant others in their lives became problematic. Commonly held beliefs, myths and stereotypes within the general community about homosexuality usually underpinned the non-supportive family's belief system. The data in this study confirm that cultural and religious beliefs also influenced a family's ability to understand and recognise a participant's *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identity.

The family of origin unit played a significant role within the lesbian participant's life, regardless of whether they were supportive, non-supportive or fell into the *shifting* relationship category. They were significant in terms of how the participant made sense of their *post-initial coming-out* lesbian self, relationships with significant others in their life and positioning and re-positioning of self by self and by others within the wider community.

Significant family traditions, depending on whether the family was supportive or non-supportive, illuminated whether significant others would either distance or silence the participant's lesbian identity or include and embrace the participant's *post-initial coming-out* identity and friends.

The analysis of these data highlight the necessity of each participant's developing new ways of communicating with their families when they had a same sex partner. This negotiation of rules and understandings was particularly evident when the participant took on the role of partner and was trying to make connections with their partner's family unit.

The following chapter focuses on how the participants navigated their work/career landscape and the subsequent identity shaping and positioning which occurred as a result of their interactions, including meaning making and construction of their long term *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identities within this context.

Chapter Six

Negotiating the Work/Career Landscape

The body which fails to submit to the law or occupies that law in a mode contrary to its dictate, thus loses its sure footing – its cultural gravity ... such bodies contest the norms that govern the intelligibility of sex
Butler, 1993, 139.

The landscape of work and career, and the decision making processes inherent within it, play an important role within the lives of the majority of people within the 23 to 33 year old age group. As the data presented here will illustrate, having to negotiate the work landscape as a lesbian influenced the career choices and options of the participants in this study. That is, while career choice and experiences within the work landscape were factors which participants used to define who they were in relation to their respective *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identities, it is important to recognise how their *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identity informed the decisions they made about career choices and their interactions with others in a workplace setting. This chapter focuses specifically on how the data illustrate the participants' negotiation of their career landscapes and how they maintained and reconstructed their lesbian identity *post-initial coming-out*.

More specifically, this chapter explores –

1. The role of tertiary education in the career landscape;
2. How the participants dealt with homophobia in the work place; and
3. The management of presentation and representation of themselves, that is, both construction¹ and maintenance², within the work place.

¹ For the purposes of this study the term *construction of self* is used to illustrate how the participants developed and understood their lesbian selves within the work landscape. This is both in terms of how they, the participants, perceived and presented themselves and secondly, in terms of how they managed significant others understanding and positioning of their lesbian identities within the work landscape.

As with the previous chapter, a short overview of each of the participant's career landscapes is presented in a text box format as a means of focusing the reader's attention on the five participants' experiences individually. All of these summaries are based on material which emerged from the nine Memory Work sessions.

Sam

Sam attended a co-educational state school in an urban setting and completed her tertiary degree in an allied medical health field in an urban setting. At the time of data collection she was the only member of her immediate family to gain tertiary qualifications. She has worked within this field for four years and acquired a great deal of personal satisfaction from her people centred job. Sam regularly participates in community/public related presentations as well as career related national and international conferences. She is content with the career choices she has made and is actively working towards establishing herself nationally within the field.

Rosie

Rosie attended a co-educational state school in an urban setting and completed her tertiary degree at a post-graduate level within an arts related field. She has also explored undergraduate study in Women's Studies, Education, and Political Sciences during her time at tertiary institutions around Australia. Like Sam, she is also the only member of her immediate family to gain tertiary qualifications. Rosie is well known on a national level within her related field and has presented work in a variety of university and community based forums. She has recently secured permanent part time employment within her related field.

² For the purposes of this study the term *maintenance of self* is meant to illustrate how the participants managed to maintain and understand their constructed lesbian selves within the work landscape (Goffman, 1959). Goffman (1959; 1963; 1974) analysed performance in terms of front stage, that which is the public front, and back stage, performance which is out of the public context and more relaxed.

Ani

Ani attended a private single sex school in an urban setting. She went to a TAFE college for several years before entering into tertiary study within a human services field. Each member of Ani's immediate family (parents and sibling) has at least one tertiary degree. While Ani has been employed within a related field for over two years, she continues to apply for other positions which are within the specific boundaries of her university degree.

Tulli

Tulli attended a mixed public school in a semi-rural setting. She has several post-graduate degrees within a variety of fields. Like Sam and Rosie she is the only member of her immediate family to successfully obtain qualifications at a tertiary level. Tulli has worked both full-time and part-time within her main field of expertise for the last eleven years. During this time she has pursued further qualifications and on the job experience. She has presented extensively at both international and national conferences in and outside of Australia.

Lucy

Like Ani, Lucy attended a single sex private school in an urban setting. She successfully completed part of a tertiary qualification within a medical allied health field but has placed this on hold due to continued health problems. She is the only member of her immediate family to participate in education at a tertiary level. While Lucy is not currently working within her chosen field, it is her long term goal to re-enter this area of interest.

As with the previous chapter, the main focal point within this chapter is to explore how the participants evaluated, understood and re-built their *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identities and relationships with significant others within a predominately heterosexual context, in this case, the work landscape. While there has been some research into lesbian career experiences in American, Canadian and European work

contexts (for example, Botkin & Daly, 1987; Fassinger, 1995; Morgan & Brown, 1991; Morrow, 1997; Morrow, Gore, & Campbell, 1996), research within an Australian work context is relatively non-existent. Further, research into lesbian career experience with a specific focus on *post-initial coming-out* remains limited worldwide.

Firstly, the role of tertiary education and career decision making processes within the lives of the participants, *post-initial coming-out*, is examined. This is central for any examination of work place contexts because access to, and participation in, tertiary education enables individuals to enter into higher paid positions and increased choice as to where they work. Secondly, the experiences of the participants inside their various work landscapes are explored. Initially, these experiences are explored in relation to the participants' experiences and then, in terms of their image construction and maintenance of identity within the work context. The data from this study suggest that it is as a result of significant other's³ homophobic reactions towards the participants within the work landscape which reshapes the participants' understanding of self.

For example, the following quote taken from the study illustrates the nature of homophobic factors within the work place; "let's look at Ani's work environment. If she were to come out, what would happen? I guarantee she would be raped or bashed or something horrible like that because that's their way of punishing you for who you are" (Lucy, GA, S4, NSAC, 13). The homophobic nature of Ani's workplace meant that for the first time in her work history she had to guard her lesbian identity within the work context. This *hiding* of self did not sit comfortably with how Ani wanted to present herself within the work landscape and unsettled her understanding of herself as a proud, strong, lesbian identified wommin. It should be noted here that not all of the participants experienced threats of potential physical violence within their places of employment however, all were aware of the potential of homophobic

³ Within this study, participants defined significant others within the work place as key people who affected their standing or acceptance within their work landscape. For example, supervisors, directors, heads of departments, or colleagues with whom they had to work closely with on a daily basis.

attitudes to escalate to the point of physical violence because of the experiences of other known lesbians within the Australian lesbian community. It is illustrated throughout this chapter that participants took risks and made informed choices based on their experiences of homophobia in the work context which in turn impacted upon their long term career options. Each of the participants throughout the course of the Memory Work session on *Negotiating Sexuality and Career* expressed their awareness of the incestuous nature of their respective work landscapes. That is, they were aware that *outing* oneself in one work environment had the potential to incidentally *out* themselves in other potential work environments without their control. Lastly, the experiences of how each of the participants managed their presentation and representation, that is, both construction and maintenance of themselves, within the work place is explored.

6.1. Role of Tertiary Education in the Career Landscape

Tertiary education qualifications were essential for the career paths the participants in this study wished to undertake. That is, in order to gain entry into their respective careers and for the purpose of progressing within their chosen fields, tertiary qualifications were imperative.

Pursuing tertiary education, especially at a post-graduate level, came at a personnel and financial cost for all of the participants. For instance, all experienced limited incomes during the time it took to earn their degrees, often extending on after degree completion, until full time or permanent part time employment was secured. This was in spite of part time employment or some access to government assistance in the form of Austudy, scholarships or the like during the actual degree. Therefore, being able to access secure, clean, housing in lesbian friendly suburbs close to public transport, an ability to access lesbian and gay friendly health professionals, select healthy food choices, and to access social and leisure activities, particularly those specifically related to the lesbian and gay community were extremely restricted. Studies by Eliason (1996) and Mubarak (2000) found that lesbians often have less

access to money when compared to their gay male peers for a variety of reasons. For example, this disparity can be as a result of gender related job opportunities and advancement and/or gender differences in expectations of family obligations and child care. Moreover, there are ever increasing groups, consisting of both females and males, within the lesbian and gay community who are disadvantaged by the *pink dollar*⁴ (Badgett, 2000). For instance, access to, and inclusion in, the lesbian and gay community can at times mean participating in significant annual events, such as The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras⁵ or related dance parties, such as Sleeze Ball, the Queen's Ball or the Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, which are costly and often inaccessible without well planned travel and accommodation to those outside the urban setting in which these events are held. Further, products or items which have lesbian and gay symbols are unlikely to be purchased outside a lesbian and gay friendly shop and, as such, often have inflated prices when compared to a similar item without a lesbian or gay symbol.

Two of the participants were able to continue living at home during their initial degrees but the remaining three were unable to, either due to lack of proximity of tertiary institutions or transport from their parent's place of residence, conflict within the family unit regarding their respective lesbian identities, or a decision to live with their same sex partner. Regardless of the reason, all participants experienced extended financial dependence upon their parents when compared to their siblings or friends who did not pursue tertiary education.

Nonetheless, the participants saw higher education as a means of pursuing their

⁴ The notion of the pink dollar is a recent phenomenon used in marketing research to identify the income of lesbian and gay individuals and the subsequent advertising campaigns designed specifically for this clientele. The colour pink is used because of its long association with the Gay and Lesbian community. It originated during the Nazi occupation of Germany where upside down pink triangles were placed on sleeves to identify homosexual males. Black upside down triangles were used to identify lesbians.

⁵ The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras is an annual march and party held in Sydney on the first weekend in March. It aims to celebrate the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex community in Australia. Please refer to the Official Mardi Gras web site for further information (<http://www.mardigras.org.au/>).

specific career choice, in addition to exploring their same sex attraction through participation in student union organised wommin or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer groups and access to a number of lesbian related texts, journals and films. These resources were often only accessible through institutions or organisations like universities and affiliated student union groups. Often participants would enrol in specific subjects, such as *Gender* or *Human Sexuality* electives, or entire degrees, such as Women's Studies, which would allow them to explore the socio-cultural and political dimensions of wimmin's lives and/or lesbian lives in more detail. These subjects, while at times not related to their intended careers, did allow the participants to extend their understanding of wimmin's lives in general and more specifically, lesbian lives. It also allowed them to think about how they might create space and understanding within their future employment/careers for lesbian clientele and/or colleagues, as well as for themselves. Most importantly, these studies offered them an intellectual space to openly discuss issues related to lesbian identities, work landscapes and their individual personal struggles to find a place within their own environment.

Despite the initial extended financial reliance on parents, which was often problematic if the participant's identity was in conflict with their family of origin's values, many of the participants saw further study and a tertiary environment as a means of seeking autonomy from their parents. Through distance and the opportunity to live away from the family home and/or difference in experiences and knowledge base this was possible. Participants seized the opportunity of tertiary education as a means of creating and claiming a space for themselves which allowed the recognition of a lesbian identity. As Tulli stated, "I just thought the only way I'm going to get out of this small country hell hole is if I study and go to uni[versity]. It was my only way out, otherwise I would have been trapped and I would have had to get married and have kids and live within a block of my Mum and Dad's house and come around every day and I just went this is not my life" (Tulli, GA, S2, FD, 45). When there was no space within the family of origin unit to recognise a lesbian identity, as was the case for Lucy and Tulli, participants were forced to physically position themselves outside the

family home as a means of constituting their identities. That is, in order to protect themselves, mentally and in some instances physically, they had to make the difficult decision to live away from their respective family homes. As such, pursuing higher levels of education provided the opportunity for a relatively *safe* environment in which to explore their same sex attractions further. Consequently, these data support the idea that when a lesbian identity is, or has the potential to be, in conflict with family of origin values, pursuing higher levels of education can provide one avenue for valid independent living arrangements and the opportunity to resituate oneself in new ways outside the family structure.

This section highlighted how tertiary education qualifications were essential for the career paths of the participants in this particular study. Engaging in higher level studies also enabled those participants whose non-heterosexual identities were in conflict with their family of origin values a legitimate means of living outside the family home without having to seek out an unfulfilling heterosexual marriage. While tertiary study resulted in extended periods of low paying, part time employment, limited income, and reduced ability to access and engage in significant lesbian and gay community based activities like The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, it did allow the participants to pursue specific careers and understand their same sex attraction further by accessing university based wommin and/or queer groups and significant texts, journals and films.

6.2. Dealing with Homophobia in the Work Place

Participants within this study were not only influenced by their positioning and experiences within their family of origin units but also by homophobic incidents experienced either by themselves or by those close to them within the work landscape. Examples of these homophobic incidents are described in this chapter. Further, most of the careers chosen by the participants in this study had a reputation for tolerance and acceptance of diversity which makes the participants' experiences of the work landscape as lesbian identified wimmin even more unsettling.

When the participants decided to conduct a session on negotiating sexuality and career, from which the data for this chapter were drawn, the theme was open and participants were not directed to write about homophobic or negative experiences within the workplace. Rather, the understanding was that participants would write about a memory which commented on their experience in the work setting given their *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identity. It should also be noted that the participants did not position themselves within a *victim mindset*⁶ at any time during the nine Memory Work sessions. Instead, they illustrated a variety of coping mechanisms and strategies, both individually and collectively, when they explored difficult memories and situations within the nine sessions from which this study is drawn. What resulted was a realistic and detailed illustration of the experiences of a small group of *post-initial coming-out* young lesbians in a variety of careers⁷ within an Australian context. These examples are listed below and are followed by an exploration of how the participants constructed and maintained their lesbian identities given these often traumatic, life shaping experiences.

All of the participants experienced non supportive, or homophobic, situations at some period in their work history. These usually occurred as a result of their lesbian identity becoming more public within the work setting and/or as a result of co-workers' or supervisors' conflicting belief systems, values and understanding about lesbians and sexual orientation in general. Participants in this study identified how non-supportive experiences often unfolded in ways which would have been difficult to substantiate and/or would have involved long and involved public legal proceedings if they were to be challenged in any overt way. There was the potential for these legal proceedings to affect the participant's long term options within their specific career as a result of

⁶ Victim mindset is defined in the literature (for example, Bartky, 1990; Bernstein, 2001; Glass, 1995; Steiner, 1975) as thinking which constantly places the person in a state of helplessness, oppression, hopelessness and powerlessness. A person in this position has a desire to be rescued and is often unable to make effective decisions, solve problems, engage in pleasurable activities or develop a deep understanding of themselves.

⁷ The careers for this study's participants included social work, medicine and allied medical fields, education, and the arts.

media coverage and word of mouth within specialised fields. The first of these non-supportive experiences are illustrated through what the participants referred to as *The Official Chat* (see sub section 6.2.1) within the work environment. Next, the use of knowledge of a participant's lesbian identity in the form of power or control by work colleagues are explored (see sub section 6.2.2, *Use of Knowledge and Power and Managing Homophobic Co-workers*). In the following section, *Managing the Presentation and Representation of Self, Both Construction and Maintenance, Within the Work Place* (section 6.3), data which illustrate how the participants dealt with homophobic co-workers within their workplace while managing their construction and representation of themselves within the work setting are presented.

6.2.1. The Official Chat

Participants for this study defined significant discussions, or meetings, instigated by their supervisors which were related, officially or unofficially, to their sexual orientation in the work place as *the official chat*. This term was developed and used by the participants as a way of understanding or defining the experience. At least two of the participants, Tulli and Lucy, experienced what they termed *the official chat* by supervisors early on in their respective careers. As the data illustrate, each of these discussions were examples of acts of homophobia within the work place. In each instance, the experiences shaped their career decisions and ultimately how the wimmin viewed themselves as lesbians in heterosexual male dominated work contexts.

The guise of the *chat* was used by supervisors as a means of challenging participants about their sexuality. This was done either blatantly or covertly depending on the situation and individuals involved. It was often used as a means of releasing an individual from their position or at the very least, as a threat of terminating employment. The term *chat* was used in each instance by the supervisor as a means of lulling the participant into a feeling of informality and friendliness. For example, Lucy applied for a permanent, more highly paid position in her place of

employment. She was aware that there was another internal applicant for the position. This other applicant was aware of Lucy's sexual orientation and the complex issues it produced for Lucy and her family. This applicant had not hesitated in the past to let Lucy know she would use this information against her if she could by stating that she would tell others of Lucy's lesbian identity. This is clearly illustrated in the following transcript of Lucy's Memory Text, written in third person as governed by the methodology. Lucy felt that the competing applicant had set her up when the *Chief of Staff* inquired about Lucy's sexual orientation under the guise of inviting her into his office for a *chat*.

Lucy applied for the job with the *Chief of Staff*. He asked her to come to his office early the following morning for a chat. When Lucy arrived, [the Chief of Staff] asked her to come in and sit down. He asked her if it was true that she was a lesbian. Lucy replied that she didn't really know and how did he find out? He said that if she couldn't decide her sexuality then how could she make decisions on the job? It was either yes or no (Lucy, MT, S4, NSAC, 1).

Despite anti-discrimination laws within Australia, Lucy's supervisor deceived Lucy into believing that he was entitled to ask her about her sexual orientation. He claimed that this information would be relevant if there were any allegations made against her by clientele. As this was Lucy's first such experience, she was unaware of the inappropriateness of the line of questioning and had no pre-rehearsed retort to his challenge. Thus, the homophobic nature of his inquiry went unchallenged. She felt trapped and powerless by the situation. The *Chief of Staff* would not reveal how he knew about Lucy's sexual orientation during this initial *chat*. However, it became clear that this employer was engaging in sexual relations with the other female applicant when Lucy returned to his office later in the day to discuss the matter further and walked in on them. Words and physical retaliation were exchanged between Lucy and the other female applicant in front of the *Chief of Staff*. The following discussion highlights the discriminatory practices which occurred. During the group analysis, the participants suggest that this employer would never have taken his original line of questioning in relation to possible client allegations with a

heterosexual identified employee,

Tulli: Can I ask what the guy did when you punched her in the nose? Was he there when you did it?

Lucy: Yes. He was just standing there. He let her abuse my Mum and abuse everything and when she grabbed my shirt I just hit her and he just stood there. Then she went to hit me back and that is when he grabbed her.

Rosie: But he didn't say that Lucy's actions were inappropriate.

Lucy: Because she grabbed me first.

Tulli: Yes, therefore you were defending yourself.

Lucy: That's right. He did say that her actions were inexcusable and blah, blah, blah and that if it was in his control he would keep me on and get rid of her but because the incident had happened in his office and there was an extra person who had witnessed it, we both had to be dismissed. I could understand that. I wanted to be dismissed anyway because I couldn't stand the sight of him anymore, especially after seeing his penis when he stood up. You know how if you interrupt somebody when it's something like that, their first reflex is to stand up immediately and that's what he did (GA, S4, NSAC, 30 – 31).

This experience impacted upon Lucy in four major areas of her life. Firstly, her overall health and sense of well being were compromised. She felt physically unwell and her self confidence plummeted. Secondly, the experience intensified her levels of awareness of others and their understanding of lesbianism in the workplace in any future employment she sought. Thirdly, she deferred from her related university course and has been unable to return to complete her studies as a result of the incident described here in combination with a series of personal matters. And lastly, the knowledge that her family of origin could possibly discover the *real* truth behind her dismissal proved to be unsettling for Lucy given their lack of understanding regarding her lesbian identity as discussed in the previous chapter.

It was revealed in the study that the support a wommin received from her family regarding her sexuality, as well as other specific cultural factors, greatly impacts upon career choice and her ability to challenge homophobia in the work place. For instance, Lucy was unable to challenge the bullying she experienced by her homophobic fellow applicant and the inappropriate questioning regarding her identity by her supervisor because she was still living at home and financially dependant on

her family while she completed her tertiary education. While Lucy had *come-out* to close friends, she feared that if she *came out* at work it would get back to her family. As outlined in the previous chapter, Lucy's family did not understand or accept her lesbian identity and would have been unable to provide the support base she would have needed to challenge this instance of homophobia in her workplace. Lucy was silenced by this positioning within the family, as well as in her workplace.

Lucy's experience was certainly more overt than the following one provided by Tulli. However, both examples highlight the technique supervisors exercised in each instance to challenge their lesbian identities. Tulli had been employed by one particular institute for almost five years at the time of the following occurrence. Part of her duty statement involved direct contact with children in a variety of contexts. Her Memory Text recounts this experience;

The director popped his head around her door, he was too cheerful. He asked if she had a minute to come into his office. She walked up, made her way around the piles of books and papers on his floor and sat in the low chair. He turned around in his chair to face her. He said they'd had a meeting and couldn't find the money in the budget to keep her on. She knew he was lying. She only had a month left on her contract. He said it wasn't because of her [injury which had resulted in her taking time off just prior to this meeting]. She knew it was because she was a dyke and they didn't like dykes and children mixing (Tulli, MT, S4, NSAC, 5).

Tulli knew the excuse of budgetary limitations was not a valid one, particularly as she was aware of the section's positive overall financial statement and predicted profits for the next five years. She had been aware of many subtle changes in her duties and a limitation in direct contact with children over the previous six to twelve months. She knew that, as knowledge of her sexual orientation became public with the attendance by her same sex partner at several work functions, her positioning within her work environment was being reconstituted differently by significant others in the workplace. She felt vulnerable, apprehensive, suspicious and paranoid. She knew intuitively that her positioning within her work landscape was changing as a result of how significant others positioned her but was unable to challenge this new location

as a result of the covert way in which it was executed. It is argued here that in examples such as this, it is impossible to *prove* emphatically whether feelings of paranoia and vulnerability, as experienced by Tulli, were maliciously instigated by significant others within her work landscape or whether she felt this way as a result of the manner in which she interpreted her changing positioning within the organisation.

The following data suggest that the unspoken assumptions and unchallenged stereotypes regarding lesbianism held by significant others in the workplace, for example, employers or people in supervisory roles, made addressing homophobic discrimination difficult, if not impossible, for each of the participants. For instance,

Lucy: You see it's very hard to prove discrimination. Like with Tulli, she is saying I know in my head that this is not the real reason he's saying that. I know the real reason, this, this, this and this, but I know that I can't prove it.

Tulli: Well there was a whole series of other events leading up to it.

Lucy: Yeah. How do you know when to go, "Okay well, shit. I'm going to sue this guy's arse", you know?

Rosie: I think it is specific though to that industry, like if you're on contract and I suppose that is not the only factor involved, but it can literally be a personality clash that loses you or ...

Sam: 'Cause they don't have to explain it, they can just say, "It wasn't quite what we wanted".

Rosie: And it wasn't in the budget.

Tulli: And it was two months short of me being there five years so they didn't have to give me a pay-out. 'Cause I had had continuous employment and I knew how much they had in that particular budget, they just didn't want me there because there's a bunch of homophobes that work there and they decided. And the more *out* I became and the more comfortable I became with myself, the more difficulty they had and ...

Lucy: The children ...

Tulli: And they decided that I shouldn't work around children even though I related very well to children. There was never an issue. But they decided that somehow homosexuals shouldn't be allowed near children because we're all paedophiles (GA, S4, NSAC, 15 - 16).

If people in supervisor roles held unchallenged stereotypes about lesbians in the workplace then, it is contended here, this was used as further ammunition not to have lesbians working on staff. More often these reasons were disguised as budgetary restraints despite a long history of good performance prior to the

supervisor becoming aware of the staff member's sexual identity. Situations where excuses, like those evidenced here, were used as thinly veiled reasons as to why contracts were not renewed, continue to place non-heterosexual contract workers in particularly vulnerable positions.

As prior examples have illustrated in the case of Lucy, and also Tulli, supervisors who took advantage of the situation caused participants to feel uncomfortable and powerless. Participants were aware that the discrimination which occurred would be difficult to prove, costly, time consuming and potentially jeopardise future employment in the same area based on industry-wide rumours, and innuendo. The participants argued that these rumours also sought to embarrass and effectively silenced them within their respective work landscapes. All of the participants had invested large amounts of study, time, energy and money into creating career paths in their chosen fields and were fearful of jeopardising their long term employment prospects. As a result of Tulli's experiences, she did make major career changes which moved her from the specific area where she experienced the previously described homophobia into a related working context which was slightly more accepting and understanding of a variety of sexual identities in the workplace. This move cost her time, money, further study and interruption of career progress.

While the existence of laws which prevents employers being able to ask employees about their sexual orientation has been identified earlier, during the group analysis, participants recognised that ultimately employers' inquiries about sexual orientation depended on the context and how the questions were asked. As with Lucy's case, the supervisor aggressively justified his need to ask these questions by arguing that if there was ever a sexual harassment complaint lodged against her then the information would somehow be relevant. The wimmin spent some time analysing how practical it was to actually refuse to answer these questions in real life situations, particularly in cases like those described below where Lucy and Tulli felt undermined and powerless.

- Sam: In Queensland I've seen that written down in black and white in the guidelines, you can't ask those questions. They have got a list of what you can't ask.
- Lucy: Oh no, we didn't have that. He was the Chief [of Staff], he could ask me.
- Rosie: Another factor of that [is], if he does it in a relatively social way. If he asked as an inquiry and it is all to do with not the official word but actually ...
- Sam: I mean if theoretically, I know in that if they come across as if they're just kind of making small talk, chat, it's hard to get out of it but theoretically you should be able to say, "Oh, I just don't like to discuss my personal life at work, can we get on to this ...". And just redirect it. That's what you're meant to be able to do but I know in reality it's a bit harder, it's a different story (GA, S4, NSAC, 12).

The participants recognised that, with experience and knowledge, they felt better prepared and more able to avoid or redirect non supportive and/or homophobic experiences in their work contexts. Not surprisingly, the participants' experiences with homophobia in the work setting supports research by Kissen (1993) and Smith (1993) which states that homophobia is the last form of discrimination which remains unchallenged in most contexts of society. As a result, there is limited policy in the workplace which is actively implemented at an everyday level. As was evidenced here, people who experience this form of discrimination are often restricted in their ability to access the support and understanding they need to challenge the situation because they do not know who to talk to or are unable to follow through with any form of action because of the implications, both personal and work related, of their sexual orientation becoming known in a public forum. Frequently, issues of power and control in conjunction with ill-informed knowledge and understanding of sexual orientation in general, and more specifically, lesbianism, resulted in further non-supportive experiences within the work place for the participants. This is evidenced further in the next section which explores situations where homophobic co-workers used knowledge of the participants' sexual orientation as a means of trying to control the participants within the workplace.

6.2.2. Use of Knowledge and Power and Managing Homophobic Co-workers

At least four of the five participants had experienced someone using, or trying to use,

knowledge of their sexuality as a means of having control over them or as a means of manipulation within their place of employment. This knowledge was used in a threatening way as to keep the participants *in their place*⁸ or *on their toes*. As a result, managing or learning how to deal with homophobic co-workers was a significant theme which impacted greatly on the working and personal lives of the participants. Often the homophobia that they experienced was covert and would have been hard to prove in a discrimination case. Lucy experienced the most overt form of homophobia by a co-worker which bordered on bullying. Her co-worker used her knowledge about Lucy and her family to place herself in a position of power over Lucy. She was aware that Lucy was not completely *out* to her family because, at that time, she was still living at home and dependant upon her parents for her support while she was completing her degree. This co-worker also knew that Lucy's family would not react well to her lesbian identity, nor would her supervisor or the institution where she worked. For instance,

She drove to work. One hour into her shift, she bumped into Nicky, the homophobic girl. Nicky told Lucy there was a full time job available. Nicky said Lucy wouldn't get it because she was a dyke and was too butch. She said that if Lucy applied and didn't say she was a lesbian she would. Nicky knew that Lucy had better grades than her and would definitely get the job over her [all things being equal] (Lucy, MT, S4, NSAC, 1).

Not only was this person a work colleague but she had connections with Lucy's family and social networks as well. It is argued here that action of this type is tantamount to bullying and has a significant impact on reconstituting lesbian identity by making the individual feel ashamed of their sexual orientation as well as powerless in terms of having control over the timing of who knows. Further, knowledge of Lucy's lesbian identity could have potentially damaged the participant's family's standing within a relatively small and tight knit community.

Lucy: I hadn't come out to [all of] my family at all at that time. She had seen me at a

⁸ Both of the terms, *in their place* and *on their toes* are colloquialism. These terms would not normally be used in academic writing, however, both are appropriate within the given context and are italicised to highlight their unique usage in this instance.

club and kiss one girl and she assumed straight away.

Tulli: What was she doing at that club?

Lucy: That's exactly what the argument was about. She graduated with me and she was from the same [ethnic] community. She had a lot of power. She didn't just have power over on me in my work, she had power in every aspect over me. Like I was a chicken. I've gotta' admit, if I had balls I would've been able to get that job and stay there and answer that question and not lose my temper and hit someone.

Tulli: But I mean it was a pretty awful situation to be put in. None of us would know what we would do given that.

Lucy: Yeah (GA, S4, NSAC, 13).

Lucy felt trapped by this wommin who was using knowledge of Lucy's same sex attraction against her in order to prevent her from applying for advancement. Lucy was unprepared for the lengths the wommin would go to to make her feel vulnerable. As identified in the previous section, homophobic discrimination was difficult to prove as well as costly and time consuming to challenge. Lucy became positioned within the organisation as powerless to respond to discrimination within the workplace.

Working out how and when to challenge the system or co-workers was a difficult decision and not one taken lightly by any of the participants involved in this study. Decisions were based on the evaluation of possible consequences, including, potential difficulties from other co-workers because of gossip, potential for change and creating understanding within the work context, and the participant's energy to respond and challenge the situation.

For instance, at the time of data collection Ani was employed in a residential Government institution which had a reputation for reproducing homophobic attitudes and actions. Research into homophobic attitudes and environments within a variety of institutions and the affect it has on non-heterosexually identified employees has been presented in work by Bensimon (1992), Clarke (1996; 2003), Ferfolja and Robinson (2004), Gatens (1998), Harris (1997), Hirata and Kleiner (2001), Treadway and Yoakam (1992), and Wallace (2001). In her Memory Text she wrote,

She hated the denial she was forced to take on. She hated having

staff be homophobic and not being able to say anything without having to be subtle. She hated hearing the residents calling each other faggot and the like. She did question them and tried to get them to think about what they were saying, but she could only push them so far until they started querying her life (Ani, MT, S4, NSAC, 4).

Ani's fears for her own safety were very real and founded upon previous experiences of other non-heterosexually identified staff members employed in the same institution. She feared that the repercussions were likely to come from both her clients or from fellow workers who harboured homophobic attitudes. It was her experience that clients, could use the information to justify an attack, both verbally or physically, on the non-heterosexually identified worker. Ani reported that it was also not uncommon for some fellow workers to delay their response to assist the non-heterosexually identified worker in a crisis situation, thus leaving the non-heterosexually identified worker vulnerable and at increased risk of potentially life threatening injuries. This case is significant in portraying the depths of the complexities of being a lesbian trying to find a position within a legitimised institutional working environment.

Despite having been *out* for between two and ten years, all of the participants felt they would have dealt with situations like the examples just described differently now, given their increased knowledge of related workplace laws, policies and procedures. Well established friendship and work ties within the lesbian and gay community and, overall experience dealing with people in general, also prepared the wimmin more adequately in dealing with these experiences. The participants described how they felt better prepared and supported to evaluate and challenge potentially homophobic situations and peers in the work landscape based on their earlier homophobic experiences.

As will become clear in the next section, when participants were able to engage in supportive experiences in the work place, their feelings about themselves and their reshaping identities as *post-initial coming-out* lesbians were strengthened and given further validity. All of these experiences, positive and negative, enabled them to

make informed decisions about risk taking and managing their overall lesbian identity in the work setting.

6.3. The Construction, Maintenance, and Representation of the Self Within the Work Place

While reported supportive experiences in the work context were few and far between, their impact upon participants was significant. For instance, Ani recounted how another employee within her workplace, who was also a lesbian, offered support, advice and friendship which reduced Ani's feelings of isolation, loneliness and disconnection within her work landscape. This connection within Ani's work landscape was influential because this significant other understood both the culture and Ani's positioning as a lesbian within the institution. Further, if a situation was not necessarily supportive or positive in and of itself, but the outcomes or the way in which the participant interpreted the events led to a positive outcome, it proved to be significant in terms of enhancing the participant's overall sense of self and positioning within the work place. For example, despite Tulli's negative experiences in the work place, as described earlier in the chapter, she was able to identify supportive mentors in other sections as a result of her experiences and subsequently position herself in more accepting employment environments within the institution. Nevertheless, all of the participants were afraid, or at the very least harboured concerns about, discussing their sexuality at work, for fear of repercussions and endangering future employment options. These fears and experiences are explored in relation to how the participants constructed and managed their positioning by repositioning themselves within the work setting. This is followed by a sub section, 6.3.2 *Identifying Lesbian Friendly Careers*, which will detail how the participants identified and sought out careers options which were *lesbian friendly* or, at the very least, allowed them space to negotiate and make informed decisions about who, when and how they would discuss their respective *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identities.

6. 3. 1. Managing Work Image

Managing one's image at work was an important concern for each of the participants and was based on real and difficult decisions about employment safety. This implies a concern for maintaining continuous employment and keeping future career options open, but also dealing with issues involving physical safety. It was not necessarily that the participants were ashamed of their sexuality or wanted to appear heterosexual but rather, it was a position or expectation placed on them by others as a means of maintaining secure employment within their chosen field. This will become evident in the following examples. Some participants argued that this expectation did not affect them in negative ways. Rather, it was a means of protecting themselves against people with whom they did not want to share information about their lesbian identity. Participants referred to this protective behaviour as being *strategically in the closet*. This was most evident in the case of Sam as depicted in the following Memory Text:

Although Sam did not appear to deviate from the task of devouring her sandwich, she was feeling uneasy and very aware of the talk around her. [The conversation taking place was focused on] lesbians accessing IVF and raising children. She had very definite opinions that lesbians could make just as good parents as heterosexuals but she chose to sit on the outer of the conversation only adding little bits and pieces. Sam did not consider herself *out* at work, however, three of her closer workmates did know and were really cool about it. The majority of her department (about 95%) were female, very straight and focussed on getting married and having babies or raising children. She felt that they would be shocked to realise she was gay, despite the clues that she knew were there. Everybody knew everybody in her profession and knowledge of her sexuality could influence future opportunities (Sam, MT, S4, NSAC, 3).

Sam's experiences in the lunch room at her place of employment typify the heteronormative ethos embedded within many work contexts. On a day to day basis she was able to manage her lesbian identity without necessarily compromising herself. She chose not to wear make up but compensated by alternating work issued

pants and skirts throughout the week. Sam reported that

The skirt is part of my uniform and while I have the option of pants as well I purposely don't go in pants everyday just because I have this feeling that it will portray some kind of image which will make people who may not have thought in their minds that I am gay but it might just click. Like because there are a lot of other signs, like I don't talk about my weekends in great detail, I don't mention male people because I don't really hang around them. Just clues that they could pick up on and I think the pants/skirt issue is just another clue (Sam, GA, S4, NSAC, 21).

Instances like the two described above highlight the tensions implicit in constructing *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identities. Sam was aware of the repercussions of being completely open about her sexuality to all of her work colleagues and the implications this might have for her future employment in the field.

The inconsistencies about who were *allowed* to talk about what in terms of personal relationships in the work place were highlighted by the participants. Heterosexual identified employees did not think twice about discussing their opposite sexed partners and weekend activities during breaks such as morning tea and lunch in staff common areas. This was taken for granted and often not challenged. However, the lesbian identified participants in this study were very conscious of talking about their same sex partners in similar settings. For example,

Lucy: They are always talking about their husbands and this weekend ...

Sam: Yes, we went up the coast and had a lovely spa at night and all this kind of stuff.

Tulli: Isn't it an issue that if they can talk about their relationships and what they did then why can't we?

Rosie: Oh totally (GA, S4, NSAC, 28).

Despite this, none of the wimmin engaged in such conversations within their work place. Preparing oneself to go into the workplace in order to manage one's image took many forms. Clothing and make-up became one small part of the role some of the participants took on in preparing to go to their place of employment in an attempt

to fit in to the heteronormative image and culture. Participants saw it as a process of getting into character. They highlighted how they individually managed their images by engaging in practices such as integrating skirts, as opposed to pants, into their work wardrobe where appropriate. Others wore a minimum amount of make-up just to get by. They were conscious that this *work place persona* was only part of who they were, it was not the whole picture. They were conscious that their lesbian identity was made invisible to some extent. Participants were aware of the fragmentation or splitting of self which occurred. Work or study related social events also proved problematic and in some instances, led to the distancing of participants further from their work colleagues. This study confirms earlier findings (Loulan, 1995) which state that relationships with significant others in the work place can become distant and strained when lesbians refrain, or are silenced, from talking openly about their personal lives. For example,

Rosie: The Arts industry is not a nine to five job. It's art exhibitions, it's social activities, it's parties and that's where it can become a real problem. And there's a certain level of career advancement [that] would be easier if you went to those things and people saw you and you were part of that sort of social events, but then there's a conflict there in yourself. Do you continue a guise as, in a social environment, people are far more likely to ask you personal questions. But then you are going to put yourself in positions where you may not feel comfortable if you're not quite sure exactly how you will handle the situation.

Sam: Yes.

Rosie: And then, of course, that has its impact on your career.

Sam: And the consequence is that I've got no uni contacts because I didn't have a social connection with them and so I don't have them now. Whereas other people kind of would still have, not a lot, I know that they don't have a lot of the contact with their uni friends but they had some they were being in contact with, but I really don't have any because I wasn't willing to go that extra mile socially. And so you don't have them.

Lucy: And it really is longer than a mile, isn't it?

Sam: Yes (GA, S4, NSAC, 35).

Some participants were aware of the potential long term affects this double life had on their mental and physical well being (Burnett, Eastwood, and Aspland, 2002; Eliason, 1996; Perkins, 1996; Smith, 1993). They were also aware that these

practices did nothing in terms of challenging stereotypes and the heteronormative environment within which they worked. However, positioning oneself as *strategically in the closet* was one way in which they were able to manage their work environment and protect their lesbian identities. For instance,

- Tulli: Yes, so this is my role, I put it [clothing and make-up] all on and then become that person.
- Sam: Yes. I kind of do that, and I kind of accept it. I'm not going to say I'm only going to wear pants, 'cause I just accept that well that is the way it is for my job, that is what I do.
- Rosie: Except that with age, attitudes towards that change. Because the longer you spend doing something, the easier it is that will become a really significant part of your life, I think. If you're caught up having to live a double life ... after a certain number of years, it just becomes really taxing.
- Sam: But I make sure, I really don't lead a double life and the fact that, well, when I'm not at work, I'm going to hold my partner's hand, I'm going to do all of that.
- Lucy: That's right.
- Sam: And I know that the chance of there being work people around is going happen, and it has happened. But I'm not willing to sacrifice my personal time just based on the fear of my career. Like, it stops at work, like in work time, I'm really worried, I know I'm going to pay attention to kind of trying to be in the closet to the people I want to be in the closet too. But I'm not going to be paranoid outside of work to the point that I can't enjoy my life. That's a choice that I've made and there is a risk involved with it (GA, S4, NSAC, 34).

Managing one's presentation and positioning by significant others was also about challenging stereotypes regarding lesbians. This resulted in the participants within the Memory Work sessions questioning socially determined notions of what heterosexual wommin should look like in the workplace. For instance, the participants challenged the assumption that make-up automatically confirms a wommin's identity as heterosexual. The participants also discussed in the Memory Work sessions how they managed their visual appearance and inserted subtle clues about their identity in their everyday appearance as a means of pushing socially determined boundaries and making connections with other *insiders*. Specific icons such as clothing, jewellery and body art as related to the lesbian community were used and are discussed more fully in the following two chapters, *Negotiating the Tensions between the Heterosexual and Lesbian Landscapes* and *Negotiating the Lesbian Landscape and*

Lesbian Selves. The focus of this chapter is how the participants negotiated the heteronormative work environments and managed their lesbian identity. Participants in this study identified how they managed their appearance in their respective workplaces,

Tulli: Like managing image, like being careful what you wear to work, wearing make-up, that kind of thing, so that if you don't look like the stereotype, what people expect ...

Sam: Or if you look like what the stereotype of a lesbian isn't.

Tulli: Yes, so if you look like the stereotype of a straight woman, then there are less questions, you can kind of pass.

Rosie: Yes. But I think it's if you fit into the stereotype of the rest of people who work in the same place as you, even if they find out that your sexuality is different from theirs then they're not as afraid.

Tulli: Yes.

Rosie: So you can relate to them, the image is the same cause you have things in common.

Tulli: Yes (GA, S4, NSAC, 31 - 32).

Being able to make connections and establish yourself firstly as a person who others could relate to sometimes appeared to be an important factor if, and when, the participant's lesbian identity became more publicly known within their place of work.

Taking control of one's career and making informed, strategic choices involved the ability to resist labels from outsiders. Rosie illustrated this turbulent decision making process in the following extract from a Memory Text. She highlights the tension many participants felt about resisting labels from outsiders in regards to their career choice or within their place of work. For instance,

Rosie remembers thinking about her career while reading and discussing [Tracy Moffatt's decline to an invitation to exhibit in an exhibition of Aboriginal artists]. She remembered thinking that she would not want to be a *lesbian artist*, but an artist who happened to be a lesbian. She remembered thinking about how easy it would be to get into themed shows and what a trap this could be in the future if her work was always referred to only in relation to sexuality. She wished she was as wise and strong as Tracy Moffatt (Rosie, MT, S4, NSAC, 2).

Rosie expressed her fear of being constructed by others as *only a lesbian artist* as a site of struggle. She exemplified this by discussing the experiences of an artist she was currently studying who talked about her own struggles of being positioned as *only an Indigenous artist*. Rosie believed that if she was positioned *only as a lesbian artist* by significant others in the field, then she would be overlooked by mainstream exhibitions and miss many important opportunities to progress within her field. Rosie was able to challenge this ghettoising by being strategic in her networking, grant applications and the number and type of theme shows she displayed her work in.

This ability to make strategic decisions in relation to career was further illustrated and discussed by the participants in relation to high ranking public lesbian and gay role models within Australia, such as Dr Karen Phelps⁹ and The Honourable Justice Michael Kirby¹⁰. These public figures were both media savvy and managed their presentation and positioning by significant others within their respective work settings and made well planned and strategic public statements about their sexual orientation. The Honourable Justice Michael Kirby in particular, waited until he had reached the upper echelon of his career before making a public statement about his sexual orientation. It is argued here that the participants in this study had no status of this sort, and as a result their experience of powerlessness was often silencing. Both Dr Phelps and The Honourable Justice Kirby have stated how their awareness of negative stereotypes of homosexuality within our society made them cautious to display their identities in their respective careers (Kirby, 2002; Mitchell, 2002). Being publicly open about their sexuality early on in their careers they argued would have limited, or at the very least increased the difficulty of, their progress. This is certainly

⁹ Dr Karen Phelps is a well known Australian who publicly *came out* as a lesbian in a committed relationship with another professional woman (teacher) with children in the Australian media just prior to being elected as the President of the Australian Medical Association (AMA) early 2000 (Mitchell, 2002).

¹⁰ The Honourable Justice Michael Kirby is another well known Australian who publicly *came out* as a gay man in the Australian media after being appointed as a High Court Judge. There was a period of political unrest within the government after The Honourable Justice Kirby's announcement of his sexual orientation which led to unsubstantiated accusations of misuse of departmental vehicles and the like by people in significant positions such as Senator Bill Heffernan in Parliament in 2003. These accusations were ultimately dismissed as blatant acts of homophobia and the accusers were made to make public apologies in the media.

endorsed by the participants in this study. Further, it is suggested in the next section that some careers are more conducive to understanding lesbian identities, while others are not.

Participants were aware of the potential long term effects to themselves if there was a mismatch between how they portrayed themselves within the work landscape and how they portrayed themselves outside the work landscape, for example, increased feelings of paranoia at being seen or discovered by work colleagues at lesbian venues or events. They recognised that it was important to determine the significance of a particular job in terms of their overall career. The participants continually questioned whether their current employment was just something to fill in time or a stepping stone in the bigger career picture. Consideration about potentially negative repercussions from public knowledge regarding their lesbian identity and the possible endangerment to their future employment opportunities were very important to each of the participants. They continued throughout the Memory Work sessions to identify how they assessed their individual working environments and evaluate the potential personal cost of trying to claim their lesbian identity.

Rosie: I think it depends on whether you see it as a long term thing and you are worried about not pissing people off. And it is not just about your sexuality but it's about all sorts of things. I think that in those particular situations, sexuality is one factor amongst the many that you might not want to mention at work. But if it's a crappy job that you don't care about, like I know in the past when I have worked in call centres and stuff, you just announce that you're gonna do something with a girlfriend or whatever because you don't care that much and you'd rather be yourself.

Tulli: Yes, I understand.

Rosie: Yes, but it's when you're worried about losing something that you value that you start to become cautious (GA, S4, NSAC, 24).

Participants realised that their level of *outedness* in their employment would change over time, that it was not a static position and would depend on the rank of their position within the workplace hierarchy, the overall climate of their place of work, their level of commitment to that specific career and other competing factors in their personal lives. For instance,

- Tulli: Everyone is anxious about what might happen and what might be the repercussions [of being *outed* as a lesbian in a hostile working environment].
- Sam: Yes, and you might say it's overly cautious to some degree but then again, all of us have sort of now talked about people that we know and situations that we know have been negative and so that reinforces that.
- Ani: We are not talking on a personal level like I'm sure that some of us will come out, or all of us will come out to people at work but not to management and ...
- Sam: Yes, just not to everyone.
- Tulli: Yes.
- Sam: 'Cause there's people out there that have a lot of power.
- Tulli: And also like, I mean we're all trying to survive, we're all trying to be independent and ...
- Lucy: [Recognise that our employment is our] Bread and butter (GA, S4, NSAC, 24).

Each of the participants were conscious of, and committed to, being financially self reliant. They recognised that they needed to remain employed in order to survive and maintain their current standard of living. None of the participants wanted to move back into their family home or be reliant upon Government assistance and relinquish their independence as a result of unemployment. Consequently, they were acutely aware of how they were positioned by significant others within their work place as a result of their *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identity.

In summary, the participants acknowledged in this section that making decisions about their careers and work place image was based on many unpredictable and challenging issues and experiences. They recognised that decisions and work place images had to be addressed differently within each work context. Further, each wommin had to engage with the challenges in ways that were unique to her individual family and career landscapes. However, it was agreed by all of the participants that the negotiation of identity within the work place landscape required ongoing adjustment and transformation.

6. 3. 2. Identifying Lesbian Friendly Careers

Participants acknowledged the importance of identifying *lesbian friendly careers* or

work choices. It was recognised amongst the group that there were no well defined lesbian careers as such. However, they were able to identify career pathways which were more accepting of lesbian identities. Nevertheless, such careers were fraught with funding issues and stereotypes that hampered the comfortable positioning of lesbians within the workplace. For instance,

Lucy: So is there a career for lesbians? Is there a safe career we can go into and not have to explain ourselves?

Rosie: Lesbians on the Loose [Sydney based magazine specifically for lesbians]. You can work with them. You might have funding issues in the future.

Tulli: Yes.

Ani: Anything in social work or social welfare.

Sam: Actually social work, I have to say, is probably ...

Tulli: Hospitality. Lots of lesbians in hospitality, lots of cooks.

Lucy: Ah yes (laughs) so a Chef, you wouldn't have to answer to anything really would you? Social work is really not like that.

Sam: No. And there are a lot of *out* gay people in the kitchen, at my workplace.

Rosie: Women's shelter. But you would have real problems with funding ...

Tulli: Everything that's really popular has got big funding issues (GA, S4, NSAC, 20 – 21).

While participants identified issues of availability, funding and the long term sustainability with lesbian friendly careers, they also highlighted the lack of visibility and overall acceptance within large institutions like hospitals and education facilities (Bensimon, 1992; Clarke, 1996; 2003; Ferfolja, 1998; Ferfolja & Robinson, 2004; Gatens, 1998; Harris, 1997; Love, 1998; Predrag, 2003; Rivers, 1995; Treadway & Yoakam, 1992; Wallace, 2001). It was acknowledged that lesbians did in fact work in large institutions, such as hospitals and education facilities, but were not easily identified due to social norms which produced the heteronormative ethos embedded within the day to day running of these institutions.

Reflecting upon the limited literature in this area (for example, Eliason, 1996), the group concluded that popular, stereotypical or *safe* career choices for lesbians were limited in number and often low paying or transient positions and plagued by funding issues. This was affirmed by the data reported in this study where the participants indicated they were acutely aware of funding issues in relation to lesbian specific

careers and support agencies because of their personal involvement with organisations like BLYSS (Brisbane Lesbian Youth in Social Support), ACON (The AIDS Council of New South Wales), and The Queensland AIDS Council where positions were usually on a volunteer basis or a short term paid contract and very dependant upon funding. Participants also acknowledged that non-heterosexual identified people were less likely to openly identify when working, or engaging in university related practicums, in large institutions such as hospitals or schools. For example the following exchange between Lucy and Rosie in the group analysis of the fourth Memory Work illustrates this,

Lucy: Ani just said something to me that surprised me

Rosie: What's that?

Lucy: Like there's a lot of gay male and gay females in social science [and] social work.

Rosie: Yes, of course there are.

Lucy: I didn't think so because we've got social workers at the hospital ...

Rosie: it is where you choose to do your placement.

Lucy: Yes, true.

Rosie: Gays and lesbians are far less likely to choose to do a placement in a hospital (GA, S4, NSAC, 21).

Clearly, this section illustrates through the data that the positioning of lesbians within the work place, and their ability to identify as such, is highly problematic. As this study affirms, young wommin *post-initial coming-out* have their career choices restricted by the low status and limited availability of *lesbian friendly* careers. Positioning of oneself in careers that sit outside this range implies ongoing sites of struggle for wommin, and generates a range of daily dilemmas as each wommin juxtaposes her *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identity with the heteronormativity of the workplace.

6.4. Conclusion

Work place relations impacted upon a *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identity. They affected the way in which the lesbian participants perceived and positioned themselves within their work place settings as well as in the wider context of society.

Homophobia and negative stereotypes ultimately impacted upon career choices for each of the participants in this study. Moreover, data from this study confirm that creating and managing work place presentation and position by significant others of the *post-initial coming-out* young lesbian in a heteronormative work environment was time consuming, problematic and complex. Overall, the participants in this study may have appeared powerless but in fact they were often powerful in terms of when, how and in what contexts they reclaimed their *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identities in the work place. For the most part, the wimmin in this study developed strength by deciding when and with whom they would share their lesbian identities within their respective sites of employment. Their friendships and ties within the lesbian community also helped support them and define their lesbian identities. This support was discussed outside the Memory Works sessions and was not specifically discussed within the group analysis as it related to the work landscape. Group analysis surrounding friendships and ties within the lesbian community were more prevalent within the sessions which focused on negotiating lesbian sex, community and relationships. These relationships are explored more fully in the next chapter, *Negotiating the Tensions between the Heterosexual and Lesbian Landscapes*.

Chapter Seven

Negotiating the Tensions between the Heterosexual and Lesbian Landscapes

i speak without reservation from what i know, and who i am

Ani Difranco, n.d.

The lesbian landscape is often invisible to outsiders. It is also fluid and unique from an inside perspective because it is constantly being challenged and changed by the very group of people who define it (Barry, 2003). This group of people are defined by Banks (1998) as *insiders*. Barry (2003) argues that “all communities, including heterosexual ones, are fictive because the people inhabiting them are multifaceted and non-static. Their identities shift and change and are non monolithic” (11). However, communities act as a means of connection making. They enable members, or *insiders*, to recognise one another in a variety of contexts. Communities are created as a result of connections or similarities between the people who define them. At times these similarities are easily recognisable to everyone, for instance, communities which are created on the basis of race, culture, or disability, at other times communities which do not have easily recognisable visual elements, for instance, those formed on the basis of a non-heterosexual identity, are less obvious to outsiders who are unaware of the cues and symbols used by *insiders* to identify one another.

For the purposes of this doctoral study, lesbian landscapes¹, or communities, are defined as being made up of wimmin who self identify as lesbian. These wimmin can be wimmin born wimmin or male to female transgender lesbian identified wimmin². They

¹ I use the terms lesbian landscapes and lesbian communities interchangeably here because the term community is more commonly used in the literature, while, the term lesbian landscape has been developed specifically for this dissertation. I prefer the term landscape because it lends itself toward a more visual image of large, open, multi-faceted, non-static areas or spaces which offers more in the way of understanding lesbian connection making. The term community implies an observable, or tangible, boundary.

² Further detailed discussion about access and acceptance into the lesbian community with regards to male to female transgender lesbian identified wimmin is discussed in the following

can be wimmin who only have sexual relationships with other wimmin or wimmin whose primary sexual relationships and attractions are with wimmin but who also have sexual relationships with men. How these insiders define and live out the term lesbian in their everyday lives is varied and open to individual interpretation. Their ability to speak openly about their *secret identity* and who they have sexual relationships with depends upon the very people who make up the community. This particular aspect of the lesbian landscape is discussed in detail in chapter 8, *Negotiating the Lesbian Landscape and Lesbian Selves*. However, it is important to begin to discuss what constitutes a lesbian landscape here by juxtaposing it with its heterosexual counterpart in order to set the scene for Chapter Eight. Hence, the focus for this chapter is to highlight and understand the tensions which exist between the heterosexual and lesbian landscapes in an Australian context³.

Within any given community, or landscape, there are only a limited number of identities available for individuals to access (Frey, 2004; Goffman, 1959). These identities are always relational (Oinas, 1998); that is, identities are always informed and influenced by significant others within any given community or landscape. As discussed previously in Chapter Two, *Literature Review*, notions of identity formation in this doctoral study are

chapter, *Negotiating the lesbian landscape and lesbian selves*.

³ An Australian lesbian landscape needs to be viewed as a concept, or notion, which does not necessarily exist as a physical location, but rather as a complex collection of people, places and services which shift and change according to the people who make up the community at any given time. Hence, the use of the term lesbian landscape for this doctoral study. Baird (2005) argues that while lesbians in Australia have been successful in creating intricate networks and community structures, the notion of an easily definable lesbian community per se is problematic because of the diverse population and needs which make up the community in the first instance. She argues that because of the diversity in sexual practices, physical proximity to large cities which tend to have more organised networks, and racism which currently exists, it is difficult to give a precise delimitation of an Australian lesbian community in the 21st century. However, she does recognise that “lesbian and queer culture and social worlds are crucially important in inspiring and motivating change and daily survival for marginalised women” (82). The definition of a lesbian landscape in an Australian culture, as used in this doctoral study, recognises that the landscape does not have well defined boundaries and is constantly shifting, changing and growing. There is an understanding that the “lesbian community serves many functions, including the creation of positive lesbian identit[ies] and the opportunity to establish intimate relationships. At the same time [it is recognised], the community demands from its members a high degree of conformity that limits individualism in an effort to maintain high group solidarity” (Correll, 1995, 271). This demand for group solidarity is problematic when it requires an individual to edit out too much of themselves in order to comply to a particular identity to be accepted into a community. Esterberg (1997) argues that it is more productive to view lesbian communities as “overlapping friendship networks, and sometimes exclusive ones at that, with multiple centres and fuzzy boundaries” (175).

informed by the work of sociologist, Eric Goffman (see for example, Goffman, 1959;1967) and his research on social interaction and performances. Goffman argued that while there are unlimited presentations of competent and socially able selves, or actors, available to individuals, there are only a limited number of identities available to access within any given community, landscape or context. This means that individuals are left with two choices when they seek *insider* status within a given community. The first choice requires an individual to edit themselves in order to fit an identity which is acceptable to the group they seek membership with. The second choice is to reject the available identities and risk being denied membership into the group (Frey, 2004). The participants within this study were unable to edit or connect with any of the identities available within the heterosexual landscape and as a consequence rejected a heterosexual identity and group membership. They were forced to look elsewhere for acceptance. This led them to explore the limited number of lesbian identities available within the Australian lesbian landscape. The acceptance or rejection of lesbian identities within the Australian landscape are explored more fully in the following chapter. However, the negotiation and rejection of a heterosexual identity and subsequent tensions between heterosexual and lesbian landscapes are explored here.

One of the unique aspect of the lesbian landscape is that *insiders* are defined by their sexuality, which in and of itself, sets them apart from mainstream heterosexual culture or communities and immediately defines them as (O)ther⁴. Lesbian communities face extra challenges as a result of this (O)thering because of their invisibility and the unsubstantiated myths and stereotypes which alienate them from the mainstream, or heterosexual, landscape. Even though heterosexuality is also a socially defined term, it is seen as the norm in Western cultures. Western culture privileges heterosexuals and ignores, prohibits, and/or punishes those with a non-heterosexually identified self. With the dichotomy between the heterosexual and non-heterosexual landscapes and the

⁴ The use of the term (O)ther is an acceptable term used within feminist and lesbian related literature (see for example, Ang, 1995; Beauvoir, 1953; Grosz, 1995; Hoffman, 1998; Lal, 1999; Macintyre, Latta, & Olafson, 2006; Probyn, 1998; Reich & Arkin, 2006; Sinclair & Lun, 2006; Treacher, 2006). The term means (O)ther illustrates a positioning outside the norm. In this instance, those with a lesbian identity are positioned by significant others who are part of the normative, power holding, (heterosexual) identity as being something other than the norm. Positioning somebody as (O)ther is often used as a means of silencing. However, many lesbian identified wimmin who are aware of the heterosexual/non-heterosexual polarity power struggle resist being silenced and made invisible by using their positioning of (O)ther as a means of

limited number of available identities within any given community, it is not possible to be non-heterosexual without having firstly explored a heterosexual identity.

It is this positioning of lesbians as (O)ther which is the focus of this chapter. The first two data analysis chapters considered the *post-initial coming-out* young lesbian in two predominately heterosexual landscapes; family and work. This chapter will firstly identify and explore the tensions which exist between the heterosexual and lesbian landscapes as it moves towards a deeper understanding of an Australian lesbian landscape. It will also highlight the invisibility of lesbian lives and experiences, culture and diversity within the heterosexual landscape and the idea of choice which often surrounds the notion of non-heterosexual identities.

In particular, the data will illuminate how the participants understood their *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identified selves given the tensions which exist between the heterosexual and lesbian landscapes and their positioning as (O)ther within heteronormative contexts. It will also show how these tensions continually shaped and re-shaped their *post-initial coming-out* identities and visa versa. For instance, assumptions of heterosexuality by significant others within the heterosexual landscape meant participants were faced with the, at times difficult, decision to challenge this assumption or remain invisible. More specifically this chapter will:

1. Identify the tensions between the heterosexual world and the lesbian landscape;
2. Use medical contexts as a means of further illustrating tensions between the heterosexual and lesbian landscapes; and
3. Explore lesbian invisibility and positioning as (O)ther.

As highlighted earlier in this chapter, it is necessary to firstly examine the broader issues and tensions which existed for each of the participants in terms of the juxtaposition of the heterosexual world and the lesbian landscape before understanding how the participants negotiated and created a space for themselves within the lesbian community. This positioning within the lesbian landscape by each of the participants is the focus of the following chapter, *Negotiating the Lesbian Landscape and Lesbian Selves*.

7.1. Identifying the Tensions Between the Heterosexual and Lesbian Landscapes

Being out of place is strongly related to learning: learning a correct body, learning words that will make the situation familiar, learning through intergenerational stories

Somerville, 2004, 56.

Tensions experienced by the participants in this study existed between the heterosexual and lesbian landscapes. The major issues, or tensions, and resulting chapter section designators identified in the data included, but were not limited to the following; firstly, the *splintering*⁵ of daily life, secondly, the lack of legal recognition for same sex relationships and protection of rights, and lastly, the invisibility of one landscape as a result of society privileging another. In this instance, the invisibility of the lesbian landscape is a result of the dominant, or socially accepted, heterosexual community or identity. Within each of these, the participant's positioning as (O)ther by significant others as a result of their *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identified selves lay at the very heart of each issue or tension. The invisibility experienced by the participants in the current study operated at different levels, as is discussed in the following sub-section, and influenced the lives, interactions and positioning of the participants in numerous ways. The notion of invisibility as experienced by the participants has been broken into major themes and made into sub-sections within the first section of this chapter. This has been done as a means of allowing the reader an insight into the complexity and diversity of invisibility as experienced by the *post-initial coming-out* participants in this study. The first sub-section introduces the notion of *splintering*. The second sub-section

⁵ In Chapter Six, *Negotiating the Work Landscape*, the participants explored the idea of fragmentation or splitting of self in relation to the performance of self in the work landscape, which was a public landscape, and their personal or private lesbian landscapes. The notion of the splintering of daily live for post-initial coming-out identified young lesbians is explored further in this chapter as one of the tensions between the heterosexual and lesbian landscapes.

centres around the current lack of legal recognition of lesbian relationships within Australian society. The final sub section highlights the invisibility of lesbians in medical contexts and research and leads into the second major issue, or section, of the chapter, *7.2. Use of Medical Contexts as a Means of Further Illustrating Tensions Between the Heterosexual and Lesbian Landscapes.*

7.1.1. *Splintering of Daily Pattern*

The most striking way in which the tensions between the heterosexual and lesbian landscapes manifested themselves was in the everyday lives of the participants. The participants identified what will be referred to here as a *splintering*⁶ where the fabric of the social world did not remain constant and they are unable to develop a cohesive self within their daily pattern. This splintering occurred because of the constant, and often unexpected, movement they had to make between the heterosexual world and their lesbian community as a result of their *post-initial coming-out* selves. Often, these two contexts did not sit comfortably with each other, as the lesbian landscape remained hidden or unacknowledged within the heterosexual horizon. This invisibility was partly addressed in the preceding two data analysis chapters in relation to both the family and work landscapes. However, its impact on how the participants defined themselves as *post-initial coming-out* lesbians and their daily activities was only alluded to previously.

Participants were well aware of the difficulties, or *splintering*, they and those close to them, experienced in all aspects of their lives because of the tension between the two juxtaposed landscapes. These difficulties varied over time and the effect upon the participants depended on the actual number of instances which occurred within a given time frame in combination with other mitigating events in their lives. For example, the following excerpt of text is from the group analysis in the third session where the participants were discussing the anticipation of homophobia they felt prior to interaction with medical personnel. The participants knew that they could not, nor did they want to, portray a heterosexual identity to the medical personnel they were about to interact with but found it frustrating constantly having to announce their lesbian selves in contexts where they would be potentially rejected or misunderstood.

⁶ This notion of *splintering* as it used here is different to the way in which the term is used in

Rosie: I think there was an actual anticipation.

Ani: Yes.

Sam: [There] was a building up [of] frustration, just knowing what [assumption of heterosexual identity and subsequent homophobia] was going to happen.

Ani: Yes.

Rosie: And in most instances it was also proven to be correct.

Tulli: Yes.

Rosie: They [the participants who wrote about this experience in their Memory Texts] weren't anticipating [this homophobic attitude] based on no experience. There was a certain element of repetition.

Tulli: Yes (GA, MWS3, CTHS, 11).

The data suggest that no matter how much time had passed since the participant's initial *coming-out* they were continually faced with potentially non accepting or homophobic situations, often on a daily basis, where they had to decide whether or not to disclose their lesbian selves and pre-empt the consequences or subsequent tension which grew out of their attempts to challenge their invisibility by announcing their existence. As a result, there was always an element of discord between how the *post-initial coming-out* lesbian lived her everyday life and how society perceived and subsequently positioned her as a result of her non-heterosexual identity. Participants experienced a very real sensitivity and uncertainty about their positioning, perception and overall safety in society. This tension of invisibility is illustrated in the following transcript,

Sam: It's just being a lesbian for a certain amount of time, it's not an issue anymore for you, but then when you get the feeling a situation isn't quite safe anymore it's unexpected when it happens. You can never just always be like a straight person can be because the whole of society doesn't view you as normal and so you come across situations where you're going to get abused and you have to be aware of your safety in certain situations and about being obvious as a couple. Like as a precaution for your safety (GA, MWS8, LIPS, 31).

This *splintering*, together with issues surrounding personal safety, tended towards participants sometimes being perceived by significant others who were not aware of the every day experiences of these wimmin as paranoid or overly sensitive. While none of the participants suffered from clinical paranoia, they reported instances where they felt paranoid, or recognised that others could easily have perceived them as being paranoid, as a result of being positioned as an *outsider*, or (*O*)*ther*, by others significant to an

psychological literature to explain a splitting of self which occurs in dissociative disorders.

interaction within a given context. For example,

Ani: I think sometimes if we've been given a hard time by somebody we think it's because we're gay.

Tulli: It's a fine line.

Ani: Yeah, sometimes it just might be because they don't like us as a person or they are actually busy or we're not actually the right person for the job or something like that. But I think it's quite easy to sometimes say, "Oh, they're just homophobic".

Sam: And sometimes you're standing there and you just don't know.

Ani: Yes.

Sam: Like with service, you don't know if they are busy, but then you look at them with other people and you think, "Well were those people legitimately in front of me or do they just prefer to deal with them rather than me?". You know that kind of stuff?

Ani: Yes.

Sam: You just don't quite know.

Lucy: Yeah, being gay does tend to make you that extra bit paranoid because you are actually psychoanalysing everything in your life.

Ani: That's right, everything.

Lucy: And you sometimes have to draw a line and go, "Okay, this is my sexuality and this is my life" (GA, MWS6, UCAO, 32).

Participants were constantly caught in situations where they felt they were being potentially over-sensitive or paranoid in the minds of others, significant to an interaction, if they analysed an interaction where they felt invisible or discriminated against as being homophobic. Often these interactions were based on nothing more than what the participants described as an internal sense or feeling they intuited about the interaction as being not quite right. It was a feeling each of the participants described as being positioned as *other* without necessarily announcing their sexuality in a verbal manner. For instance, in the group analysis of the sixth Memory Work session,

- Ani: Everyone knows what was meant by the [homophobic] confrontations and so forth, but no one [no significant other who was being homophobic] actually said, “this is because you’re gay or this is because we suspect you’re gay”. It was just this is how it is, this is what’s happening and you’ve got no control over the situation.
- Tulli: Which makes it [the situation] difficult to confront.
- Ani: Because nothing [has been] said.
- Tulli: And then if you say something then you’re the one with the problem.
- Sam: Yeah and you get on your high horse about your issue when it’s not really coming from you.
- Tulli: Yeah.
- Ani: And it’s not actually our issue, it’s theirs. They’re the ones that have the issue.
- Rosie: How do you actually change these situations?
- Sam: And you never know when it’s going to happen when it’s such a broad range of people and situations and you just don’t know when you’re going to encounter it (GA, MWS6, UCAO, 26 – 27).

Participants also described these intuitive feelings as acting like a safety gauge. This is particularly interesting given recent studies (for example, NSW Police Service & Price Waterhouse Urwick, 1995; Streetwatch Implementation Advisory Committee, 1994) on violence towards gays and lesbians in Sydney which suggest that while violence towards gay men is more prevalent, violence towards lesbians is more likely to result in death or greater physical injury (Streetwatch Implementation Advisory Committee, 1994). It is argued here that the participants’ intuitive feelings surrounding their safety are similar to those described by Somerville (2004) in her *lived* body work with miners in pit mines and their body/place knowledge called *pit sense*. This *sense* relies on kinaesthetic, sound, smell, and touch and enabled the miners to be aware of, and react to, minute changes in sounds, smell and feel of the air whilst underground. Somerville (2004) states that it is only “because of this acute and intense sense of things being-in-place and out-of-place that the mine workers can know when they are in danger. Similarly, the participants in this study described an intense sense, or embodied knowledge, of feeling accepted and safe. The participants believed that the anxiety they felt about their personal safety in the heterosexual landscape was a result of the taboos surrounding homosexuality and the subsequent privileging of heterosexuality,

- Ani: I think it's a generalisation that we think that heterosexuals are going to abuse us all the time.
- Lucy: That's right.
- Ani: But I also think that heterosexuals think they have the right to be able to abuse us all the time.
- Lucy: Because it's a taboo to be homosexual (GA, MWS8, LIPS, 41).

Mason (1995) argues that the very threat of violence is a control mechanism used by the dominant culture, or in this instance the heterosexual landscape, to actually regulate the presence of lesbianism in public. That is, "the harassment, the violence it insinuates, the actual physical assault can represent a warning or intimidatory mechanism against breaking the silence" (80). Participants were aware of the fine line they walked between resisting the status quo by making their lesbian identity visible and being invisible as a means of remaining safe. They were often called upon to evaluate a situation and make a split second decision about whether to be visible or invisible in the heterosexual landscape.

Another component of this *splintering* was the experiencing of feelings which fluctuated between ambivalence and anticipation when recounting experiences from their everyday lives. They felt caught between two worlds, one which wanted them to remain invisible (the heterosexual landscape) and the other (the lesbian landscape) which demanded they speak out against their invisibility at every opportunity. The participants' desire and ability to constantly challenge the dominant paradigm of heterosexuality and their invisibility at times wore them down and left them feeling tired, frustrated and unsupported. When participants did decide to challenge heteronormative thinking patterns, their *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identities were often used by significant others as an excuse to ignore their comments or as a means of redirecting and deprecating their line of enquiry. For instance,

She was working as an educator at a leading sexual and sexuality education organisation and never thought her sexuality would be a problem. On the most part it was not however, to one woman it clearly was. They were talking about a [school sex education] program they had in place and Ani asked this flaming red head if there was anything specific [within the program] to gay and lesbians other than just passing comments. Her reply shot out, "It's not a focus as much for us as it is for you". Ani was not sure if she said it quietly, but in the open office with desks joined everywhere, it sounded as if she had yelled it out. Ani tried

to explain that it wasn't a main focus for her either, but the red head had moved on. It was clear to Ani that there were many *us* and *them* barriers to break down and she wondered if she had the energy to try (Ani's MT, MWS6, UCAO, 6)

Daily battles of challenging in conjunction with the participant's subsequent invisibility within the heterosexual landscape left them feeling guilty, or at the very least torn, between what they felt they should have done and what they actually did. Participants reported that these internal feelings of guilt were difficult to reconcile even when they recognised they did not have the energy to contest a particular situation. For instance, when the participants analysed the Memory Texts from the session on *Unexpected Challenges and Oppositions* they spoke about this issue in detail.

Rosie: You kick yourself afterwards and with hindsight you say, "Well why didn't I just say ... And I could have just said these three words and it would have made all the difference". But at the time that it's done you can never do that.

Tulli: I came away [wondering] if I was just being super sensitive or did this really happen?

Rosie: That's the best way to silence someone [which] is why I think it [the questioning you were left with, was] calculated (GA, MWS6, UCAO, 14).

Splintering affected the participants in a number of ways, for example, an undermining of self confidence, feelings of paranoia and a sense of guilt if homophobia or invisibility was left unchallenged. It is argued here that the external issues which existed between the two landscapes, heterosexual and lesbian, would not allow the participants to develop a consistent and cohesive self. For the most part, participants used a variety of constructive coping strategies in an attempt to minimise the effect this *splintering* had on their sense of self. These strategies ranged from having a strong and understanding support system of friends with whom they could talk with, to allowing themselves to have periods of *down time* where they consciously disengaged from the challenges of negotiating their invisibility within society. Most importantly, it is evident from the personal talents each of the individual wimmin possessed that their ability to engage in other forms of expression, such as art, music, cooking and writing, was vital in their ability to cope with the *splintering* they experienced in their everyday lives. It is argued here that the *splintering* in the daily lived experiences of the participants as a result of their *(O)thering* meant they had to find these other avenues in which to express and explore themselves. Hall (2000) states that many,

contemporary lesbian artists passionately resist silencing through the empowering act of self-writing. Pivoting around issues of identity, their writings embody a nuanced celebration of survival and a recuperation of lesbian desires and experiences. At the same time, textual enactments of selves-in-process offer coping and survival strategies for others to adopt. Works by lesbian writers reject the silences surrounding the cumulative repressive forces that impact their lives – silences that perpetuate the patriarchal, heterosexual status quo (2).

The forms of alternative expression chosen by the participants provided them with an outlet in which to consider, and at times illustrate, their invisibility without necessarily using their oral skills in contexts which were less constricting or judgemental.

To summarise, the aforementioned illustrations of *splintering* in the daily lives of the participants, be it the undermining of self confidence, feelings of paranoia or invisibility, reveal the influence these examples of aforementioned tensions had on the participants' understanding of their *post-initial coming-out* identities and positioning within heterosexual society. *Splintering* was one of the manifestations of the tensions between the heterosexual and lesbian landscapes as experienced by the participants in the current study. This manifestation occurred because the two contexts, the heterosexual and the lesbian landscapes, were juxtaposed and did not sit comfortably with one another. As a result of being unable to take up a heterosexual identity, the participants were forced to take up a position of *(O)ther* within the heterosexual landscape and seek acceptance in a non-heterosexual landscape.

7.1.2. Lack of Legal Recognition of Lesbian Relationships

[Kerryn Phelps and Jackie Stricker are] not the template by which all gay people should judge their relationships. There is no such template for homosexuals or heterosexuals. They have created for themselves a way of being together that is right for them and in doing so have forged a path for others to create their own lives

Mitchell, 2002, 232.

The participants were frustrated with the lack of legal recognition of same sex relationships within Australia at the time of this study. Mostly this lack of recognition had the potential to impact upon the participants lives in a negative way and reinforce their

invisibility within the heterosexual landscape. In particular, those participants who had families of origin who were non-supportive or indicative of *shifting* relationships felt most at risk. This discrimination was also based on a widely held belief in society that “if you are different from the so-called norm you can [at best] be tolerated but not fully integrated into *normal* society by expectations of legal marriage. It assumes, also, that gay people choose their so-called difference” (Mitchell, 2002, 93). Well known Australian lesbian, Jackie Stricker, made the following comment about how she felt when her brother was married,

I can remember when my brother got married sitting back and feeling a lot of different emotions. I felt envious, I felt left out, I felt isolated, I felt ostracised from mainstream society. I felt I was a disappointment to my parents. I felt I was somehow marginalised from this commitment and why was I? So when I met Kerry [Phelps] and I fell so desperately in love with her I thought, I want that too. And why shouldn't I? The fact that it wasn't legally recognised was irrelevant to us. We felt the law would simply have to catch up” (Mitchell, 2002, 66).

Overseas in countries like America it is also still illegal for non-heterosexual people to marry despite a brief moment (of less than a month) when it became *legal* for same sex couples to marry in states like California in early 2000. As a result of this illegality in America, they too “are denied social security and insurance benefits, inheritance rights, and major medical benefits for live-in lovers. Gays are [also] barred from military service. Some states [also] ban gay adoptions and in some home ownership by unrelated individuals is illegal” (Bozett & Sussman, 1989, 1).

While there have been some changes in the Queensland legal system during this study in relation to the legal recognition of same sex relationships with the introduction of the Discrimination Law Amendment Bill in 2002, there were still legal loopholes which do not completely cover all aspects of the law and same sex relationships. The laws which did exist at the time of this study differed from state to state across Australia (Baird, 2005; <http://www.gaylawnet.com>). For example, there were only a few, non lesbian and gay oriented private health insurance companies which recognised, and included, same sex couples in their family cover option. Further, superannuation companies were not obligated to provide full spouse entitlements to a same sex partner in the event of a death. Queensland law still refused to recognise same sex partners as next of kin, but

did allow same sex partners to leave property to each other in wills and give each other power of attorney. At the time of this study, same sex couples could also not legally adopt children or access safe artificial insemination or donor sperm within Queensland. Nor could the non-biological mother in a same sex couple gain legal rights, recognition or responsibilities for the child regardless of her role in the planning and parenting of the child (Baird, 2005; <http://www.gaylawnet.com>). Participants were also aware that should a person in a same sex relationship fall ill, then it was up to the discretion of the individual doctor and hospital to recognise, include and accommodate the same sex partner in the medical decision making process. This inclusion would be automatic for a couple in a heterosexual relationship but was not a given for those in same sex relationships. The current Australian taxation system also discriminated against same sex couples by not allowing them the same tax breaks as heterosexual couples. Towards the end of this study there was an awareness within the lesbian and gay community that the re-elected Howard government, who had gained the majority of power in both the House of Representatives (the Lower House) and the Senate (the Upper House) would block any future legislative reforms seeking to recognise same sex couples in the same vein as their heterosexual counterparts (Baird, 2005; Johnson, 2003).

While the participants were aware of the many limitations of the lack of legal recognition within this country, they also had the good humour and insight to work the system when the opportunity arose. For instance, at least two of the five participants had accessed financial assistance through the government funded *Centrelink* agency for a relatively short time. Each of the two participants recounted how they were upfront about their same sex relationships when they put in their paper work and how they had received mixed reactions from the counter staff. As a result of the government not recognising same sex relationships at a national level, the participants were able to receive assistance without being means tested against their respective same sex partner's limited incomes. The participants viewed this as a small win in an otherwise bleak heterosexually biased financial landscape. Ani recounted her experience with *Centrelink* during the group analysis in the Memory Work session on *Unexpected Challenges and Oppositions*,

Ani: I was putting down how much [I] earned and all that sort of jazz and [than came to] a question about your partner. And it was like first time I'd ever been there so I went up to this lady who was probably in her fifties or sixties and very prim and proper and said, "Does this mean that it includes same sex couples as well?". And she said, "What?" (Laughter). And I said, "My partner is a woman as well". And she raced off. I swear she aged ten years. And she raced off saying, "I've got to check with my supervisor". I'm sure she had a swig of scotch or something on the way to settle herself down. And she came back and said, "No, no it doesn't. It doesn't. No. No, it doesn't". (Laughter).

Tulli: But she wouldn't come to the counter. She stood back from the counter. Even though the counter was really wide and Ani was on the other side of the counter.

Ani: That's right, [previously] we were sitting down but when she came back she wouldn't sit down, she just stood up.

Tulli: And she wouldn't come close to Ani at all.

Lucy: Really? Was she scared of Ani:

Tulli: She might get the lesbian germ! (Laughter) (GA, MWS6, UCAO, 18 – 19).

Even though the experience here was recounted in a humorous way by Ani, it did impact on the way she felt about her lesbian self. In an attempt to be honest about her same sex relationship she was treated as contagious. Even though in this one small instance her invisibility worked in her favour financially, she was still conscious of her positioning of *(O)ther* both by the government and the *Centrelink* employee.

This section highlighted the frustration felt by the participants in relation to a lack of legal recognition of same sex relationships in Australia. It also illustrated how this legal invisibility affected, and was played out in, their everyday lives. For example, not only were the participants particularly vulnerable where they or their same sex partner had a non-supportive family of origin who could challenge or contest their relationship in relation to difficult medical and/or legal situations, but this lack of formal recognition had serious implications for producing and raising children.

7.1.3. Invisibility of Lesbians in Medicine and Research

Participants were aware of the lack of medically appropriate research and funding for HIV positive lesbians and the education of wommin to wommin transmission of HIV and STDs within both the general and lesbian communities. This could be partly due to the belief that white, middle class homosexually active men have been predominately affected by the HIV/AIDS virus (King, Lawless, & Spongberg, 1996; Richardson, 2000). While this may have been the case when the virus first struck in the early 1980s,

research shows that women are now outstripping predicted numbers of new cases HIV infection (King, Lawless, & Spongberg, 1996; MacBride-Stewart, 2004). Further, it was not until 1993 that invasive cervical cancer, a wimmin-specific HIV/AIDS condition, and other disease manifestations common to women were included in the Centres for Disease Control AIDS-defining illnesses, despite over 18,500 wimmin having officially died of AIDS in the United States by the end of 1992 (Dworkin, 2005).

McDonald, Misson, and Grierson (2002) state that in Australia “women make up 6% of the total population of people living with HIV/AIDS yet globally women make up nearly half of the estimated 40 million people living with HIV/AIDS” (xiii). They do not state what percentage of these wimmin are lesbian identified or the rate of female to female transmission of the HIV/AIDS virus within this cohort. While none of the participants identified as being HIV positive at the time of this study, they were all acutely aware of the lack of lesbian driven and funded research in this particular area of medicine. As mentioned previously in Chapter 2, *Literature Review*, the Centre for Disease Control (CDC) in the United States defines a lesbian as a wommin who has not had sexual relations with a male since 1973, regardless of the wommin’s age or other relevant sexual history (Albury, 1993; Axell, 1994; Dworkin, 2005; Gale & Short, 1995; Lawless, Kippax, & Crawford, 1996; Mac Neil, 1993; Rosen, 1992). As a result the CDC does not have a category in their AIDS report which considers, or recognises, wommin to wommin transmission of the HIV/AIDS virus. Rather, they have a category of *other* where they position HIV positive wimmin who do not fit the *normal* modes of HIV transmission; for example, injecting drug user or engaging in unprotected sex with a HIV positive male. While it does not appear that the transmission of the HIV virus between wommin occurs at the same rate as that of injecting drug users who share dirty needles or unprotected gay male sexual activity, there are many cases of suspected cases of wommin to wommin HIV transmission (Cochran, Bybee, Gage, & Mays, 1996; Lawless, Kippax, & Crawford, 1996; MacBride-Stewart, 2004; Marmor, Weiss, & Lyden, 1986; Monzon & Capellan, 1987; O’Hanlan, 2004; Perry, Jacobsberg, & Fogel, 1989; Rich, Buck, Tuomala, & Kazanjian, 1993; Sabatini, Patel, & Hirschman, 1983). It is difficult to assess the full extent of wommin to wommin HIV transmission because of the way transmission is categorised by the CDC. Furthermore, drug trials for HIV/AIDS treatments do not include wimmin. Therefore, wimmin are given treatments based on male only trials which

do not address their specific needs or metabolic systems. For instance, in King, Lawless, and Spongberg (1996), King states,

Where is my lesbian body? I am constantly presented with images that don't relate to me, especially a sexually HIV positive lesbian. I feel last in this pool of theoretical and medical terminology, about my treatments and lifestyle. I try to work it all out – what is best for me but it is muddled ... 'cause I read that drug trials are not even done on women, that it was done on men! I throw my hands up and scream, "I am not a man I am a woman and a dyke at that so how the heck will this relate to me?" I am different and invisible and the worst part is that I really want to believe it. I get disappointed and then angry and sad (131).

Ultimately, HIV/AIDS has been constructed and portrayed as a gay male defined disease by both the medical and general population. Within Australia wimmin have been ignored by National HIV/AIDS reports all around the country, with the small exception of incidences related to peri-natal transmission (King, Lawless, & Spongberg, 1996), however, an Australian report by McDonald, Bartos, de Visser, Ezzy, and Rosenthal (1997) on wimmin living with HIV/AIDS in Australia did identify the development of a number of positive women's groups. Wimmin have not only been infected with the HIV virus from the very start of the epidemic, but they also far out number the male volunteer carers working in the area (King, Lawless, & Spongberg, 1996; MacBride-Stewart, 2004).

Not surprisingly, this lack of acknowledgement of HIV/AIDS transmission between wimmin within the medical profession is also perpetuated in the general heterosexual community as well as some parts of the lesbian community. For instance, all of the participants were unaware of the possibility of HIV and STD transmission between wimmin when they first identified as lesbian. They were also unaware of safe sex practices that related specifically to lesbian sexual activity. It was only after a considerable amount of time, personal research and chance discussions with knowledgeable others that the participants in this study became more aware of the issues. This finding is also supported by research conducted by MacBride-Stewart (2004) in New Zealand whose work with lesbian wimmin and safe sex practices confirms that participants only became aware of lesbian related safe sex practices through their ongoing contact with other lesbians as opposed to some kind of public health education.

These experiences of invisibility and lack of lesbian specific sexual health knowledge support the idea that invisibility can have a substantial, if not life changing, impact on the lives of *post-initial coming-out* young lesbians. Not only does this invisibility impact upon the *post-initial coming-out* lesbian's sense of safety and overall personal health but it also affects the level of care and understanding she can potentially expect to receive when accessing medical health providers, in particular, those professionals who she has not already met and established a working relationship on the basis of disclosing her lesbian identity.

Invisibility within the heterosexual world in combination with stereotypes and assumptions, particularly within the medical field, did impact upon each of the participants' sense of self and identities as *post-initial coming-out* lesbians in a variety of ways. Foremost, feelings of rejection, repulsion, (dis)ease and misunderstanding heightened the participants sense of being an *outsider*. It is argued here that this feeling of being an *outsider*, or (*O*)*ther*, is related to the way in which space or boundaries are understood within our culture and consequently organise our lives (Johnston & Valentine, 1995; MacBride-Steward, 2004; Woodhead, 1995). For instance, there is the idea of public and private spaces and their relationship to health and lesbian invisibility. An example of a private space would be a home. This space has the potential to allow greater freedom in the understanding, displaying of visual cues and acting out of a non-heterosexual identity. Home in many cases was defined within this study as a space which was away from the participants' family of origin and was viewed as a *safe* place. It was a private space which allowed the participants to explore their identity, display visual cues which reinforced and celebrated their sense of self, and allowed *time-out* from the outside (heterosexual) world. Examples of a public space include medical institutions such as hospitals and doctor's surgeries. Valentine (1996) argues that public space is an arena where the production of heterosexuality is played out and upheld as the norm. Data from Valentine's study support the argument that hospitals and medical institutions uphold heterosexuality as the norm and produce a space which often renders non-heterosexual identities as invisible or positioned as (*O*)*ther*. With the shift of responsibility for health from the state to the individual in recent years (Petersen & Lupton, 1996), there has been a blurring between what is public and what is private. McDowell (1999) argues that the notion of public within the context of health now implies

a kind of citizenship or ownership, that is predominately heterosexual in nature. Hence, the use of medical contexts, or public space, is an excellent vehicle for illustrating the invisibility and tensions lesbians experience in a public, or heterosexual, landscape. This sense of (*O*)*thering* and invisibility in a medical context is explored more fully in the next section.

7.2. Use of Medical Contexts as a Means of Further Illustrating Tensions Between the Heterosexual and Lesbian Landscapes

The richness of the data specifically involving medical contexts and the *post-initial coming-out* lesbian in the third Memory Work session, *Negotiating the Health System*, was a source which further illustrated the tensions between the heterosexual and lesbian landscapes identified in the previous section. Firstly, assumptions about heterosexuality and the subsequent positioning of the participants by significant others within the medical profession are presented. This is followed by a sub-section on how the participants used a combination of redirecting questions and subtle forms of resistance as a means of challenging misinformed questions by medical personnel. A final sub-section on the impact of social expectations, generalisations and misconceptions on the participants' non-heterosexual identities are presented. Each of these sub-sections will provide memories and group analysis of experiences as recounted by the participants during the third Memory Work session. These experiences further illustrate the participant's heightened awareness of being *outsiders* in the heterosexual landscape as a result of their *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identity. "Lesbian disclosure is a central experience in lesbian life" (McDonald & Anderson, 2003, 697) and affects all experiences and interactions, but particularly those within a medical context. For instance,

Sam: I just [get] frustrated anticipating what [is] going to [happen]. I don't know, it just never changes. It's just always the same old story.

Rosie: I don't really have a problem in terms of my health.

Tulli: Yes, but you have seen it all happen though.

Rosie: Well, yes.

Sam: It seems to come down to if you choose to disclose or not. If you can just encounter the system without disclosing [anything about] your sexuality.

Tulli: But the way they ask the questions, you can never not avoid it.

Sam: I've been and I've avoided it if it [the condition Sam was seeking treatment for] is something simple [like a cold or flu] (GA, MWS3, CTHS, 19).

As with the previous two data analysis chapters, it is appropriate here to provide a brief overview of each of the participants in a text box format. This will allow the reader a more detailed insight and understanding of the participants *lived* experiences in a medical context as they relate to the Memory Work texts and transcripts which follow. In this instance, the vignettes will focus on the participants' pertinent medical histories and have been constructed by the author from information which arose during the group analysis from the third Memory Work session, *Negotiating the Health System*.

Sam

Sam had not experienced any major medical illness at the time of this study. She did not have one specific general medical practitioner that she saw on a regular basis. However, she had regular general and sexual health check ups despite receiving a variety of reactions to her disclosure of her lesbian identity. Due to a combination of factors which included employment location and long work hours, Sam chose to access medical care from a suburban 24 hour medical centre which was close to her home and place of employment. She was aware of three gay and lesbian specific medical centres which existed within the urban setting that this study took place but was unable to access them because of their limited opening hours.

Rosie

Rosie, like Sam, had also not experienced any major medical illness at the time of this study. However, she had had a long history with the medical profession due to major health issues both within her family of origin and with her same sex partner. As a result of study commitments, part time or casual employment, and location of residence, Rosie's experiences of the medical profession had been predominantly with the public health system. On the whole her experiences with the medical profession had not been particularly positive.

Ani

Ani had a long history with the medical profession as a result of a serious mental health illness. This illness was organic in nature and unrelated to environmental or identity issues. When she first sought medical assistance she had many difficult experiences with medical professions who did not understand lesbian identity, issues or culture. After much persistence and support from her same sex partner, Ani was able to access a team of medical professionals who understood her illness was not caused, or negatively affected, by her lesbian identity. This team of professionals actively included her same sex partner in major medical decisions. Ani continued to experience difficult interludes with medical professionals when she had to access doctors who had not been recommended by her core team.

Tulli

Tulli, like Rosie, had a long history with medical professionals as a result of major health issues both within her family of origin and with her same sex partner. Tulli also had a gynaecological health issue which resulted in extensive appointments and tests with specialists, who were predominately unaware of lesbian health issues and culture. Despite financial difficulty, Tulli chose to access a regular GP at a gay and lesbian medical centre and utilize private health insurance to ensure her ability to access doctors and specialists of her choice.

Lucy

Lucy also experienced a number of long term medical conditions which limited her overall mobility and ability to maintain long term employment. She was dependant upon the public health system and limited financially and logistically in her ability to access one of the three gay and lesbian medical centres available within the urban setting in which this study occurred.

7.2.1. Assumptions of Heterosexuality

The majority of heterosexuals have never had to question, or answer questions about, their sexual orientation (Eliason, 1996; Kitzinger, 1987; 1989). As O'Hanlan (1997)

states, “health care providers are not immune to misinformation received in their early socialisation, and they typically are not educated about gay and lesbian health issues in their medical training, with the possible exception of HIV/AIDS” (27). For the most part they have never had their heteronormative thought patterns challenged. Therefore, in some respects it is not surprising that, on the one hand, automatic assumptions about the heterosexuality of their clientele are also taken up by the medical profession. This background socialisation was recognised by the participants in the following group analysis,

Rosie: I think medicine fits into society as something that just generalises and works on stereotypes, as most of society does.

Ani: And it's quite literal.

Rosie: It works on the majority, so we happen to be in the minority so it's our prerogative to identify or not identify and to assert ourselves.

Ani: I think it magnifies generalisations of the society as a whole, because you don't just walk down the street thinking about these questions that doctors ask you when you go into a doctor's surgery and you get these questions flying at you and you think, “Oh well, hang on a second” (GA, MWS3, CTHS, 52).

However, despite the fact that the majority of clientele will be heterosexual, medical professionals do see a wide variety of people and medical issues in their working lives and the automatic assumption that a patient's sexual identity is heterosexual is documented as having a huge impact on a non-heterosexual identified individual's decision to firstly seek, and sustain medical advice (Baird, 2005; Mathieson, Bailey, & Gurevich, 2002; McDonald & Anderson, 2003; McNair, 2003; O'Hanlan, 2004; Public Health Association of Australia Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Health Policy (<http://www.phaa.net.au/policy/lesbianan/bisexual.html>); Roberts, 2001; Schwanberg, 1990; Trippet & Bain, 1992), especially with respect to levels of communication, confidence, and anxiety experienced before, during and after the advice is sought (Booth, 2002; Eliason, 1996; Lesbian Health Project, 2003; Mathieson, Bailey & Gurevich, 2002). As Eliason (1996) argues with the advent of equal treatment and anti-discrimination laws issues involving race, gender and sexuality should no longer be relevant, however, “people are *not* treated equally in our society or in health care. Prejudices, fears, and negative attitudes are so deeply ingrained in individuals and in institutions that discrimination is widespread. Equally significant is its commonality, its *routine* character, which makes it largely invisible to those in the dominant group” (4).

Data from this study also confirm the routine, and often invisible, nature of discrimination experienced by the participants in a medical context. During the group analysis in the third Memory Work session, the participants highlighted the common elements and feelings of anticipation in their Memory Texts,

Tulli: Alright, similarities between each of the memories?

Rosie: I think every single person had an anticipation of that [negative or potentially homophobic] response.

Ani: Yes.

Sam: [I] was frustrat[ed], just knowing what was sort of going to happen.

Ani: Yes.

Rosie: That was common in all of the memories. And in most instances it was also proven to be correct.

Tulli: Yes.

Rosie: They [we] weren't anticipating based on no [previous] experience.

Tulli: Yes.

Rosie: And there was a certain element of repetition, like, not only was it common that you knew that it was going to be [but] you knew it was going to [happen] again [in the future]. (Laughter).

Sam: Yeah. I think [mine] and Tulli's were very similar. Just the interaction with the health professional really not being comfortable with dealing with a lesbian and then their questions were really sort of heterosexually based.

Tulli: And as soon as Ani said the lesbian word, then it was kind of like the whole questioning speed up and it [the appointment] took a different direction (GA, MWS3, NTHS, 11 – 12).

Data from this study support the idea that assumptions of heterosexuality by significant others had far reaching implications for each of the participants, *post-initial coming-out*. This was particularly evident in the context where these heterosexual assumptions occurred in a medical context. As Sam stated,

Sam: The notion of invisibility [has] always [been] a big stereotype, that lesbians are invisible in the health system.

Ani: [They] just assume you are heterosexual every time you walk in there?

Sam: Yes (GA, S3, NTHS, 51).

The difficulties the participants in this study experienced in a medical context because of assumptions of heterosexuality by medical personnel is supported by research conducted by an Australian doctor Carol Booth (2002). Booth states that it is not uncommon for lesbians to have "difficulty choosing a doctor. Lesbians want health workers to ask questions in ways that affirm that same-sex relationships are normal.

[Lesbians] take cues from the way the health worker or doctor behaves” (63). Further, Eliason (1996) states that “health care education rarely provides essential information about lesbian and gay clients to counteract the stereotypes” (112) which affect medical personnel treatment of, and attitude towards, non-heterosexually identified patients.

This lack of understanding and empathy about lesbian lives by significant people in the medical profession has an effect on lesbians being willing to seek appropriate and timely medical advice which can potentially affect the quality and longevity of their lifespan (Cochran, Mays, Bowen, Gage, Bybee, Roberts, Goldstein, Robinson, Rankow, & White, 2001). It is a stance which also continues to position lesbians at best as *(O)ther* and at worse, invisible. This is illustrated in the following example where Lucy believed that one of her doctors forced her into a position which simultaneously denied her lesbian identity and reinforced the heteronormative status quo of the general population. Lucy was experiencing a number of serious health issues at the time recounted by her Memory Text. Lucy had seen the particular doctor mentioned in her Memory Text because the doctor was female, bulk billed, and was relatively close to her place of residence. At each appointment Lucy was accompanied by her same sex partner. Neither Lucy or her same sex partner were secretive about their relationship but both felt an underlying, unspoken uncomfortableness on behalf of the doctor about their relationship at each of Lucy’s appointments. For instance,

The doctor asked them both to come in and explained she had to write a medical report about Lucy. Lucy panicked. She began to worry about how she was going to explain she was in a relationship with a women [when] she knew the doctor was homophobic. They went through the questions in the report and everything was fine. Then they came to the question about marital status. Lucy responded saying that she was divorced and her doctor looked at her. Suddenly, the air in the room felt uncomfortable. Lucy said, ‘I’m in a relationship with Rosie, but I don’t think that’s anyone else’s business’. Her doctor gave her a wink and smiled, ‘Yes, that’s right’ she said. As Lucy and Rosie left the room, the doctor put her hand on Lucy’s shoulder and said, ‘I’m glad you don’t hide behind your sexuality’. Lucy felt as if she’d been hiding all her life (Lucy’s MT, S3, CTHS, 3).

In the group analysis which followed the reading of the Memory Texts, Lucy reported that she felt her doctor, through her words and body language, had managed to not only reinforce heterosexuality as the norm, whilst single-handedly denying Lucy’s identity, but did so in a manner which she felt was condescending and inappropriate. It is one thing

for a patient with a lesbian identity to request her identity not be recorded on medico-legal documents when the ramifications for doing so far outweigh the benefits than it is for a doctor to make an assumption that maintaining an image of heterosexuality is far more important and the *correct thing* to do. Lucy stated she felt her doctor thought it was the correct approach to portray Lucy as heterosexual in the documentation she had to complete as part of Lucy's treatment. Throughout a series of ongoing appointments over a significant period of time, both Lucy and her partner became aware of what they perceived as a homophobic attitude on behalf of this particular doctor. However, as the doctor was not interviewed for this study, it is hard to determine exactly whether the doctor's response recounted above in Lucy's Memory Text was based on heterosexual privilege or homophobic ignorance. O'Hanlan (2004) states that limited research in the area of medical practitioners' disdain for lesbian clientele suggests that "lesbian patients do perceive this distain and have been alienated from the medical system, reducing their utilization of standard screening modalities, potentially resulting in higher morbidity and mortality from cancers and heart disease" (2). Research which specifically explores medical professionals' attitudes and experiences in conjunction with non-heterosexual clientele in an Australian context is yet to be conducted. This type of research is outside the limitations of this particular doctoral study but is worthy of future consideration.

Further to Lucy's example were experiences described by at least two of the participants with specialists who assumed they were heterosexual, or chose to ignore the signs that they were lesbian. They reported that the doctors informed them in their mid teens and early twenties that the best solution for their respective medical (gynaecological) conditions would be to quickly find suitable male partners, get married and produce children.

Tulli: So she [first gynaecologist] had the audacity to say to me that it would go away and I would be fine as soon as I had a child. And that I needed to go and find myself a husband, pretty dam quick (Laughter). Like, I was in my early twenties, and this woman is telling me to go and find a husband and have a child!

Ani: Well you're marring days are over after 22 (Laughter)!

Lucy: Could you imagine a doctor saying that to me at 15? He was saying to me with my mum sitting beside me, "As soon as you get married, like next year or the year after and have children, this will go away Lucy".

Tulli: Yes I know, but the thing is it doesn't go away. And then I had a second gynaecologist say almost the same thing to me.

Rosie: But it's also one of those things, when you read the books, that about 80% of

people, after they have children, [it does] clear itself up.
 Tulli: But that's a myth, it doesn't.
 Lucy: There is a percentage, but it's very low. It's about 5 or 2 %, something like that [for whom pregnancy works and reduces the severity of the condition].
 Tulli: Plus chances are you are going to have trouble falling pregnant anyway.
 Rosie: Yes (GA, MWS3, CTHS, 23).

Regardless of identity, the participant's agreed that given their own research into the particular gynaecological condition underpinning the above transcript of the group analysis, no medical personnel should be suggesting marriage and childbirth as an effective treatment. This advice reflects the lack of understanding which exists within the medical profession and reinforces the heteronormative nature of society in general. It reinforces the invisibility of lesbians within our society. If the participants in this study had heeded their respective specialists advice, the number of people directly affected by their marrying for the wrong reasons, as well as the effect on the long term mental and physical health of the women themselves, would have been considerable. It also reinforces the United States based Lesbian Services of Whitman Walker Clinic's recognition that "historically, lesbians have confronted a health care system that is, at worst, hostile to their life choices and, at best, has little information on how to work sensitively with lesbians" (<http://www.wwc.org/>).

Linked to assumptions of heterosexuality were the routine questions used by the medical profession. These questions served to further reinforce heteronormative identities, ideals, and ultimately made lesbian lives invisible. While the participants were not specific about the types of lesbian driven health related question they would have liked medical professionals, outside of Lesbian and Gay specific medical centres, to use once the participant had disclosed her lesbian identity, the limited research (for example, Booth, 2002; Eliason, 1996; Hiller, de Visser, Kavanagh, & McNair, 2004; Lesbian Health Interagency Network (www.acon.org.au/community/index.cfm?doc_id=1044&cat_id=72); Lesbian Health Project, 2003; Mathieson, Bailey, & Gurevich, 2002; McDonald & Anderson, 2003; McNair, 2003; O'Hanlan, 2004; Public Health Association of Australia Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Health Policy (<http://www.phaa.net.au/policy/lesbianan/bisexual.html>); Roberts, 2001) which does exist in the area would suggest the following issues as relevant;

1. use of inclusive language (for example, using the term partner instead of husband or boyfriend which automatically assumes the client participates in heterosexual relationships) (See for example, Booth, 2002; Eliason, 1996; Johnson, Guenther, Laube, & Keettel, 1981; Lesbian Health Interagency Network (www.acon.org.au/community/index.cfm?doc_id=1044&cat_id=72); Lesbian Health Project, 2003; Mathieson, Bailey, & Gurevich, 2002; McDonald & Anderson, 2003; McNair, 2003; Public Health Association of Australia Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Health Policy (<http://www.phaa.net.au/policy/lesbianan/bisexual.html>); Roberts, 2001; Scherzer, 2000);
2. promoting the use of dental dams and other related latex products relevant to lesbian safe sexual practices (See for example, Booth, 2002; Eliason, 1996; Lesbian Health Project, 2003; MacBride-Stewart, 2004; Public Health Association of Australia Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Health Policy (<http://www.phaa.net.au/policy/lesbianan/bisexual.html>));
3. accurate information about AIDS and discussion regarding STDs from a lesbian perspective which were relevant to the individual's sexual partners and practices (see for example, Dworkin, 2005; Eliason, 1996; Lesbian Health Interagency Network (www.acon.org.au/community/index.cfm?doc_id=1044&cat_id=72); MacBride-Stewart, 2004; Mathieson, Bailey, & Gurevich, 2002; McDonald & Anderson, 2003; Public Health Association of Australia Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Health Policy (<http://www.phaa.net.au/policy/lesbianan/bisexual.html>); Richardson, 2000; Roberts, 2001);
4. discussion regarding smoking and alcohol consumption (it is important to note that research, for example, Bradford, Ryan, & Rothblum, 1994; Fethers, Marks, Mindel, & Estcourt, 2000; Hiller, de Visser, Kavanagh, & McNair, 2004; Lesbian Health Project, 2003; Mathieson, Bailey, & Gurevich, 2002; Murnane, Smith, Crompton, Snow, & Munro, 2000; O'Hanlan, 2004; Tremellan, 1997; Welsch, Howden-Chapman, & Collings, 1998, indicate consistently higher smoking and alcohol consumption amongst lesbians than their heterosexual counterparts);
5. discussion regarding safe drug usage, whether it be social or more frequent in nature (research, for example, Bradford, Ryan, & Rothblum, 1994; Degenhardt,

- 2005; Fethers, Marks, Mindel, & Estcourt, 2000; Grulich, Richters, de Visser, Smith, & Rissel, 2003; Hillier, Dempsey, Harrison, Beale, Matthews, & Rosenthal, 1998; Murnane, Smith, Crompton, Snow, & Munro, 2000; Smith, Lindsay, & Rothenthal, 1999; all show increased use of illicit drugs amongst non-heterosexual, or questioning, lesbian and bisexual youth and adults in comparison to their heterosexual counterparts. More importantly, research by Hillier, Dempsey, Harrison, Beale, Matthews, & Rosenthal (1998) illustrate a strong correlation between same-sex attracted youth (both female and male), abuse, and injecting drug use);
6. parenting or pregnancy issues as they relate to lesbian identified single or partnered families (see for example, Eliason, 1996; Harvey, Carr, & Bernheine, 1989; Lesbian Health Interagency Network (www.acon.org.au/community/index.cfm?doc_id=1044&cat_id=72); Mathieson, Bailey, & Gurevich, 2002; McDonald & Anderson, 2003; McNair, 2003; Public Health Association of Australia Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Health Policy (<http://www.phaa.net.au/policy/lesbianan/bisexual.html>); Roberts, 2001);
 7. awareness of how lesbian identity can impact upon comfort level and ability to relate to specialists and other referral related services. For example, the issue of gender and location of the specialist can have a huge impact (see for example, Eliason, 1996; Lesbian Health Interagency Network (www.acon.org.au/community/index.cfm?doc_id=1044&cat_id=72); Mathieson, Bailey, & Gurevich, 2002; McDonald & Anderson, 2003; Roberts, 2001; Scherzer, 2000);
 8. specialised understanding of lesbian experiences when dealing specifically with mental health or violence (see for example, Carr-Gregg, Enderby, & Grover, 2003; Eliason, 1996; Girshick, 2002; Helfrich & Simpson, 2006; Lesbian Health Interagency Network (www.acon.org.au/community/index.cfm?doc_id=1044&cat_id=72); Mathieson, Bailey, & Gurevich, 2002; McDonald & Anderson, 2003; McNair, 2003; Renzetti, 1992; Roberts, 2001).

All of this research suggests that lesbians are at a higher risk of undetected sexually transmitted diseases, breast, uterine, ovarian and colon cancers as well as heart

disease and stroke as a result of presenting later in the progression of the illness (Cochran, Mays, Bowen, Gage, Bybee, Roberts, Goldstein, Robinson, Rankow, & White, 2001). It also suggests that lesbians potentially do not access appropriate resources for parenting or pregnancy issues, mental health or violence as compared to their heterosexual counterparts.

Participant responses to questions and doctor reactions to disclosure of a lesbian identity varied depending on the context. That is, whether it was a private or public health setting, general medical practice or lesbian and gay specific medical practice. The questions asked by the medical professionals were ultimately driven by the participant's discretion in terms of whether they chose to disclose or not to disclose their *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identity. The following example given by Sam illustrates several related and important issues relating to questions and disclosure,

Finally the only female doctor working that shift called her name. She followed her down a narrow corridor and entered into a brightly-lit room at the very end. Sam remembered being asked the reason for her visit [Sam's bi-annual pap smear]. She answered and then anticipated the 'routine' questions that would follow.

Are you taking any medications?

Are you using contraception?

Are you sexually active?

Sam recalled the look of mild puzzlement and concern cross over the doctor's face, as she answered no to contraception and then yes to being sexually active. The doctor then asked, 'well are you using condoms?' Nonchalantly Sam informed her that no she did not as she was lesbian and did not have male sexual partners. Sam wondered how many lesbians ended up with a heterosexual targeted safe sex lecture from medical professionals because they did not choose to disclose their sexuality. Sam detected a degree of discomfort from the doctor and did not feel at ease for the remainder of the appointment (Sam's MT, S3, CTHS, 4).

In the group analysis, Sam's interpretation of her interaction with the doctor after the disclosure of her lesbian identity was that the doctor's body language displayed she was uncomfortable with Sam for the remainder of the appointment. This uncomfortableness displayed by the doctor could have been because she, the doctor, realised her initial mistake in immediately assuming Sam was heterosexual or as a result of her own lack of understanding about lesbian related health issues and inability to relate to lesbian identified women and ask appropriate health related questions.

Research reported by Eliason (1996) confirms a change in interactions, or in some instances the rough handling of a patient, after disclosing a non-heterosexual identity is not uncommon. This apprehension about possible homophobia from medical personnel lends itself to the real possibility of non-heterosexually identified clients not disclosing their orientation and subsequently not being given the information they really need about a particular health question or condition. It can also result in the delay of seeking appropriate medical care in the first instance which in turn can affect the overall treatment and long term health outcomes of the client. Further, O'Hanlan (2004) argues that the "medical and psychological effects of such disdain are profound on the developing self-concept of the youth as well as the adults who recognize within themselves a same-sex orientation. Therefore, the process of homophobia – the socialization of heterosexual against homosexuals and concomitant conditioning of gays and lesbians against themselves – must be recognized by physicians as a legitimate health hazard" (3). The participants in this study described their experiences with doctors who were uncomfortable with them, disclosing these experiences in ways which were humorous yet filled with frustration. This use of humour was often used as a coping mechanism and is reflective of the participants' inner strength.

Sam: This [lesbian identity] just gets thrown in and it is a bit of a shock for them and it's just a bit of a hassle for me to have to go through the whole explanation and you just know these [heterosexual based] questions are going to come up now. You just wait for them.

Ani: It is like you have an ID card, "Yes I am a lesbian. I do not have sex with men, this will not impact upon my Pap Smear results. Can you please just do what you have to do, thanks very much (Laughter). (GA, S3, CTHS, 13).

Medical professionals' inability to switch to more appropriate questions were also highlighted by participants as potentially affecting their overall medical care in terms of being able to access lesbian related safe sex information and having the ability to confidently discuss health concerns or issues in a lesbian friendly setting.

Rosie: I guess the only thing that is disappointing is that in situations like ours when you say, "Oh no, my partner is a woman", that there isn't an automatic set of separate questions. That there isn't an automatic switch where they can flick into lesbian questioning that would be relevant. They are still so conditioned in only knowing one form of questions and that I guess is disappointing.

Sam: And it is also like, not only the questioning but being comfortable with that as a concept, that their partner is going to be the same sex but they still need to be included like all the other partners are included (GA, S3, CTHS, 52 - 53).

This inability to understand the inappropriateness of heterosexually driven health related questions further highlights the invisibility lesbians face on a daily basis, particularly in medical contexts. The use of medical contexts in this instance to illustrate the invisibility of lesbians within the heterosexual landscape reflects the larger power dynamics and tensions which occur between the lesbian and heterosexual landscapes within our Western society.

7.2.2. Using Resistance

Much theorising has occurred in relation to work concerned with identity and the use of resistance (see for example, Bartky, 1997). Unexamined stereotypes, assumptions and the stigmatisation of lesbianism impacted negatively upon the visibility of the lesbian participants in this study and their subsequent positioning of *post-initial coming-out* selves within a predominately heterosexual society. The following discussion and examples in this sub-section illustrate the actual tactics of resistance used by the participants on a regular basis. For example, the participants were able to highlight in the group analysis how they were able, at times, to redirect a line of questioning or correct a misconception related to their lesbian identity when a doctor appeared to want to link the participant's lesbian identity as a major causal factor for a medical issue or ask probing questions out of misdirected personal interest. For instance, Ani wrote

Because she was a student and had no money a doctor suggested that the help of a psychiatrist was perhaps an option as no fee would be incurred. She sat in the waiting room, a dreary calming colour scheme that held no inspiration was all around her. The people behind the desk were not as caring and friendly as she thought they would be. Soulless eyes, empty starved skeletons and people in deep conversations with themselves surrounded her. These people were not like her. She did not fit in. She wasn't supposed to end up like this. Her name was called. A big man in a dark suit and glasses stood before her. Here goes nothing she thought. She sat down at the desk. Comfy chair she thought as she sunk into it. She also noticed how it made her much lower than the doctor. Then she noticed his desk. It was bordered on three sides by picture frames as though it was a barricade or he was trying to protect himself from the nutters who entered his office. He asked questions, didn't bother to look at her, mumbled to himself

and typed on his laptop. She felt very frustrated, still no eye contact. Do you have a supportive partner? He asked. Yes. She was answering without any interest in him. And what does he do? Well actually, SHE works at _____. And then it happened, the unthinkable. His eyes looked at her over his glasses. She? He inquired. Here he goes she thought to herself. She braced herself and waited. Tell me more about that. How does your family cope? She let go - he had pissed her off for too long. She took a deep breath and let fly. They were fine, they loved her. She was fine with it all, this was not why she was there, she had no issues with that, could they move on? (Ani's MT, S3, CTHS, 1 - 2).

Ani recounted in group analysis how the psychiatrist shut down when she was able to directly challenge his assumptions that her non-heterosexual identity was the cause of her problems in spite of her debilitating mental illness which affected her ability to participate in, and communicate with, many people and everyday life at the time. She was able to clearly state that her lesbian identity had not caused or worsened her condition. It was an aspect of herself with which she was comfortable. Ani was concerned before she went for her appointment that the psychiatrist would want to medicate her further without listening or wanting to explore and work through her depression. Ani recounted to the group how the psychiatrist imposed his own construction of her illness and told her to continue with her medication without exploring other options like cognitive therapy. For example,

- Ani: [His response was] keep going on your medication and I don't need to see you again.
- Tulli: And in your Memory Text, the psychiatrist denied being the stereotype of what a psychiatrist is [someone who medicates without talking about the issues in detail].
- Lucy: But [he] turned out to be exactly that.
- Ani: I just laughed at him.
- Lucy: Well deny, deny, deny [the stereotype of a psychiatrist] and support, support, support, then medicate, medicate, medicate. They're the three rules. Make sure it leads to another appointment, sorry there are four rules.
- Ani: I think I said something like, "Well that's what I said when I came in here".
- Tulli: That's right because it was like, "You don't need any more sessions but I think you should continue on with your medication". Without any follow-up appointments, nothing.
- Lucy: He wasn't doing his job, he just wanted money (GA, MWS3, CTHS, 36 – 37).

Likewise, Tulli had the following experience,

She was sitting in the gynaecologist's office. She felt small, overpowered by

the pastel shades of the office (she hated pastel!). There were books everywhere and the desk which separated her and the doctor seemed excessively large. The doctor seemed higher, larger, bigger on the opposite side of the desk. She was firing questions at her. Tulli didn't think the questions had any relevance to her ovaries. She'd had exploratory surgery, the doctor couldn't find everything she had expected. Tulli didn't feel like she was being listened to. She felt angry and frustrated. The doctor was asking if she had a boyfriend. Tulli was honest and said no she had a girlfriend. The questions continued at a faster pace, like automatic gun fire. Tulli wanted to scream, to say stop the world from spinning, she wanted to get off! The doctor asked if she'd had boyfriends previously. No. She asked questions about her girlfriend. How was her relationship with her parents? What did they think about her being a um ... arrah ... a.. hmmm, lesbian? The questions kept coming (Tulli's MT, S3, CTHS, 5).

While the doctor could have been checking or probing for a support system, the way in which Tulli interpreted the doctor's tone and body language made Tulli feel humiliated and almost powerless while she remained seated in the doctor's office. These feelings were reinforced further by a number of objects, or situational characteristics, mentioned in Tulli's Memory Text. These included power relations reinforced by the difference in height between the doctor and patient when seated, the largeness of the desk which separated them, and the pastel colour scheme which evoked passivity. Tulli felt uncomfortable about the direction the doctor's questions were taking and, while not as forthright as Ani, she was still able to make her point that her identity was not impacting on the medical condition for which she was seeking treatment. When it became obvious that she would not be fully heard or understood she shortened her answers until they became monosyllabic replies so that she could end the appointment. Tulli interpreted an awkwardness about her lesbian identity and a limited knowledge about lesbianism from the types of questions and assumptions made by the doctor. The doctor appeared to be implying that Tulli's gynaecological illness was some how related to her lesbianism and her family's reaction to her non-heterosexual identity. Tulli made a conscious decision never to return to that office or doctor again. After a period of time Tulli found a team of natural therapy practitioners and another gynaecologist who related well to her as an individual and understood lesbian issues in general.

In each of these two instances, both wommin were able, to a certain extent, redirect or deflect an incorrect causal link between an illness and their lesbian identity. These instances of resistance (Bartky, 1997; Foucault, 1983; McNay, 1992) were significant

because they illustrate the inner strength of the wimmin, specifically, in terms of their ability to state what they knew to be true from their experiences and knowledge base, and secondly, in their ability to unsettle the power dynamics between the medical professional (holder of knowledge) and patient (submissive position) by their own display of expert knowledge. The participants recognised their own inner strengths but raised concerns about what impact encounters like those described above would have on wimmin who were not as comfortable with their lesbian identities,

Rosie: Do you think reading those magazines [in the doctor's office] puts you in a really paranoid frame of mind before you enter a doctor's surgery (Laughter)?

Tulli: But do they undermine your sense of who you are?

Rosie: They put you in a particular frame of mind to enter a doctor's surgery.

Tulli: Yes.

Rosie: It has to be psychological, because people tend to go into a doctor feeling a little stressed so I would assume that the pastel colours are there to calm me down a little.

Tulli: But we are all really strong women, all five of us.

Lucy: And that's the key. The big issue is that if we weren't educated women and we weren't a bit intelligent then we would not have a problem with this.

Tulli: Yes.

Sam: Yes, we stood up to the system and said, "No wait a minute, we're actually lesbians".

Ani: But we still felt a little bit intimidated.

Sam: We still feel uneasy, but what didn't come through was an encounter with someone that you didn't have the empowerment to do it [challenge them]. What would have happened then? (GA, MWS3, CTHS, 24 – 25).

Each of the participants in this study were able to draw on their support network of friends as well as their own inner strength to challenge the heteronormative mindset they encountered with medical personal. Like Tulli, Ani went back to her GP and complained about the treatment she had received from the psychiatrist appointment described previously. Eventually she was able to locate a psychiatrist with whom she could relate and who had an understanding about lesbian issues. She was able to use the initial experience, despite her debilitating condition at the time, as an impetus to resist being placed in the submissive role of compliant patient, as she explains here,

- Ani: I never went back to him [the original psychiatrist], but since I went to see him I've made sure that there's not that lack of power. I'm just straight up [now], [like] straightforward.
- Rosie: But is that just in as far as types of consultations, or is it generally?
- Tulli: It's across the board.
- Rosie: Yeah?
- Ani: Because I won't allow it to happen any more (GA MWS3, CTHS, 13).

These experiences of Ani, Sam and Tulli were certainly not unique and were shared by the other two members of the group. Ani, Sam and Tulli analysed their experiences in the group discussion following the reading of the Memory Texts as,

- Sam: I think Sam and Tulli are similar as far as just the interactions with the health professional really not being comfortable with dealing with a lesbian and then their questions were sort of really heterosexual sort of based.
- Tulli: And yours [Sam] was a bit like Ani's ... it was like as soon as you said the lesbian word, then it was kind of like the whole questioning speeded up and it took a different direction. And it was like, 'How is this related to what I'm here for?'
- Ani: And he [the doctor] was almost disappointed when I said well that's not the issue. Regardless of the fact that I had been out for years previous to seeing him, then it was almost like, 'Oh, we've got a lesbian here. We can, you know, write really good stuff now with it'. Because it wasn't, he just got disappointed and said, 'Bugger off' (GA, S3, CTHS, 12).

The experiences of these wimmin suggest that the medical profession in particular, reinforce the invisibility of lesbianism by assuming a heterosexual identity. Assumptions about a heterosexual identity impacted greatly, not only on the day to day aspects of *post-initial coming-out* lesbian lives, but also on the overall health care they received (Cochran, Mays, Bowen, Gage, Bybee, Roberts, Goldstein, Robinson, Rankow, & White, 2001). Times of illness are often stressful and leave people feeling vulnerable (Eliason, 1996). When these feelings are combined with invisibility and a lack of understanding and compassion about non-heterosexual identity, an individual's overall health care can be compromised. They are left with two choices; either deny, or negate, their identity, or, confront the heteronormative elitism and potentially receive substandard care as a result. If Ani had not returned to her general practitioner to complain about her interactions with the first psychiatrist she saw and asked for another referral she would have very likely received substandard care. Likewise, Tulli had to continue searching for a specialist who was both knowledgeable and understanding of her health problems and lesbian identity before she could find a satisfactory solution. These findings are also

supported by the available literature in the health field (see for example, Eliason, 1996; Mathieson, Bailey, & Gurevich, 2002; McDonald & Anderson, 2003; Roberts, 2001).

One participant in particular received substandard care in a public hospital after she had surgery to her back. Lucy had a homophobic nurse who refused to nurse her when she was open about her lesbian identity and insisted that the staff include her same sex partner in the medical decision making process. Lucy and her partner submitted an official complaint to the hospital after the homophobic nurse refused to take her to the toilet. The nurse knew Lucy was desperate to go to the bathroom but left her on her bed unable to access either the bathroom or a bedpan without assistance. Lucy stated that overall there was a noticeable difference in the general interaction and inclusion of partner and family with the majority of staff on that particular ward when she compared her situation to that of patients who identified as heterosexual.

Tulli: If you're relying on a Public Health Care system, then your options in terms of who you choose and if you can afford to go to places is severely limited.

Rosie: I think that is where the power stuff comes in. If you are dealing with BIG, BIG institutions like hospitals there is no equal level at all, it is all power situations. If you start asking them [doctors] questions as an intelligent person then they see you as a threat. Because you [do] not believe [them], because in a hospital for their bureaucracy to run smoothly, they [the doctors] have to have all the answers and you have to accept what they say, and if you go and do research, they think you are undermining them and that threatens their perceived [position of power]. And they just refuse to deal with you or they treat you like shit.

Tulli: Rosie, you wrote in your memory about the difference of how you and Lucy were treated compared to all the other heterosexual families around.

Rosie: We thought it was an age thing as well, except there was another young couple and the guy was in there and the woman was encouraged to spend the whole time there and just sleep in his bed with him and all that kind of stuff. He had just had a number of surgeries and she was fully welcome there.

Lucy: I've always believed that if you pay you get good service. If you don't pay, then you are going to get crappy service.

Ani: I was just about to say is it a private/public health system thing?

Lucy: Oh yes, go around the world, it's [the same] everywhere. If you have private cover then you are treated like a princess, you have your own room, they don't question you about your sexuality, it's not even relevant (GA, MWS3, CTHS, 14 – 18).

Similarly, when Tulli had sustained an injury at work and was taken to the emergency section at a large public hospital, her same sex partner was denied entry for several hours by the nurse at the front desk because she refused to acknowledge their relationship.

Unexamined stereotypes about lesbians within the medical profession, as well as in the wider general community must be challenged (Eliason, 1996; Lawless, Kippax, & Crawford, 1996). These stereotypes contributed to the comparatively poor health of lesbians in general because of previous negative experiences with the system resulting in a reluctance to seek medical intervention or advice (Eliason, 1996; Mathieson, Bailey, & Gurevich, 2002; McDonald & Anderson, 2003; Roberts, 2001). It is argued here that the negative positioning and stigmatising of lesbians by significant others in powerful positions, in this instance within the health system, affects their overall physical and mental health care and subsequent positioning within everyday society. This positioning of *(O)ther* within the health system also means lesbians are less likely to seek medical assistance in a timely manner because they anticipate a less than understanding reception. They anticipate being stigmatised and misunderstood and do not wish to reveal (social) stigmas unnecessarily.

Rosie: I was just thinking there is that theory that every woman is a potential rape victim. And that is meant to be part of the psyche as a political position, I don't personally live my life believing that is true. There is a certain element of truth that every lesbian is a potential health victim. In terms of we all have this anticipation that someone is going to react negatively, and I don't mean like a victim ...

Tulli: No, I know what you mean.

Rosie: I wonder, if that is something that could be generalised or just happens to be something that is coincidental, as a way of summing it up as some generalised subjectivity [or] issue. There is that kind of element [that] we have this stigma somehow attached to us (GA, S3, CTHS, 50 - 51).

The term, victim, as it has been used in the above transcript has not been used in terms of *victim mindset* which theorists (Bartky, 1990; Bernstein, 2001; Glass, 1995, Steiner, 1975) believe increases the chance of being, or continuing to be, a victim, but rather the positioning of lesbians as inferior by significant others. In this instance, the significant others are those who hold positions of power within the health system. As argued

previously, it is this positioning of inferiority, or stigmatisation, of non-heterosexuals by significant (heterosexual) others which affects the overall physical and mental health and well being of the *post-initial coming-out* lesbian in an Australian context. Like other oppressed groups of people, for example, Indigenous Australians, there is a lack of recognition about the amount of extra work people who are positioned in society as (O)ther have to do to maintain a positive sense of self. This positioning also brings with it increased levels of physical stress and a direct denial of access of appropriate resources which cater and recognise their specific needs and experiences through no fault of their own, but rather, as a result of how they are viewed within the dominant landscape. Thus, this section was able to demonstrate how unexamined stereotypes, and the stigmatisation of lesbianism impacted negatively upon the visibility and positioning of *post-initial coming-out* lesbians within a heterosexual landscape.

7.3. Explore Tensions of Lesbian Invisibility and Positioning as (O)ther

Newspaper, television and theatre have over represented the sensational fringes of homosexual culture and portrayed gay men and lesbians as social deviates, while the vast majority of homosexuals have been blending into every segment of American society. The effect has perpetuated negative and inaccurate stereotypes and fostered continued disdain for homosexuals by well-meaning and reasonable heterosexuals. Perceiving this disdain, gay men and lesbians maintained a hidden subculture. In the absence of real experience of who lesbians and gay men really are, these stereotypes and misinformation have persisted

O'Hanlan, 2004, 3.

Negotiating the lesbian landscape for each of the participants in this study demanded firstly an exploration of the heterosexual landscape and its subsequent finite number of available identities. Being unable to edit their selves in such a way as to fit a heterosexual identity, the participants found they were being positioned as *outsiders* or (O)ther; an identity shrouded in stigma (Goffman, 1963). Each of the participants had to find, understand, negotiate and create a place for themselves given the tensions between heterosexual and homosexual identities within an Australian lesbian landscape. This negotiation was complex not only because of the myths and stereotypes associated with lesbians within heterosexual society, but also because of broader global influences. For example, the Americanisation or Hollywood sensationalism of lesbian lives and culture through contemporary magazines, books, movies and the internet created a

socio cultural gap between expectations and actual reality within an Australian context. That is, the portrayal of American glamorised lesbian and gay life was vastly different to the reality of every day life for lesbians and gay in Australia, particularly those not residing in an urban setting. At various times throughout the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s some mainstream world wide media even presented the notion that lesbianism was trendy. Terms like *lesbian chic*⁷ and *lipstick lesbian*⁸ grew out of the early 1990s Western media's fascination with lesbianism (Baird, 2005). However, it was usually presented as a passing or momentary phase rather than a long term, well thought through life changing experience. The myth of lesbianism being a passing phase was also discussed in Chapter Five, *Negotiating the Family Landscape*, in relation to belief systems held by non-supportive families of origin. These myths and stereotypes often reinforced the general population's misunderstanding of lesbians rather than promote education and understanding when presented in public forums such as mainstream media. They reinforced the participants' positioning of (O)ther by significant others. For example,

- Lucy: Like when we were young, it used to be this fairy tale thing [about] having a girlfriend and you would look at other people that [had] girlfriends and thing, "Wow, that is so great!"
- Tulli: And also with that fairy tale image [is also thinking] about the stereotypes. Like Hollywood has started to pick up on that whole gay and lesbian movie making thing.
- Lucy: Yeah, there are now a lot of Hollywood films coming out with a lesbian plot. Like they put this lesbian plot in a film and its always about how a woman is controlling another women just to get some guy or something. It's [like] they are using it, [lesbianism], as a game. They will sleep with her but, [they're] not really interested in women, it's just because it's part of the scene or whatever.
- Tulli: And the guy always gets the woman, he always turns her.
- Lucy: Yes! I hate that! Why doesn't a woman end up with a woman, you know?
- Tulli: And the other thing is if the plot's not like woman-woman then one woman gets the man, then it's the lesbian is a ...
- Lucy: Serial killer.
- Tulli: Yes, a serial killer, or a vampire or a psycho, do you know? (GA, MWS9, LSNR, 38 – 41).

While there had been some movement away from mainstream portrayal of lesbian

⁷ The August 1993 Vanity Fair cover of kd lang being shaved by supermodel Cindy Crawford is a prime example of lesbian chic.

⁸ Baird (2005) argues that the term, lipstick lesbian, provoked debates within the lesbian communities within Western society about the "politics of dress and lesbian appropriations of

stereotypes by small independent film makers in films like *Go Fish*, *The True Adventures of Two Girls in Love*, *Better than Chocolate*, and *DEBS*, their viewing audience were small in contrast to those attracted to mainstream Hollywood blockbusters. Media portrayal of lesbians as vampires in Australia in the early 1990s as a result of a murder of a man by four lesbian identified wommin in Queensland also did nothing to dispel inappropriate lesbian myths and stereotypes.

Constant bombardment and reinforcement of lesbians as particular stereotypes reinforced the tensions between the heterosexual and lesbian landscapes and reinforced the participants' feelings of being an outsider (Barry, 2003; O'Hanlan, 2004). Due to a,

lack of familiarity with gay men and lesbians, newspaper, television and theatre have over represented the sensational fringes of homosexual culture and portrayed gay men and lesbians as social deviates. The effect has perpetuated negative but inaccurate stereotypes and has fostered continued disdain for homosexuals as by well-meaning and reasonable heterosexuals. Gay men and lesbians remain the brunt of multiple levels of legal prejudice, with negative assumptions about their morality, sexuality, employability, and integrity. These categories of accusations are very similar to those made against African Americans, Jews, and other minority groups when prejudice against these groups was legal and widely practiced

O'Hanlan, 2004, 5.

Identity is not "something deep down inside the individual but [is] located in the interaction between the individual and society. Identities, thus, are always in process (Esterberg, 1997, 15), Frey (2004) and Goffman (1967) both argue that there are only a finite number of identities available within any given landscape or community. These identities are constructed and reinforced by the people who make up the community, insiders, and are often reinforced through popular media, like newspapers and television. If a non-heterosexual identity is always positioned as (O)ther by the dominant culture, in this case heterosexuality, then people who are forced to take up this positioning of (O)ther, for example lesbians, will experience invisibility, stigma, conflict, tension and non-acceptance and be forced to look elsewhere to find a sense of belonging.

Each of the participants in this study expressed a desire to belong, feel safe and experience some form of acceptance, particularly those who had family of origin who were non-supportive of their *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identities. For example when the participants were analysing the fourth session, *Meeting the Partner's Family*, they spoke about their desire to be accepted by a same sex partner's family,

- Rosie: I guess there is a generalisation that the immediate response would be negative.
- Tulli: Yes, like everyone hopes they will be accepted but there is that expectation that you know that you won't be.
- Ani: And even though you won't be accepted, it still upsets you when you're not. Even though you know you are not going to be accepted, it still upsets you when you are not accepted. On so many levels you know that it's not going to be what you want when it actually happens, and it's not what you want, you still get fits of despair (GA, MWS5, MTPF, 10 – 11).

Maher and Pusch (1995) argue that is “heterosexuals that have the power to create safe space for lesbians. That lesbians look for safety signifies their positions within adverse contexts even as it also fosters unity within the lesbian community” (40).

The participants recognised that the match between identity and their sense of self did change and re-define itself over time given their positioning, experiences and relationships with significant others in their lives. For instance, Lucy's description of how she always imagined her life to be, which was driven by her non-accepting family of origin's expectation of a heterosexual identity, and how she wanted her life to be as a lesbian were often in conflict with one another (This conflict was discussed in length in Chapter 5, *Negotiating the Family Landscape*). They were constantly informing and shaping each other. Lucy recounts,

Lucy: Like I always thought, even knowing what I was feeling inside, I always thought I'd end up with a family, a husband you know, and kids and what have you. I never ever thought there would be a time in my life where I would actually be a lesbian, you know, like actually be able to live that. Cause I saw my Uncle and he was a beautiful man, he was so generous and everything, but to see my [other] uncles throw stones at his coffin when he died from AIDS; I didn't want to live like that. To tell you the truth, the first time I ever saw two girls actually kiss was when I was nineteen years old and my friend dragged me to a club and said you need to go, you need to see if you are really like that or if this is just a fantasy in your head. I think you all experienced it a lot earlier than what I did (GA, S2, FD, 45 - 46).

With a combination of a non-supportive family of origin, lack of positive response to other gay family of origin members and what appeared to be internal conflict with external lesbian images, it is not surprising that Lucy experienced some difficulty reconciling her understanding of lesbian identity with her actual self image. That is, difficulty reconciling what she imagined her life, or self, would be like at this point in time in comparison with her actual everyday lived *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identity. While Lucy was comfortable and positive about whom she was and how she lived her life, it was very different to how she imagined she would be living her life. While at an internal level she knew she was attracted to wimmin, living openly as a lesbian in a lesbian relationship was in direct conflict to how significant others, for example, family of origin, would have defined or positioned her. This meant that she was acutely aware of the tensions between the lesbian and heterosexual landscapes and the conflict she experienced conflict at different times in her life as a result of how significant others positioned her given her *post-initial coming-out* identity. This conflict between her self as lesbian and her relationship with significant others did impact on how she actually defined and lived her life as a *post-initial coming-out* lesbian on a daily basis. For instance, when compared to the other participants, Lucy appeared less connected to the lesbian landscape and not as knowledgeable about its related history and politics. This did not mean that she was any less of a lesbian than the other participants, nor did any of the other participants in the study position her as such. Rather, they were aware of her family of origin and her background experiences with work and family relationships and understood how these tensions impacted on her relationships with others particularly within the lesbian landscape.

Tulli also experienced conflict in how significant others in her family of origin positioned her in contrast with her image of self and everyday lived experience as a *post-initial coming-out* lesbian. While this conflict was not as pronounced as that experienced by Lucy, it was still evident when Tulli had contact with her family of origin. For instance, she recounted in the Memory Work sessions how she felt she had to edit herself around her family because of their non-acceptance of her lesbian identity so as not to be rejected by them. This editing around her family of origin made her feel uneasy, angry and invisible.

The tensions between the heterosexual and lesbian landscapes were evident to each of the participants, particularly when their sense of safety was unexpectedly disrupted. For example,

- Tulli: You make connections in your life and you create your own safe space where you deal with people on a daily basis that don't have an issue about how you are and what you do. [You] have friends so feel supported and all that kind of stuff.
- Lucy: It's your comfort zone.
- Tulli: Yes, and so you go along and everything's fine and gorgeous and then unexpectedly, this [a situation] comes from nowhere and then you kind of put on a ...
- Lucy: Shield?
- Tulli: Yes
- Rosie: [It's like] I forgot this part of the world existed?
- Tulli: Yes, that kind of thing.
- Sam: Because you've got a world that you have made where the people in it are accepting and when they are not accepting, you know that and you know what to expect. So when it [a situation] comes along where you expect that there's going to be good acceptance and there's not ...
- Rosie: It's really frustrating and you are immediately try[ing] to find [out] the underlying problem in that situation [and you've got to be] really quick on your feet.
- Lucy: Cause my father said when I came out to my parents, "You've picked the hardest life you could possibly pick". He said to me, "You've going to make your comfort zone and feel comfortable and then someone's just going to come and blow everything away". And he said, "It's going to happen to you all your life. Why have you chosen this lifestyle? I wanted so much more for you and you're the only girl in our family, why are you doing this to yourself?". And I didn't even know what he was talking about until I united with you guys and then I met other people and it [situations of conflict and tension] started happening all of the time I mean, you have your comfort one and they [significant others who want to reject you or position you as an outsider] come and blow it away" (GA, MWS6, UCAO, 27 - 29).

The participants recognised that constantly being positioned as an (O)ther or outsider in the dominant landscape was not beneficial to their overall sense of well-being or safety. Being unable to find a place or identity for themselves within the dominant landscape, in this instance the heterosexual landscape, they felt they did not belong and rejected it. Instead they sought acceptance and safety by exploring the lesbian landscape. Ultimately, being positioned as an outsider in the heterosexual landscape meant searching for a suitable identity within the lesbian landscape which did not require too much editing of self to find acceptance. This exploration of the lesbian landscape and available lesbian identities are explored in detail in the following chapter.

7.4. Conclusion

Inhabiting place is violent, sexualized and self-damaging. The flesh of body and the flesh of place are subject to the same discursive rules of violent degradation

Somerville, 2004, 58.

Participants consistently described a sense of rejection, tension and invisibility in the heterosexual landscape. They negotiated their self understanding in relation to both lesbian and heterosexual landscapes. Within the heterosexual landscape they were positioned as *outsiders*, or *(O)ther*, by significant people or discourses within this setting. This was particularly evident in the examples provided which involved the participants' experiences within a medical context. These highlighted the shift in society about what constitutes public and private space, knowledge and responsibility. That is, in the medical examples provided the participants were forced outside their safe zones into random public spaces where they could not predict the response of significant others to their *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identities. It was not that the participants experienced any greater amount of illness than their heterosexual counterparts, but rather, their positioning as (O)ther was particularly evident within this context.

Failure to acknowledge lesbians in social science research, for example, can mean that incomplete pictures of society pass for comprehensive accounts, that significant dimensions of social change are ignored, and that heterosexuality is again represented as an unchallenged norm. The ramifications of this invisibility are acute for those women who are seeking lesbian community, especially young women who are newly exploring lesbianism, and cannot find it. They are also acute for lesbians who seek healthcare and are met with the assumption that they are heterosexual, or who seek holiday accommodation for them and their partner and are offered only single beds – and become all the more so when disclosure is met with embarrassment or ignorant assumptions or hostility or discrimination

Baird, 2005, 80.

To be defined as (O)ther by significant others within a dominant landscape also brings with it a label of stigma (Goffman, 1963). As a result of this positioning, the participants had to explore the lesbian landscape and negotiate the tensions between the lesbian and heterosexual landscapes. This was necessary in order to make connections with others who also identified as lesbian and to create a space for themselves in a safe landscape.

Chapter Eight

Negotiating the Lesbian Landscape And Lesbian Selves

The Walls of Lesbos

to build a Lesbian wall
take big rough stones

don't cut to fit
they are themselves undressed

balance each with care
use no cement no force

large gaps remain
the strength is in the touching

and the spaces

Lenore, 1997, 332.

The difference between identity and selves, as defined by Goffman (1959), is vital in understanding the relationship the participants in this study had with significant others in their negotiation of the lesbian landscape in an Australian context. As discussed in the previous chapter, Goffman (1959) and Frey (2004) argue that there are a limited number of identities available within any given landscape or community for individuals to access. However, they argue that there are unlimited presentations of competent and able selves, or actors, available. Thus, individuals have to negotiate the limited number of identities available to them within any given community and edit their selves accordingly, in order to gain membership into the desired landscape.

This chapter will explore the multi-dimensional and diverse nature and characteristics of the lesbian landscape and the limited number of available identities in an Australian urban context in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Due to the constraints of time and space inherent in doctoral research, this dissertation will present the most relevant features of the lesbian landscape as they pertain to the study. It should be noted that these characteristics will not represent the entire lesbian community; however, they will

provide an insight into the lesbian landscape as it is lived by the five participants in this particular study. More importantly, this chapter will explore how the participants understood the *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identities available to them and negotiated their positioning within the contemporary Australian lesbian landscape.

What will become increasingly apparent during this chapter is the persistence of each of the five participants in negotiating the lesbian landscape and available identities. Persisting in these negotiations was important to making ongoing connections with others in the lesbian landscape, in order to better understand their own *post-initial coming-out* lesbian selves. As the opening quote alludes, the strength of each of the participants to forge a lesbian self in a predominately heteronormative landscape was significant. That strength involved drawing from their own internal resources as well as the external support of significant others within the lesbian landscape. At times the differences between life experiences and expectations, political persuasions, and religious and/or cultural beliefs were too great, with the result that the connection with others did not always occur, as will be illustrated in sub-section 8. 2. 1., *Becoming Aware of Unspoken Rules, Clichés and Cliques*. However, the spaces which occurred between this connection making were recognised as being just as important as the connections themselves, because the spaces or gaps allowed room for growth and the potential for new understandings and possibilities. Along with this growth came the shedding of the old, or death, as indicated in the title of this dissertation. The concept of death was not meant to be taken literally, but rather, it was representative of death in terms of loss of community membership, friendship, and previously held ideas, understandings and concepts about identity or community. Death was not a central or recurring theme in the group analysis in the Memory Work Sessions; it was however, present in the silences and gaps in the Memory Texts and group analysis.

In particular, the data in this chapter will illuminate how the participants understood, constructed and maintained their *post-initial coming-out* lesbian selves as well as their connections with significant others within the Australian lesbian landscape given their invisibility, or lack of recognisable identity, within the heterosexual landscape. This chapter will explore how the lesbian landscape continually shaped and re-shaped the participant's *post-initial coming-out* identities and visa versa. More specifically this chapter will:

1. Examine how the participants negotiated the lesbian landscape as *post-initial coming-out* identified lesbians;
2. Provide snap shots of how the participants negotiated the diversity and available identities within the lesbian landscape;
3. Explore how the participants negotiated political awareness, affiliation and gatekeepers within the lesbian landscape; and
4. Explore how each of the participants found a place, or space, within the lesbian landscape.

As noted in each of the previous three chapters, the main focal point within this study is to explore how the participants re-evaluated, understood and re-built their lesbian self *post-initial coming-out* through everyday relationships and interactions with others they deemed significant. However, this chapter is different from the previous three data analysis chapters because it explores the Australian lesbian landscape from a previously unexamined *insiders* point of view. It provides a snap shot of how the participant's selves were negotiated, edited, influenced and shaped by the limited number of available lesbian identities within a specific Australian lesbian community. This negotiation of lesbian selves and available lesbian identities within a particular context has also been previously largely ignored by major institutions, such as those associated with government, medicine, religion and education. Continued invisibility of lesbians within each of these major institutions has been shown in the previous three data analysis chapters to have the potential to have significant negative impact on the overall quality of lesbians' lives (see for example, Baird, 2005; Beckett, Bode, Clark, Cox, Crewe, Hastings, Herbert, Martino, McLean, Page, & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1997; Bickmore, 1999; Booth, 2002; Denborough, 1996; Eliason, 1996; Epstein, 2000; Ferfolja & Robinson, 2004; Johnson, 2003; Mathieson, Bailey, & Gurevich, 2002; McDonald & Anderson, 2003; McNair, 2003; Mills, 2004; Mitchell, 2002; O'Hanlan, 2004; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1995; 2000; Roberts, 2001; Schwanberg, 1990; Trippet & Bain, 1992).

For the purposes of analysis in this chapter, data are drawn from a number of Memory Work sessions instead of focusing on just one or two, as done in the first two data analysis chapters. Overall, research exploring *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identity and its relationship to the lesbian community in both an Australian and international context

is extremely limited. This chapter is in no way intended to disrespect any feature or group within the lesbian landscape, but rather to illuminate the experiences of the five participants, or *insiders*, in a way which alerts *outsiders* to the complex and fluid nature of this particular landscape. Its aim is to break down the assumptions, usually held by *outsiders* to the lesbian landscape, that lesbian identified wimmin will automatically be sympathetic and friendly with each other based solely on their common sexual orientation, and that a lesbian identity can contain a lesbian self.

The first section of this chapter illustrates how each of the participants negotiated the lesbian landscape or community as *post-initial coming-out* lesbians. The second section explicates how the participants negotiated the diverse range yet limited number of identities available within the lesbian landscape. In the previous chapter, *Negotiating the Tensions between the Heterosexual and Lesbian Landscapes*, it was brought to the reader's attention that a lesbian self and lesbian identity/ies were complex and fluid in nature, because they had different meanings to different people at different times and in different contexts. However, for the purpose of this study, the participants agreed that for each of them, being a lesbian and having a *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identity meant that, as wimmin, their primary attraction and relationship/s were with other wimmin. This was true regardless of whether or not they were currently in a relationship or if their relationships were open or monogamous in nature. Each of the five participants were also open to the concept, and inclusion, of Male to Female transgender lesbian identified wimmin within the lesbian community, an issue that was both contentious and rancorous within the larger lesbian landscape. They were also aware that some lesbian identified wimmin were attracted to, and engaging in, sexual relationships with men, another contested topic in the lesbian world. The third section of this chapter illustrates these complex issues of identity in relation to an awareness of political issues and community gate keepers. The final section of the chapter explores how each of the participants found or created a space as *post-initial coming-out* lesbians in an Australian lesbian landscape. It also offers examples of how each of the participants used the issue of self as a resistance to identity. That is, how they knew when to stop editing their selves in order to fit an available identity choice.

8.1. Negotiating the Lesbian Landscape as *Post-Initial Coming-Out* Identified Lesbians

The distinguishing characteristics of the lesbian and gay communities are not only based on sexual behaviour, but on the psychosocial impact of living in the focus of ubiquitous misunderstandings and hatred

O'Hanlan, 2004, 4.

Each of the five participants in the current study stated that they drew a great deal of strength from the lesbian landscape when they were able to make meaningful connections with significant others, or when they were recognised by other *insiders*. For instance, Ani wrote the following in her Memory Text for the session on *Negotiating the Lesbian Landscape*,

She had on her new Doc Martin boots with her bright purple shoe laces ready to stomp on anyone who dared challenge her. She *looked* confident even if she didn't feel it. She causally glanced to her left to a spunky looking gal who was looking straight back at her. They smiled. She got embarrassed and then remembered her girlfriend on her right hand. The stranger and Ani glanced at each other again when the stranger commented on her shoe laces. "Nice", she said. A nervous smile was all Ani could muster up. "You know what they mean don't you?". Ani nodded, she was learning the new language of being half out and still a bit in. "So are you?" [the stranger] asked. "Uhuh" [Ani] replied with a grin from ear to ear. In unison they both said, "Cool", giggled and walked off separately. In amongst hundreds of people, Ani and her stranger had danced, serenaded, and wooed each other without anyone noticing (Ani, MT, MWS7, NTLL, 1).

While this example illustrated a positive interaction, the journey each of the participants experienced in making connections within the lesbian landscape was at times problematic. For instance, participants recalled their experiences of unspoken rules, clichés, cliques and political affiliation which made positioning within the lesbian landscape complex. These specific instances are discussed in later sub-sections of this chapter (See 8.1.1., *Becoming Aware of Unspoken Rules, Clichés and Cliques*, and 8.2., *Negotiating Political, Awareness, Affiliation, and Gate Keepers Within the Lesbian Landscape*). Recognition of problematic experiences, or issues, is partly supported by the research of Barry (2003), who examined a gay and lesbian community in the United States. Barry's findings conclude that, unlike traditional conceptions of communities such as those formed on the basis of race or ethnicity, gay and lesbian communities differ in

the way in which the members come together. That is, gay and lesbian communities are formed on the basis of sexual attraction and a positioning of *outsider* in a heterosexual landscape. Barry's research also suggests that lesbian and gay communities are usually formed as a result of non-supportive families of origin and/or a sense of safety, either in physical location or through other people who openly identify as members of the community. Work by Gross (1991) also supports this conclusion, but goes further to examine the influence mass media has in promoting stereotypes, myths and the invisibility of minority groups within the dominant landscape. Unlike other communities, gay and lesbian communities have to be sought out or created, and are based on sexuality. They are also extremely complex as a result of the diversity of the members.. Issues focused on boundaries, such as unspoken rules, clichés, cliques and political affiliations, as well as discrimination (including racism, ageism, sexism, and ableism), were identified and recognised by the participants in this study as being problematic for the lesbian community.

Baird (2005) asserts that,

since the early 1970s there have been very visible communities of lesbians and non-heterosexual women in every capital city in Australia, and some of the larger regional cities. In the large cities there are often whole inner city suburbs where lesbians cluster. In each of the large cities in Australia there are also many, many support groups, sporting teams, church groups, occupational networks, and small businesses that make up the lesbian community (76).

However, research by Burnett (1997) and Lemon (1993) argues that while these communities exist in every Australian capital city, they are not easily accessed or entered into without first having both a sense of what lesbian identities are available for access, and a connection with an already established *insider* in order to gain entry into, and develop a sense of credibility within these new contexts.

Post-initial coming-out, the participants became more acutely aware of the diversity which existed within the lesbian landscape. Unlike other communities or landscapes, non-heterosexual landscapes are made up of a diverse range of people who have a same sex attraction which brings them together. Thus, the backgrounds and experiences members of this landscape bring with them are widespread and not

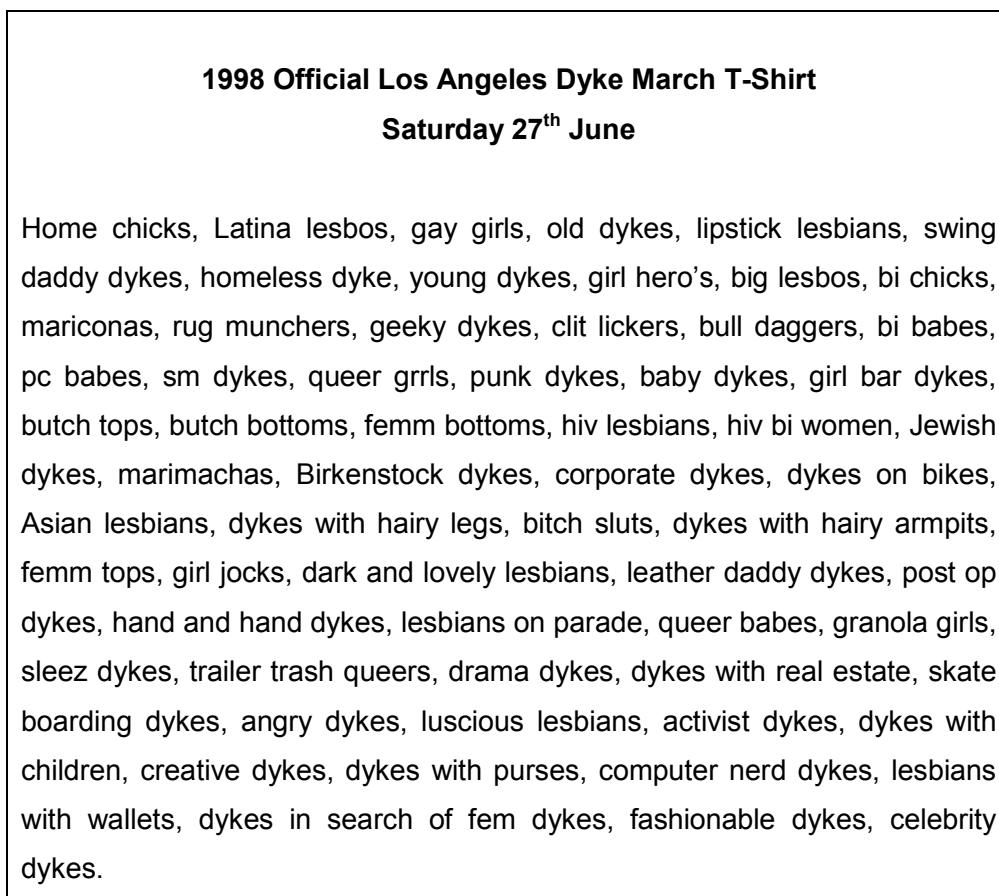
necessarily conducive to the formation of a tight knit, accepting community. Correll (1995), argues that lesbian communities,

often provide a haven or a retreat from a hostile outside world. At the same time, the lesbian community shares a problem with many minority communities: the desire to achieve group solidarity is at odds with goals of individuality. From the 1930s to the present, bars have been a central institution in the lesbian community. They serve the roles of “teaching gays the meaning of what a homosexual is ... A lesbian community serves many functions, including the creation of a positive lesbian identity and the opportunity to establish intimate relationships. At the same time, the community demands from its members a high degree of conformity that limits individualism in an effort to maintain high group solidarity (271).

The expansive diversity of lesbian communities was a recurring theme in many of the Memory Work sessions. Thus, diversity within the lesbian landscape was seen in both a positive and negative way regarding its impact on defining who made up the community; that is, in understanding how the participants characterised themselves and others as *post-initial coming-out* lesbians in an urban Australian context. Diversity within the Australian lesbian landscape is not unique in that it is also recognised in the wider International lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. While research (for example, Baird, 2005; Correll, 1995) has noted difficulties associated with the diversity which exists in those communities, it was also appreciated and celebrated by many *insiders* in a number of International contexts. Two of the participants in the current study had been able to walk in the Los Angeles Dyke March on a number of occasions. For each march, like the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, the organisers designed a new T-shirt to celebrate the event. The 1998 Official Los Angeles Dyke March¹ T-Shirt highlighted the diversity which existed within the Los Angeles lesbian community at the time of the march (refer to Figure 8.1, *1998 Official Los Angeles Dyke March T-Shirt*). Some of the identities were specific to the Los Angeles context, while others were more Internationally recognised.

¹ The Los Angeles Dyke March is an annual march held in West Hollywood, California, in the United States for lesbians as part of Pride celebrations.

Figure 8.1
1998 Official Los Angeles Dyke March T-Shirt



Participants saw the t-shirt as positive in that it sought to highlight and name the diversity within the lesbian landscape. In doing so, it gave legitimacy by naming; that is, creating identity. It also gave International and interstate attendees an opportunity to compare and contrast the diversity with their own local communities. The participants in this study were able to identify and discuss their positioning and identity in relation to the different groups which made up their community. However, they also agreed that the different sub-groups could be difficult to infiltrate. For example,

- Sam: I think an important part [issue] of the lesbian landscape, [is that] it does become quite cliquy in little groups.
- Ani: It [is] quite segmented.
- Sam: Yes that's right. And like often I wouldn't go out on my own, I would want to go out with a couple of people just because otherwise you're sort of standing there and looking at all the other groups talking, [and you're] thinking, "Do I want to go and approach them or not?". And unless you recognise someone then it's really awkward.
- Tulli: The lesbian community, say compared to like a generic kind of gay community, [is that] you have to be out and know people before you can get in to and find out where the lesbian community is and go to the wimmin's only events. Like it's more underground than ...
- Rosie: I think you can go to the events, but that doesn't mean you'll be included.
- Tulli: Yeah.
- Sam: Yeah, that's right. So in order to be included and for people to talk to you and for you to go and dance with the group and stuff, you have to kind of know them already or be with someone who knows them. And then once you're introduced then it's fine. And then you can go [out] on your own because you know that the chances are you'll know a few people who are there and you can chat and you can go from group to group, but if you turn up and you don't know anyone, it's really hard to get in.
- Ani: But it's a catch 22. Like sometimes you can't know about the events unless you know people but you can't know people unless you follow the events. It's almost like being inducted into the local tree house club in the neighbourhood.
- Tulli: It's like you need the lesbian nod, or the lesbian approval before you get in.
- Ani: Yeah, the [secret] handshake (GA, MWS7, NTLL, 27 – 28).

There was recognition within the group that gaining entry into the different sub-groups in the lesbian landscape continued to be difficult, and required continual maintenance of group membership as *post-initial coming-out lesbians*.

However, continuing to locate and negotiate the lesbian landscape as *post-initial coming-out* lesbians was important to each of the participants as it facilitated the process of connection making and an ability to form friendships with others like themselves. This connection making gave the participants a sense of security, safety, acceptance and understanding. Moreover, these connections, or friendships, played an important role in the support, understanding and survival of the participants against the dominant heterosexual landscape which rendered them invisible. Other members of the lesbian landscape provided the potential to form a family of choice for each of the participants, as discussed in Chapter 5, *Negotiating the Family Landscape*. Bohan (1996) and D'Augelli and Garnets (1995) argue that the construction of families of choice provide

small, tightly knit communities in response to the rejection and conflict often experienced within their families of origin as a result of their non-heterosexual identities. While it has been shown in the current study that families of origin can be supportive and understanding, it is often not the case, and as a result, families of choice can play an important role in the lives of lesbian identified people. Further, when families of origin did not understand or accept a family member's lesbian self, this rejection or lack of acceptance influenced them to seek an affirming sense of community outside the family of origin unit. Rejection by a family of origin also meant that the notion of community was understood to be elsewhere, or something which must be sought outside the heterosexual landscape (Goffman, 1959).

In contrast to the potential for rejection, a sense of belonging or notion of community is where,

an individual comes to feel that she or he is a member of a larger group. This connects that individual to some larger social, rather than personal, identity (Deaux, 1996). From this point of view, identities exist out in the world for an individual to take, or consume, into the self in order to be part of a larger whole (Padgug, 1989). This notion of identity consumption privileges certain individuals over others and works best if a person is already a member of a privileged group and is seeking some way to bond with people. Social identities are ways in which people can further define themselves, a way for people to make friends, and friendship becomes an important aspect of social identity

Baker, 2002, 5.

Since lesbian identified people are rendered invisible and often rejected by heterosexual landscapes, a lesbian's first experience of community has often been mitigated through *outsider* status (Banks, 1998; Goffman, 1959). Lesbian communities therefore often "constitute a purposeful, thoughtful, and active search for a sense of safety by gay people in order to fortify them against the negative effects of living in a homophobic environment" (Barry, 2003, 2). However, trying to enter into, and negotiating, a new community can also be difficult because of a fear of rejection, particularly if this has already been experienced. The participants in this study had already experienced this sense of rejection with their previous negotiation of the heterosexual landscape. This fear of rejection can mean that individuals are willing to continually edit their selves (Frey, 2004) to fit one of the identities on offer within the community into which they are seeking entry. The participants in this study did manage to find and enter into the local

lesbian community when they first came out. The negotiation of the lesbian landscape during their *post-initial coming-out* was different from this initial period because they were more aware of their selves, had developed strong connections and formed families of choice, and as a result were not as willing to enter into the editing of self to fit an acceptable lesbian identity as an admission price for inclusion within the lesbian community.

For the participants in this study entry into the lesbian community meant that the editing process often encompassed rejecting heterosexual privilege. Such rejection can range from getting out of a long term heterosexual marriage or refraining from engaging in sexual intercourse with males, to choosing to be open about being a lesbian in a heterosexual landscape. In addition to rejecting heterosexual privilege, entry into the lesbian community can require other forms of self editing in order to successfully act out a front stage² performance of an identity. This editing of the self to gain entry and acceptance within the lesbian landscape, in combination with the invisibility of lesbians in the heterosexual landscape, proved problematic for the participants in the current study because “for reasons of emotional, social and physical safety many women who are interested in other women may choose to pass unnoticed, or to actively pass as heterosexual” (Baird, 2005, 75).

The data from this study both confirm and suggest that at times, this admission price of excessive self-editing placed too many requirements on the participants to be an acceptable exchange for the sake of a lesbian identity. Often the available lesbian identities did not match the individual’s sense and understanding of self. When this mismatch occurred, the individual had to decide which of three choices to make. The first option was to either modify, silence or forgo a part of their self in order to meet the requirements of admission into the particular community. The second option was to decide whether to reject the community and seek membership elsewhere. The third option available was to choose to remain on the periphery of the lesbian community in

² Goffman (1959) refers to the front stage in relation to performance of identity where the front is the “part of the individual’s performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance. Front, then, is the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance” (19). The performance involves, but is not limited to, a setting, clothing, posture, speech, facial expressions and body gestures.

order to avoid excessive self editing. It is pertinent to consider here that individuals bring their previous experiences and identity as an *outsider* with them and this fear of continuing to be an outsider can be a strong influence in the decision to choose the first option, mentioned above, in order to belong. At other times there was a match between the social lesbian identity and the individual's sense of self. When this happened, the individual experienced levels of acceptance and understanding reserved for those who take on an *insider* status within a community or landscape.

However, as mentioned earlier, Lemon (1993), examined the notion and accessibility of the lesbian community within an urban Australian setting and found that wimmin had to be confident and relatively comfortable with the idea of a social lesbian identity (even if it was loosely formed), before they could make connections with others and gain access or admission into the lesbian landscape. This study, in conjunction with a study by Burnett (1997), found that the homosexual (or gay male) landscape was more readily accessible to either gender, regardless of sexual identity; especially to those who were new or wanting to gain access to that landscape. It is argued in both studies that this was the case because the gay male landscape was more visible. Within this community, gay males also had higher incomes, greater disposable incomes, and increased access to Commonwealth and Government funding than their lesbian peers. Gay males were also accustomed to the privileging of males over females in the heterosexual landscape and were not immune to carrying this sense of male privilege across to the homosexual landscape (Kissen, 1993).

Lesbians and lesbian related issues have often part remained invisible within both the wimmin's and Queer movements. Firstly, the wimmin's movement has often tried to distance itself from lesbian related issues in an effort to maintain their heterosexual status and subsequent privileging in order to challenge inequities in a male dominated heterosexual landscape. More recently, the Queer movement, which is predominately driven by men for men and calls for a rejection of labelling (whether it be self labelling or labelling imposed by others), also inadvertently oppresses and renders lesbian identified wimmin invisible (Jagose, 1996).

For the most part, lesbian related issues and concerns do not attract funding or support (Brown, 1995; Burnett, 1997; 1998; Eliason, 1996; O'Hanlan, 2004). The gay male

landscape appears to be more prominent and readily accessible within society when compared to the lesbian landscape (Burnett, 1997; Lemon, 1993). For instance,

Rosie: I think one thing that's changed a lot is perceptions generally about homosexuality, the way that's changed has been completely different if you look at the types of rallies that turn out for Pride, they have a bit of crap, you know that oh we're so PC [politically correct] at rallies but generally they're dance parties.

Tulli: Yes.

Rosie: That's generally what the Queer community does in terms of, particularly student funding, they use it for parties and stickers and booze. The reason I think the Queer community as a whole has worked out that the way you make political change is on the personal level.

Tulli: The personal is political.

Rosie: But it's not the 70s personal is political at all. It's the, "Oh my God in my family there's 25 Queer people!" And people have to deal with it on a personal level cause everyone will find they know someone, whereas the same thing isn't there for wimmin. I think men get political change easier in terms of sexuality. Lesbians have been subsumed into the Wimmin's movement and often haven't been given a voice. There's issues of hierarchy and oppression that's really big in the Wimmin's movement and socialist politics. And a lot of people who go into the Wimmin's movement are really young (GA, MWS1, BTTPCGC, 10).

A number of the participants had been involved in either the wimmin's movement and/or the student union movement and were aware of the marginalisation experienced first hand by many lesbians within these arenas. These experiences are supported by research from Barry (2003) who concludes that the notion of a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community is fictive, ultimately because of the diversity and division which exists within and between lesbian and gay groups. Secondly, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender adults were mostly raised in predominately heterosexual communities as children and unlike other communities they have not developed the same collective understandings and connections. Lastly, Barry (2003) argues that there is limited awareness of a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender collective history both within and outside the community. Nonetheless lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities do exist despite these barriers. Ultimately, this is due to a shared understanding of sexual orientation and experiences of oppression (Barry, 2003; Bohan, 1996)

The participants in the current study were aware that often there appeared to be a general lack of knowledge and appreciation for the groundbreaking work of earlier generations within the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. This lack of

knowledge widened the gap and hindered the ability to communicate between established members and those new to the landscape. Participants recognised that symbols and history played an important role in defining, understanding, and making connections with others within the lesbian landscape. Barry (2003) states that, “history is vitally important to many conceptualizations of community. McMillan and Chavis (1986) in outlining the concept of sense of community note that having a collective history is important in creating a sustained sense of community, no matter who comprises the community” (12). As the participants in this study became more connected with the lesbian landscape they developed an interest in educating themselves about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender history, including important dates and events (for example, International Lesbian Day, the Stonewall Riots, World AIDS Day) and images and symbols synonymous with the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. This knowledge helped them create an understanding, awareness and positioning of themselves within both the lesbian as well as the wider heterosexual landscapes. Understanding the history of oppression and silencing of lesbians gave the participants the strength, courage and conviction to actively fight against oppression in their own landscapes. For example,

- Ani: Her-story [history] isn't written about, particularly in Australia. I mean a lot of the stuff we hear about is American. Stuff that happened in the 50s, 60s, even 70s isn't written about in Australia. Which is why this study is so imperative that it gets published widely (laughter) because younger women don't know about all of that stuff unless they are in some sort of political movement where the stories have been handed [down from] generations. I mean, if you've just come out and you're a straight scene queen how are you going to hear that sort of stuff?
- Rosie: But a lot of young wimmin don't give a shit.
- Sam: My experience has been most of the people that I've socialised with especially people [who] come out dancing and stuff, they really don't care about the other aspects. All they want is basically somewhere to dance, go out for dinner, maybe celebrate a birthday or whatever.
- Ani: They like the freedom of it but they don't care about the fight that happened to get that.
- Sam: It's kind of accepted that, “Oh well, this is how it is now”.
- Rosie: But the idea of that history is that it's so far back
- Ani: But it's still happening.
- Rosie: Yes we all know that ... but if you are in a big city then you can kind of just get away. It's like you've got all the mod cons.
- Ani: And also if you haven't done some sort of Humanity study at uni, or you haven't affiliated yourself with some sort of political or activist group you're not going to hear that stuff. And you're not going to care because you don't know it's there.
- Rosie: That's right.

- Tulli: There's a real sort of "it's alright, everything's fine" [mentality] unless something happens to that person. [Like] they get bashed or they're discriminated against [at] work and they actually have to start seeking people out to assist them and to help them. Nothing in their life really changes and they don't need to be held accountable ...
- Sam: They don't feel like they need that part of it [the Her-story/history and political background] until something happens, I agree (GA, MWS7, NTLL, 22 – 24).

It could also be argued that the knowledge of what had come before in terms of Her-story/history, provided the participants with an identity as an *oppressed other*. As stated in the previous chapters, the participants in this study were conscious of taking on a proactive identity rather than one which embraced a positioning as victim. This awareness complicated their unpacking, or analysis, of events because they did not want significant others to read them as paranoid or victimlike. However, it was recognised that identities centred around victimisation or martyrdom did exist within the lesbian landscape. For instance,

- Sam: If you are going to be a lesbian for your whole life, do you have to be fighting your whole life?
- Lucy: No, you can't.
- Sam: Everyone else in society has bars and clubs [where] they can go and dance without having to intellectualise it. [They don't] think about everyone fought for me, I should ...
- Tulli: Appreciate it?
- Lucy: Yeah, totally.
- Sam: Yeah, they should be able to just go out and just say, "Oh well this is here, this is here, it's great, lets just go and enjoy it".
- Tulli: And not feel guilty about enjoying it.
- Sam: Yeah.
- Tulli: There's a huge burn out rate for people that are involved ...
- Ani: And it's often the same people that are involved [in the political or activist roles], regardless of whether they've been burnt out for twenty years because it's their special project and they've got ownership [or an identity attached to it] and they don't want anyone else taking over (GA, MWS7, NTLL, 24 - 25).

Likewise, there was an understanding by participants that a number of organisations associated with the lesbian landscape, often those of a political nature, cultivated victim or martyr identities,

- Tulli: Do you find that with wimmin who've been on Women's Land or are part of COAL³, the Coalition of Activist Lesbians, that there's a mindset that there is

³ COAL stands for a national group of separatist lesbians known as the Collation of Activist

- only one way to [think and] all men are evil ...
- Rosie: The mind set is that they've been enlightened and therefore they understand really how society works and therefore how to change it. And if you come along and they don't know you, you have not yet been enlightened. And once you've [been] enlightened, you'll know how to do it their way but until you're enlightened you have to prove yourself to them in order for them to ...
- Lucy: To have any respect for you.
- Rosie: And the only way they'll respect you is if you do something they recognise.
- Ani: But you're only going to be a wommin that "we" accept [if] you've been beaten up by some man, been sexually abused, you know?
- Rosie: Or you've got the speak and demonstrate that you understand the experience.
- Tulli: Exactly, speak the language.
- Lucy: That's the funny thing about these sorts of organisations, instead of helping the victim, what they actually do is make the victim feel more fucked than they did in years.
- Ani: Yeah, they talk about survival and everything but it's only thing they actually want to focus on, the victimisation of it all. You could be a survivor as long as [you] actually don't use the survival word. You're a victim and that's all you are (GA, MWS7, NTLL, 25 - 26).

These examples illustrate the availability of identities of victimhood and martyrdom within the lesbian landscape. They appear to be connected with history as well as being politically driven by organisations or sub-groups within the landscape. Further discussion on the influence of politically driven organisations, for example, COAL, in relation to discrimination within the lesbian landscape is presented in a later section within this chapter, 8. 2., *Negotiating Political Awareness, Affiliation, and Gate Keepers Within the Lesbian Landscape*.

Word of mouth, the internet, and Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer specific media (in the form of weekly radio and television programs and fortnightly newspapers) in conjunction with local social groups also played an important part in modeling the roles or identities which were available within the landscape. These venues were a means of publicising events and activities which would facilitate the process of connection making with others. In other words, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer specific media let the participants know what events were on as well as where they could meet with others having similar interests. By connecting with others the participants were able to first expand their friendship circles, and second, gain feedback on the successfulness of their editing to fit a particular *post-initial coming-out* identity. For instance, the following transcript of a group analysis examines the issue of

Lesbians. They are particularly active along the east coast of Australia and predominately based on the mid north coast of New South Wales.

the editing of body image in nightclubs and what the participants referred to as a *scene queen* identity,

- Tulli: I just think that I'm sick and tired of society stereotyping us on what we look like instead of who we actually are.
- Lucy: Yes, because you know there are a lot of people that wouldn't touch me with a ten foot pole because I'm a big girl.
- Tulli: But you are beautiful.
- Lucy: There are some people who say, "Oh you're paranoid". [But] I'm not because I can feel it when we walk into a club. And I have thought to myself, "Okay, you don't have that beautiful body, then you don't have anything" because [those girls] can't see anything beyond that [and that's the message I pick up on]. And you have to have a good body, you have to have a good hairstyle, you have to have the right clothes.
- Sam: Yes, it is the image thing. It's not just the body size, it comes with the whole image. If you're not wearing the latest hip clothes from I don't know where, then they, [the beautiful girls], don't look at you either.
- Lucy: Yes.
- Ani: Yes.
- Lucy: I'm sick of it. Why do we have to be like everybody else? Why do we have to be similar? I've met the most adorable people that have been all colours, sizes and shapes and in different parts of the world.
- Sam: I think part of that is when you're out on the scene and that kind of thing [it's about attraction], because sex is about attraction and in that environment you can't actually chat and get to know someone well.
- Ani: Yes, that's it. It's just an instant attraction.
- Sam: You rely on an instant image, an instant attraction sort of thing. It doesn't mean that you're going to meet people that have any kind of substance or are nice people, but they're all relying on that *image out there kind of look* thing.
- Ani: Yes but then if you're only looking for sex at a club then you don't need to speak.
- Sam: That's right, but if you're looking for something more substantial then it's probably not the right place to go anyway (GA, MWS9, LSANR, 46 – 47).

As this transcription illustrates, the participants were aware of the connection and mismatch between self perception and available identities within a particular landscape. The participants felt frustrated when they were unable to edit their selves in order to fit an acceptable identity and gain acceptance. Further, they recognised the front stage and props of the *scene queen* identity and nightclub context did not offer meaningful insight or an ability to make connections with those unknown individuals present. Goffman (1959) states,

if unacquainted with the individual, observers can glean clues from his [sic] conduct and appearance which allow them to apply their previous experience with individuals roughly similar to the one before them or,

more importantly, to apply untested stereotypes to him[sic]. They can also assume from past experience that only individuals of a particular kind are likely to be found in a given setting. They can rely on what the individual says about himself [sic] or on documentary evidence he [sic] provides as to who and what he [sic] is. If they know, or know of, the individual by virtue of experience prior to the interaction, they can rely on assumptions as to the persistence and generality of psychological traits as a means of predicting his [sic] present and future behaviour (1).

While the participants did enjoy going out to nightclubs and dance parties from time to time it was not a context where they found a match between how they saw themselves in other peoples' minds (self perception) and how they understood the identities which were on offer within the particular setting. They were not able to edit themselves to fit the identities on offer; nor were they able to make meaningful connections with others in this setting. Many social events advertised in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer media centred around night clubs and dance parties. These settings were often the most accessible in the community, yet, produced the most prescriptive of identities.

This section recognised the positive aspects and interactions the participants drew from the lesbian landscape. However, it predominately concentrated on the problematic aspects the participants experienced in making connections within the lesbian landscape as they became more acutely aware of the diversity which existed there. The participants had to recognise and negotiate the different sub-groups which existed in the landscape, as well as make decisions about self editing relative to the groups' various requirements for group membership. These editing choices were navigated against the backdrop of the finite number of available identities within the landscape. Through their interactions with the various groups in the lesbian community, participants became aware of unspoken rules, cliques, and clichés, discussed in the next section.

8.1.1. Becoming Aware of Unspoken Rules, Clichés and Cliques

The group analysis process of the Memory Work Sessions enabled the participants of the current study to identify and discuss the unspoken rules which they felt existed within the local lesbian landscape. They were able to recount how these unspoken rules restricted their behaviour and positioning within the community. For instance, in the following transcript the participants raise the boundaries placed on penetrative sex, lesbian identities and acceptable lesbian behaviour.

Ani: There are a lot of lesbians who feel that penetration [during sex with a woman], well they're not anti it, [penetration], but [they] don't think it's part of ...

Sam: Or a big part of it.

Lucy: Or they try it and it doesn't do anything for them.

Tulli: Or if they like it, then they feel guilty about it because it's not ...

Lucy: Normal?

Tulli: It's not lesbian, do you know?

Ani: It's too heterosexual.

Tulli: You can't have penetration and be lesbian.

Lucy: That's so not true.

Ani: Yes.

Rosie: The thing that gets me about the politicised element of the women's movement is that stuff we are talking about and everything with choice. The issue is meant to be about choice [and] that was the point of breaking down stereotypes [in the women's movement], so that women can choose whomever they want. But those same people who are all agitating for that kind of crap are so against a so called man's way of having sex.

Ani: Yes, that's exactly right.

Sam: It comes down to pleasure, like, you have sex for pleasure.

Tulli: That's right.

Ani: Yes, you do what you want to do.

Sam: You should be able to talk to your partner about what turns you on and what you want. And for some people they won't want any penetration and for other people they probably will sometimes.

Tulli: It's a good point to bring up because there is so much stuff [surrounding this issue]. And the women that do enjoy penetration, lesbians that do enjoy penetration, are somehow seen as not being good lesbians (GA, MWS9, LSANR, 28 – 29).

Within this transcript Rosie raised the conflict between the rhetoric of choice from the Wimmin's Movement which can, optimally, lead to the breaking down of stereotypes, and the everyday practices and attitudes which exist within the lesbian landscape that serve to restrict, silence, or inspire guilt in individuals about particular sexual practices, contrary to the ideal of choice. In this way, activities, in this instance penetrative sex, become attached and aligned to stigmatised identities within communities.

Likewise, the concept of pornography within the lesbian community was also raised as an issue by the participants,

Ani: Dykes need to understand, and women in general, that porn movies that are made by wimmin for wimmin, and I do know it is hard to tell whether the actresses are like completely consensual, but ...

Lucy: [Porn made by wimmin for wimmin] Are okay!

Ani: Yes. They are hard to find and expensive, but it's okay to watch them.

Sam: But is there a problem watching other [types] of porn though if that's what you

- want to do?
- Lucy: Hey, there's nothing wrong [with it], because there is no book for lesbian lives.
- Sam: But does anyone have any experience with wimmin who haven't been comfortable [with it] or it's been an issue?
- Rosie: Yeah, I've been to a NOWSA conference where they've fucking screamed the fuck out of me when I suggested that there might be porn that is made by wimmin for wimmin.
- Sam: Because I have been in relationships where the idea of it is something that could be considered but the other partner just said, "No way", and wouldn't even consider it and was very uncomfortable.
- Ani: It comes down to [the issue of when] are chicks going to realise that they can be comfortable with their bodies and comfortable at looking at other people's bodies without necessarily objectifying them? We are all born with a sexuality, we are all born being attracted to people, just get over it (GA, MWS9, LSANR, 42 – 44).

These twin issues, penetrative sexual acts and pornography, presented examples of confrontational issues which are often not spoken about in the lesbian community at large. The freedom to discuss such issues in the context of the Memory Work group setting illustrates the close connection, confidence and safety each of the participants in this study felt with one another. The examples of discussion surrounding these issues also illustrate the often unspoken rules within the lesbian landscape which restrict what is deemed to be acceptable lesbian identity and activity.

Issues surrounding wimmin actively seeking out one night stands and casual sex were also very controversial topics within the lesbian landscape. On the one hand, these issues were linked with society's perceptions of wimmin in general, that is, *good*, respectable wimmin do not engage in such practices. It is possible that this perspective was carried over into the lesbian community from prior upbringing and socialisation in the heterosexual, androcentric landscape which rewards male virility whilst castigating female promiscuity for virtually the same behaviours. The respectable wommin role was one which several of the participants in this study actively rebelled against,

- Lucy: Has anyone in this room done that, [gone to a club looking for sex]? Because I have not ever done that and ...
- Ani: Done what?
- Lucy: Gone to a club to get sex.
- Ani: Yes.
- Sam: Yes (GA, MWS9, LSANR, 47 – 48).

Overall, the participants felt that the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities

were divided about four related, but separate, issues including casual sexual interactions, monogamous versus polygamous relationships, same sex marriage, and lastly, the legal recognition of same sex relationships. The underlying tension which linked each of these four issues within the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community in the urban setting where the study took place was a desire to retain a uniqueness which defined a community yet at the same time sought to gain legal protection against discrimination. This lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community as a result had many groups or factions which clashed over these issues. One faction actively fought against anything which remotely resembled the heterosexual landscape and what they viewed as a patriarchal derived ownership over another person, that is, marriage and monogamous relationships. This faction actively fought against the recognition and assimilation of same sex relationships as normative. The opposing faction, which actively fought for same sex marriage, were seen by many within the community as conservative and ultimately straight acting. A third group sought more middle ground on these issues and put their energy into gaining legal recognition for same sex relationships, but did not dictate the form the relationship and related public ceremony should take.

The participants were acutely aware of the tensions surrounding same sex marriage and the factions which existed within the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer community. While several were yet to make a definitive decision about where they stood in the larger political arena regarding this issue, each was committed to their individual relationships and clear about how they defined them. For example, the following transcript from a group analysis illustrates how the participants negotiated the boundaries for their own intimate relationships,

Tulli: You were trying to negotiate so that you didn't cross the ...
Lucy: Limitations of the relationship.
Sam: Yeah.
Lucy: The boundaries.
Tulli: So you had limits as well.
Lucy: Exactly. There are certain things that you would do and certain things that you wouldn't do.
Rosie: You talked about having to clearly define what the limits were.
Lucy: Yeah.
Rosie: So that you were still preserving your relationship.
Sam: I think all five [Memory Texts] were about monogamy.
Tulli: Yeah, I do too.

Lucy: Sam's was taking that side of joking about limitations and things like that. Knowing her limitations but just joking about it in a humorous way..

Rosie: Yeah.

Sam: So it was a joke but it wouldn't have been the same if we hadn't have had a conversation [about our expectations of the relationship] already.

Tulli: Or if the boundaries were a bit blurry.

Rosie: [There is a need or a] level of honesty [in the communication] that the needs of the partners [are] the same.

Sam: Yeah, so you've got to decide if you're looking for a relationship or just a quick fuck I guess (GA, MWS9, LSANR, 7 – 8).

Participants also raised concerns about the lack of respect their relationships received by some within the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer community. Many recounted experiences they had had where individuals within the community sought to actively break the partnership up as if it were a game. These individuals used various means including, but not limited to, actively seeking out one partner to cheat on the other, becoming friends and then playing one partner off against the other, and spreading rumours which would hurt one or both of the couple. For instance,

Lucy: I told her I had a partner and she still went after my arse.

Rosie: Oh okay.

Lucy: Sometimes even when you tell them you've got a partner and [you say] she's just sitting over there, they'll still do the fucking thing, you know, under the table. They'll still try their best.

Tulli: Yes.

Lucy: This is what they're out there for, they don't care.

Tulli: [Ani has had the experience where] she's gone, "I've got a partner, I'm not going to go there with you. I am not interested". And this crusty woman goes, "I've got a partner too. What's the problem, what's the issue?. And then kept pursuing it and then Ani has run to the toilet and rung me on her mobile.

Rosie: [This girl that Lucy was talking about] told all our friends that she slept with Lucy.

Tulli: [There are] lesbians still out there that think that anyone in a relationship is fair game. They don't respect the relationship. They do anything they can to bring in a lesbian love triangle.

Lucy: Totally! I am so sick of those girls that try and come and weasel their way in. You can see it for a mile.

Sam: So are these people out on the scene or where are they?

Lucy: They're everywhere honey!

Tulli: They're friends, they're acquaintances of other people, they're strangers that you meet out clubbing or at dinner. They are everywhere.

Lucy: Yes.

Tulli: That was one thing living in the city, like my experience was that by the end of five years everyone knew where we lived, they knew our phone number ...

Lucy: That's right.

- Tulli: It was very convenient to park the car out the front of our place and hang out for a couple of hours before it got busy and then all go out together or to stay an entire fucking weekend from Friday to Monday. And I'm not just talking one off weekends, I'm talking multiple weekends.
- Sam: Shit!
- Tulli: I'm big on personal space, like I love having my friends and I love having people drop over ...
- Lucy: But if you are in a relationship you need your space.
- Tulli: Yes but I also just needed space to walk around in my undies.
- Lucy: Yes, totally
- Tulli: Like there was no conscious acknowledgement [from people ringing up and dropping around] that our budgets were different or anything like that. I mean I really loved the social side, but by the end of five years it was really draining. Did you [Rosie and Lucy] find that?
- Lucy: We only lasted living there a year. It was like my life stopped [when we moved away] but I didn't miss the constant targeting with people coming over when Rosie wasn't home. Everything was about sex over there. It was all about sex and it was driving me fucking crazy. And I was always drunk and drugs were an option. It was just too much, too much.
- Tulli: Definitely. I mean I really loved all the social aspects but then it got to a point where it was just too much. And there wasn't that respect for the fact that you were in a relationship.
- Lucy: No, people would just come over whenever they felt like it and it was just like a halfway house and I felt powerless and that what I think really ticked me off (GA, MWS9, LSANR, 57 – 61).

This transcript illustrates how beliefs and myths in mainstream society can also permeate and be acted out within the homosexual landscape. The myth that non-heterosexuals are not capable of having deep committed relationships is embedded within a homophobic belief system. These myths can be played out within the lesbian landscape by individuals who have not examined their internalised homophobia and belief systems. Each of the participants in this study had had previously successful committed same sex relationships and were currently in long term relationships at the time of this study. The experiences and expectations of the participants in this study in terms of relationships is significant in debunking myths about the homosexual's ability to have successful committed relationships.

This section identified several examples of unspoken rules which the participants felt existed within the local lesbian landscape. It illustrated how the participants tried to negotiate these rules *post-initial coming-out*. Furthermore, it demonstrated how the rules were often connected with myths in mainstream society and subsequently played out in the lesbian landscape, thus restricting the participants' behaviour and positioning within

the lesbian community. To the credit of the participants, they were able as a group to raise and discuss difficult and controversial issues which exist within their local lesbian landscape. These same issues are part of the larger socio cultural context which both necessitated and displays research methodology based on feminist principles. The group in the current study was nurtured by the feminist research context through which each participant's sense of the personal as political can be viewed. An analysis of issues relating to politics, affiliation and gate keeping follows.

8. 2. Negotiating Political Awareness, Affiliation, and Gate Keepers Within the Lesbian Landscape

Assumptions were often made by significant others about the participants' involvement with political groups and organisations. For example, the following Memory Text from Lucy recounts how she was confronted with a wommin's assumption about her non-involvement with *Reclaim the Night* and the event's lesbian connections.

Lucy explained that Reclaim the Night was not simply a lesbian event even though it was for women only. Lucy explained that she didn't go to rallies because they were not disabled friendly and being a lesbian friendly event did not change that. Lucy used to go to rallies years ago with friends but she did not really like them. She believed that these events did more harm than good because people got hot headed and roused up for the wrong reasons and they lost their focus (Lucy's MT, MWS1, BTTPCGC, 2).

The participants explored Lucy's Memory Text further in the group analysis,

Ani: One year at a Reclaim the Night Rally, I was actually talking to one of the organisers and I had decided not to march again like the previous year, and she said oh are you coming? She knew that I was out and she said so are you coming? And I said well actually no and she almost dropped everything she was holding because you know I was supposed to go and I just said well actually no I don't agree with it. I don't think that we should have a wimmin's only march against violence against wimmin because men aren't the only perpetrators and wimmin aren't the only victims and if you don't include men in those marches then how are we ever going to get anywhere? If we continue to exclude a group that we're trying to educate and have an impact upon then how are we going to get anywhere? And it was the same response, how can you say that, you're a lesbian, you're a feminist, you're supposed to agree that only wimmin get hurt and that wimmin don't hit other wimmin and that wimmin don't hit men. You're only supposed to think that girls get hit by boys.

Lucy: Yes.

Rosie: I think there's an assumption that the only way to make people understand that these things happen is to demonstrate in one particular way (GA, MWS1, BTTPCGC, 9).

Lucy highlighted how a number of the annual, politically driven events and marches were not disabled friendly. The participants were also conscious of a growing awareness within the lesbian landscape about same sex domestic violence (Eliason, 1996; Girshick, 2002; Helfrich & Simpson, 2006; Renzetti, 1992). Helfrich and Simpson (2006) state that "between 41% and 68% of lesbians may experience violence at the hands of an intimate partner" (345). The participants were unhappy with the lack of recognition in events like *Reclaim the Night* to acknowledge firstly, same sex domestic violence and secondly, a growing awareness of violence towards men by wimmin. There was an unspoken rule about the expectation of lesbian participation in the *Reclaim the Night* event within the lesbian landscape. It could be argued that this expectation was connected to myths circulating in the heterosexual landscape that lesbian identity was the result of a traumatic experience with a male and/or an intense dislike, or separatist mindset, of males. "In the heyday of radical lesbian feminism, some argued that *any* woman could be a lesbian. If relationships with men are oppressive, then one route to political and social transformation is to separate from men and form relationships with women" (Esterberg, 1997, 27). The participants in this study acknowledged that while a large percentage of violence towards wimmin was indeed perpetrated by males, they were aware of other perpetrators in the community which were not acknowledged by events like *Reclaim the Night*. Participants were aware that in some instances these perpetrators (often involved in same sex domestic violence) participated in events like *Reclaim the Night* despite the contradictory nature of their behaviour. The participants felt frustrated because of their awareness of a growing number of males within society who supported wimmin and wimmin's rights but were unable to participate in events like *Reclaim the Night*. Goffman (1959) explains that unwritten, contradictory laws of social behaviour cause disruption to the performance of an identity (front) or cause the performance of a character to be difficult to sustain.

Often the fear of rejection from a community is strong enough to regulate the behaviour of the members of a group, community or landscape. The fear associated with once again becoming an *outsider* and losing a new found sense of belonging and acceptance can become a gate keeping mechanism (Foucault, 1983; 1991; Goffman, 1959) which

maintains the member's behaviour to reflect those identities deemed acceptable by the community. Thus gate keeping becomes both an internal and external mechanism whereby members watch and regulate both their own and others behaviours and performances. For instance,

- Ani: You just hear all these rules and regulations and you think, "How am I ever going to fit into any of these? And how am I going to abide by any of these? And what happens if I don't? And where are the lesbian police?" (Laughter).
- Lucy: Yes.
- Ani: I think you always expect that you're going to be welcomed.
- Lucy: That's right.
- Ani: And it's so heart breaking when you're not because you think, "Oh, I'm gay, Lucy's gay, Lucy's going to accept me for who I am and what I am, and she's going to be like me and we're going to be friends".
- Lucy: Because we've both in the same situation.
- Ani: Yes, but just because the two of us are gay doesn't mean that we're going to be friends. I think it takes a lot of time and a lot of heartbreak for people to realise that.
- Sam: I think people come out into the gay scene thinking well because I'm gay and there's another two hundred people here that are gay then we're all going to get on (GA, MWS7, NTLL, 54 – 55).

These data support findings (see for example, Burnett, 1997; Eliason, 1996; O'Hanlan, 2004) that the lesbian and gay community is unique in that, unlike other minority groups, it cannot be distinguished by obvious physical traits or connections with family of origin.

The participants were aware of various self appointed gate keepers, or *lesbian police*, within the lesbian community. These gate keepers decided who was accepted into the community as an *insider* and who was declined entry. As highlighted previously, the lesbian landscape was constantly shifting and being redefined. Consequently, what was demeaned as acceptable lesbian practice, attire and politics was also being continuously redefined. For example, Drag Kings⁴ were deemed acceptable by many factions of the community while Male to Female transgender lesbian identified wimmin were not. Some groups within the community were more outspoken than others about who and what was acceptable. The participants in the study had many experiences which highlighted the groups and factions that exist within the lesbian community and illuminate the fragile and fluid nature of the community. For instance, Tulli's Memory Text, *The conference and*

⁴ Drag kings are the opposite of Drag Queens, that is, they are females who dress as male and perform a caricature of over exaggerated male characteristics in a musical cabaret style performance.

recognising the other, from the first session (Tulli's MT, MWS1, BTTPCGC, 5 – 6) recounts her experiences with a group of separatist lesbians who publicly alienated a Male to Female transgender at a conference.

Tulli was sitting at the edge of a large group of people during the morning tea break. There was one wommin at the other end of the group she was sitting with. She was thin, exciting, oozed boundless energy and confidence. She talked to a lot of people. Everyone seemed to know her. She looked comfortable in her body. She looked extravagant and elegant. She was dressed in a black full length cat suit and a red full length velvet cape. She had black curly hair and *theatre* make up. Her movements were fluid and large. She did not go unnoticed. She looked like a wommin but she was thin and not *curvy* like other wommin. She was challenging. During the morning tea session the COAL (The Coalition of Activist Lesbians) wimmin handed out brochures to all of the female conference participants. She handed one to the red caped wommin. She kept passing brochures out then stopped dead. She walked back to the red caped wommin and ripped the brochure from her hand and walked on. Tulli watched shocked, confused and embarrassed. The red caped wommin had almost gotten away with it, she'd almost broken through. (Tulli's MT, MWS1, BTTPCGC, 6).

This experience had a profound effect on Tulli. While she had had an earlier experience with the wimmin from COAL when she first *came out*, again in relation to Male to Female transgender wimmin, this more recent incident reaffirmed her earlier belief that lesbian identified Male to Female transgender wimmin did have a place within the lesbian community. Tulli, along with the other participants, struggled with the discrimination the COAL wimmin blatantly showed towards those who were not *wimmin born wimmin*,

Lucy: So what's the point of us breaking through all this political correctness when we've got conferences that just knock us back down again anyway?

Tulli: Well it wasn't actually the conference it was just a group of wimmin that attended the conference. It was actually a very mixed conference.

Rosie: I think the thing about it is that people with extreme views can hold them very strongly and tend to vocalise them while people in the majority tend to feel more comfortable not needing to. It's people, that may not be the extreme, but may be full of arrogance or they just discovered something or they have held on to anger about previous relationships ...

Ani: that they're so angry that they are radical to the point that they've actually become quite conservative.

Rosie: I think it is fear. I mean, what do I find so offensive in that situation in the conference? And I think it's the ultimate feeling you that if I **don't** prove to **you** in **your** way that I'm valid then you don't trust me (GA, MWS1, BTTPCGC, 8)

Baird (2005) argues that a pivotal challenge experienced by the lesbian landscapes in Australia is the lesbian identified transgender. She illustrates this by exploring the conflict which erupted at the 1994 National Conference for lesbians in Brisbane,

A transgender women had been part of the local organising group but on the day that the conference opened her presence was the object of strong opposition. After the conference, the Lesbian Space Project (LSP), a Sydney lesbian group fundraising and organising to buy and run a building explicitly for lesbians, spent years grappling with the issue of whether transgender women should be admitted. Those who opposed their inclusion deployed the new identity label 'women-born-women' but the LSP eventually resolved to adopt an inclusive rather than exclusive policy. More recently lesbian communities have begun to include and be challenged by Female-to-Male transgender men, many of whom live in lesbian communities before, during, or after their transition from woman to man. These kinds of debates, where marginal or sub-cultural communities are challenged from their own margins, are nevertheless the site of conflict and contest over crucial issues for the wider society (79).

Participants recognised the importance of making connections with others in order to establish a sense of belonging and safety; Goffman (1959) refers to this connection making as the formation of teams. However, for the participants in this study this connection making did not occur when individuals had to constantly prove their validity, membership, *insider* status, or meet an invisible yardstick in order to gain acceptance when the editing of selves went outside the individual's defined boundaries of acceptable behaviour, morals or political beliefs. Instead, participants questioned the notion of community and recounted the dissociation they felt as a result of being forced to edit themselves to present a sustainable and suitable front. For instance,

Tulli: There was this woman who stayed with me for Lesbian Confest⁵ and she had a real issue because it was the first one the Trannies came too. And it all blew up and she was one of the instigators for making trouble. And Ani just went, "Oh so no!" And so this women then turned it around and said that Ani had mothering issues and that Ani couldn't relate to her because she was an older women.

Ani: That's right.

Lucy: Oh my God! It sounds like this woman couldn't handle rejection.

Rosie: I think there's something about those sort of semi political, social environments were if you don't respect age and experience and maturity or any of those

⁵ Lesbian Confest is conference/festival held every two years by lesbians for lesbians in Australia. It is hosted by different lesbian communities around the country. Lesbian Confest organizers and participants have been in conflict since the early 1990s over the inclusion of pre and post operative Male to Female lesbian identified wimmin.

things then [if there's a problem then] it's your fault.
Ani: It's not so much about respecting their age but respecting their experience, their version of history (GA, MWS7, NTLL, 56).

This section illustrated how the participants in this study were unable to maintain a performance of an identity which rejected lesbian identified Male to Female transgender wimmin in wimmin/lesbian only spaces in order to maintain their membership within a particular setting of the lesbian landscape. The inability on behalf of the five participants to conform to an accepted identity within the lesbian landscape lead them to seek out other identities and spaces within the landscape which did not require such a high level of editing of self. This search is illustrated in the following section.

8. 3. Finding a Place, or Space, Within the Lesbian Landscape as Individuals

Having made connections with the lesbian community, participants worked through a process of finding their own place and an identity which more closely matched their sense of self within the lesbian landscape. This was an ongoing process as the participants learnt more about themselves and others in an ever changing lesbian landscape.

One method the participants used to understand the lesbian identities on offer within the lesbian landscape and their subsequent positioning was by placing themselves physically in the centre of openly lesbian and gay areas of activity. This usually meant sections of the inner city which were known for their lesbian and gay operated, or gay friendly, businesses, such as speciality shops, boutiques, restaurants, cafes, and night clubs. Two world wide recognised examples of such areas would be Oxford Street in Sydney or the Castro district in San Francisco. These areas are often referred to in the literature (see for example, Inness, 1997) as gay ghettos and are frequently very gay male dominated. These areas are important because they provided participants with a space where they could take time out from the invisibility they experienced in the heterosexual landscape. They also allowed them to make connections with others and feel safe. Unfortunately, at times these ghettos were also depressing because of the obvious visual concentration of drugs and alcohol abuse,

Rosie: So you create for yourself a gay friendly social network basically.

Tulli: Like a ghetto.
Rosie: Like your own safety zone, like your little boundary. I just know for us [Rosie and her partner] we're not doing that [because we live in an outer suburb].
Lucy: I personally don't like the gay ghettos.
Tulli: It can be a bit depressing.
Lucy: Very, you see old lesbians who are alcoholics and stuff. It's just not right.
Sam: It's kind of getting caught up in a world that's not quite real and you kind of get lulled into thinking [you're safe] and you kind of know that it's not really like that. And it can't be like that forever (GA, MWS8, LIPS, 25).

Participants also relayed how they felt these ghettos gave a false sense of security which was seductive and easy to be lured into. These spaces had the potential to provide a bubble, or alternate, sense of reality which shut out the heterosexual landscape. This is evident in Ani's retelling of an experience in Sydney's Oxford street during the Sleaze Ball⁶,

Ani: That's what happened the first time I went to Sleaze in Sydney. I was just having the most amazingly fantastic *out* time when there was this straight couple walking up Oxford street and everyone just parted and they walked up the middle ...
Tulli: Like they were the freaks, they were the side show.
Ani: And everyone just stopped and stared at them, because for a week it was all just gay couples everywhere. And this straight couple walked in and everyone just got a shock.
Tulli: And everyone just parted. It was like the sea parting. It was amazing.
Rosie: But that's why I think that's actually an intermediate sort of thing. When you come out you start to notice those things, or you start to seek them out and then you really need that absorption time to actually feel like you're a normal human being (GA, MWS8, LIPS, 26 - 28).

So while it was important for the participants to gain a sense of normalcy and acceptance by being absorbed into the gay ghettos and events from time to time, they also recognised them as not providing a true sense of reality. These ghettos were also constantly changing. For example, business would close down or change hands, areas would become trendy and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer community would be pushed out because of increases in land values and rental properties. These areas were also often portrayed in the media as being high crime areas and synonymous with syndicates or gangs involved in drug running.

⁶ The Sleaze Ball is held in a number of capital cities within Australia and overseas. However, in Sydney it is the second major function after the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. The Sleaze Ball is darker in nature than the Mardi Gras event and usually involves costuming which is black, leather, and reveals more flesh.

The most important element of spaces such as a gay ghetto was the ability to learn how to make connections with others; that is, to recognise and be recognised by others (Inness, 1997). This ability to make connections often involved a series of non-verbal cues, like,

Lucy: And they all did this thing [winking action].

Rosie: Yes or the nod.

Tulli: The lesbian nod.

Lucy: Like sister?

Tulli: Yes (GA, MWS8, LIPS, 15 – 16).

Or there was a high concentration of visual clues which incorporated symbols such as the rainbow flag, upside down pink or black triangle, and/or wimmin symbols. These visual clues were often then integrated into one's clothing or accessories. Hair styling and particular types of clothing were also used to cue other *insiders* about sexual orientation. For instance,

Sam: So do you think that dressing the same makes people and lesbians who are out in public more noticeable?

Ani: Yes.

Rosie: Well you look like you're part of a group. You know when you see groups of teenagers they'll all wear something similar.

Sam: When you see a bunch of dykes, you can just go, "Oh yeah".

Ani: If you see a bunch of dykes you can generally pick up who the couples are because they do look so similar. Like they'll have a similar haircut and I don't think it is intentional.

Tulli: Well not even that, they look like they belong together.

Lucy: Cause they give each other looks or a vibe ...

Tulli: Or [it's their] body language.

Ani: Or they'll walk around but not talk to each other, but, look like they're obviously friends.

Rosie: Or they're bickering, not as in arguing, but bickering as in fussing, because friends don't fuss when they're walking in pairs, but couples do fuss (GA, MWS8, LIPS, 21- 22).

There was a certain *buzz* experienced by the participants when they were recognised by other *insiders*. For example, Ani recounts the following experience,

Ani: I was walking down the city a few weeks ago and there was this woman who was obviously dykey and I was just walking around and subconsciously I get this feeling of kicking my heels while walking around. And I just looked up and she gave me the lesbian nod and I just glowed, and I thought how stupid, like this has been going on for how many years and yet I still get this grin on my face.

Lucy: Yes.
Ani: Like you've been noticed and you're one of them and they know you are one of them.
Lucy: Yes.
Rosie: It's like a language.
Lucy: That's what I was going to say. Acceptance, hey? Acceptance is a big thing (Laughter).
Sam: Yes (GA, MWS8, LIPS, 32).

This *buzz* was equated by the participants to feelings of acknowledgement and acceptance which was particularly important when they were in the heterosexual landscape and felt invisible. Instances like these boosted their sense of confidence and reinforced their lesbian selves.

However, while these visual clues, such as hair cuts, clothing and jewellery, helped *insiders* recognise and acknowledge each other they also had the potential at times to limit an individual's self expression or ability to connect with a lesbian identity and landscape. For example, if an individual's sense of self did not match the expectations of the community's sense of what it meant to be, or look like, a lesbian, then the individual was left with two choices. Firstly, to pay the admission fee to enter the lesbian landscape and change their visual appearance, or secondly, to reject the expectations connected with a particular identity and remain on the outside or perimeter of the landscape. An example of this would be to maintain an extremely feminine appearance and constantly wear full make up, long hair, skirts or dresses and high heeled shoes to lesbian events. The cost to the individual could be firstly to be refused entry by the door staff or secondly to be rejected or shunned by others at the event because of the individual's appearance. The individual would probably be read by *insiders* as heterosexual and wanting to dabble in a lesbian experience before returning to the safety of a heterosexual marriage or partnership and thus would be subsequently rejected.

If there was an inability to maintain a front stage performance of an acceptable identity (Goffman, 1959) within the lesbian landscape, as experienced to some extent by each of the five participants in this study, there was a rejection of the available central identities. Goffman (1959; 1974; 1981) argues that these fronts reflect the values of the particular community in which they occur. The participants were unable to edit their selves without compromising their values and as a result moved to seeking identities and membership which were available on the periphery of the landscape. These moves can be interpreted

as resistance and can serve to increase comfort levels as illustrated in the following section.

8.3.1. Use of Resistance and Comfort Level with Lesbian Self

The participants were able to develop an understanding of their own selves by firstly defining what they were not. That is, by *naming* the cliques, spoken of earlier in section 8. 1. 1., *Becoming Aware of Unspoken Rules, Clichés and Cliques*, which made up the lesbian community they were able to firstly define what they were not before they were able to define, or name, what they were. They were able to accept the diversity which existed within the lesbian community and see it as a strength rather than a weakness. They saw diversity as one of the positive aspects of the lesbian landscape although they were aware that it was also something which had the potential to pull the landscape apart. For example, these tensions were reflected in the clash surrounding Male to Female transgender lesbian identified wimmin versus *wimmin born wimmin* in wimmin only space.

Each of the participants was aware of how their understanding of lesbian self was modified, or affected, over time, given significant events and experience. For instance, Sam's Memory Text highlighted how she recognised a change in focus in both herself and her friends,

She had been out for a good six years and enjoyed socialising with her lesbian friends at the wimmin's only venues. She was out watching a band the night she met Patricia. Patricia was shorter than her, with very short cropped reddish/brown hair, she was wearing black pants with a trendy singlet, and a large tattoo of a Labyrinth was clearly visible on her upper arm. She danced well and Sam thought she was attracted to her but this started to wear off after the feeling that they did not click grew. Patricia was strongly vegan and been involved in feminist politics strongly whilst at university twelve months before. She even described herself as a radical feminist and was very vocal about a range of social issues. Sam respected and even admired Patricia's involvement in these politics, however, she felt a little over it. Once she would have attended a number of rallies and marches each year but now she had other focuses in her life. For one, most of her lesbian friends appeared over it too and were not politically active, but instead put energy into a career and keeping in touch with family. This interaction with Patricia highlighted that she had become less political over the years and to some degree this brought feelings of guilt (Sam's MT, MWS1, BTTPCGC, 3).

For Sam this Memory Text signified a change in her willingness to edit her self to fit an identity connected to politics and trends within the lesbian landscape. She was aware of others who had created pockets within the landscape which had identities which valued career and family connections. Sam felt a connection between her understanding of self, or self story, and the available identities which were less political in nature. All of the participants expressed these feelings, or connections, to some extent. For example,

Rosie: I think there's a stage in your development of yourself, after you've been out for a number of years where you stop expecting homophobia. I think when you initially come out [you're really aware of it. Your identity changes over time and] It's not the [identity I had when I was] young and really confident and proud and arrogant and ignorant of my sexuality, therefore, I didn't give a fuck what anyone said so get fucked. It's not that. It's the other, where it's just part of you and it's not the thing on your sleeve and it's not your identity, it's just part of you.

Tulli: So there's more a merge?

Rosie: So when we get into social situations, we're not entering it with a huge level of anxiety which I think you do go through that stage.

Ani: And the huge level of arrogance of like, "I'm going to say something deliberately now so that you can say something to me and I can put you in your place".

Lucy: That's right.

Rosie: Or, "If you just say something that doesn't mean anything, I'm going to read into it that you mean something".

Tulli: Yes (GA, MWS8, LIPS, 23).

There was a shift in the participant's sense of self and positioning in social settings from one of a publicly reactionary, *in your face*, tough lesbian to a more settled, open to a number of opinions self. For instance,

Sam: Yes but I think you get to a point after you're sort of comfortable, after a number of years that you just don't need to be vocal, you might have strong opinions but you know when to vocalise them and when not to (GA, MWS1, BTTPCGC, 8).

It appeared that the participants had been able to create a place within the lesbian landscape where they were able to negotiate a lesbian self which was more closely aligned to their sense of self. That is, as they gained a better awareness and understanding of the lesbian landscape and the limited number of lesbian identities available within this landscape they were able to reject, or negotiate, aspects of lesbian identities which did not match their sense of self and adopt others which did. They were less likely to react to a situation or interaction in a manner that was perceived as expected behaviour. Instead, based on assessing the situation from their prior

experiences and knowledge, they were likely to react in a less uncompromising manner. For example,

- Rosie: We might think about it [a situation] and talk about it with our partner later as opposed to see it as a situation.
- Sam: Like when you're first coming out and you're brave enough to hold hands in public, you sort of think that absolutely everyone's looking at you?
- Ani: Yes.
- Sam: But then later on, it's just you've got to go about your business and if you want to do that, [hold hands], [than you just do it] and you're not aware of people anymore because it doesn't matter.
- Lucy: That's right.
- Tulli: Do you also think it's because as you move on and get more comfortable with everything, that we create safe places [or] environments where our friends are okay with who we are and we know where to shop ... Do you know what I'm saying?
- Rosie: I know what you're saying but I don't think it's that. I think that actually creating those things for yourself is an intermediate phase. I think that's what gives you the confidence to move into the other phase which is just that it's part of you. I think that is something that is important for lesbians who have come out. I think it's a three-fold developmental sort of process and that that is like the middle stage of it, when you do everything in the community (GA, MWS8, LIPS, 24 – 25).

Participants reported that when they started to feel confident and comfortable with their self image as lesbian they were able to use resistance techniques as a means of challenging stereotypes and homophobia. This is illustrated in Ani's Memory Text for session eight, *Lesbians in Public Spaces*,

They were shopping in the city one Friday night in a last ditched attempt at Christmas shopping. Nine o'clock struck and with a demure not shown by many other frantic shoppers, they went to catch their bus home. They casually strolled through the mall, hands clenched, bags in tact and smiles adorning their faces for a job well done when all of a sudden from out of nowhere came, "You fucking faggots!". They looked around to see who it was directed at and where it had come from. The voices came from the top of a parking lot which overlooked the mall. In a split second Ani realised the voice was directed at them, she looked down to check on a lack of penis and thought if the voice was not going to be nice to people then it should at least have the courtesy to be correct in its name calling and slurs. Ani then looked up and noticed what was surely the whole of [the mall] looking at her and her girlfriend. She looked up for the source of the voice and the wrong moronic slur and noticed him hiding in the dark shadows of the car park. She thought he needed to be corrected, so with a deep breath she yelled in her loudest and scariest voice, "We are not fucking faggots, we are fucking dykes!" With that her partner took her

hand and they ran quickly through a stationary crowd of onlookers who were in a state of disbelief. Ani and her girlfriend laughed loudly all the way home on the bus” (Ani’s MT, MWS8, LIPS, 4).

Ani was able to challenge and resist the cowardly homophobic slurs with her own loud verbal reply despite it being in a crowded public setting. She highlighted the incorrect assumptions made about both her gender and identity and turned it back onto the *voice* hiding in the dark car park in a way which allowed her to regain her sense of power and control. It also illustrates that Ani felt comfortable with her lesbian self in a way which allowed her to challenge an incident initially designed to silence and belittle her in a public setting.

Tulli also recounted an incident in her Memory Text, *Waiting at the Checkout*, in session eight, *Lesbians in Public Spaces*, which highlights both resistance in a heteronormative setting and a high degree of comfort with her lesbian identified self.

Tulli had just picked up her partner from work and they were at a shopping centre doing the fortnightly grocery shop. It was busy but not too busy, mainly mature people and young wommin with children. It wasn’t long before they were lining up at the checkout and began to catch up on their respective days’. The conversation quickly turned to an interesting story Tulli’s partner had been told by a friend on the train on her way to work that morning. Tulli noticed a middle aged wommin lined up behind them who was possibly eaves dropping but she decided to ignore her. Tulli’s partner told the story about how this friend’s friend was a lesbian and had just started a new relationship with another wommin but hadn’t at that stage informed her parents of her preference in partners. She was supposed to have gone away for the weekend but had decided to stay home and not tell anyone. It was a rainy afternoon and the wommin and her new partner were having an intimate moment in the bedroom. The partner thought she heard a noise but the wommin who owned the house just told her to ignore it and they continued on. Suddenly the bedroom door opened and it was the wommin’s mother with a vacuum in hand, she had a key and was cleaning the house as a surprise for her daughter. Everyone stopped what they were doing and there was an uncomfortable pause ... the mother cleared her throat and said right then I’ll go and put the kettle on and make us all a cup of tea. Tulli and her partner roared laughing about how that would be one way to come out to your parents. They chatted on about other aspects of the story. Tulli had watched the wommin in the line behind them during the story her partner was telling her. She was sure the wommin was listening. Tulli’s instinct was confirmed when the wommin blushed and had a look of terror on her face as Tulli and her partner laughed. The wommin refused to make eye contact with Tulli or her partner. All colour had drained from the wommin’s

face and she looked like she was about to collapse (Tulli's MT, S8, LIPS, 5).

Tulli and her partner were able to disrupt the heteronormative environment of the supermarket and quietly challenge the wommin who was eaves dropping in the line behind them by recounting a lesbian related story. Both of the examples presented here illustrate Foucault's (1983) notion of turning a form of power, or in this instance, social norms in the form of expect behaviour and conversation in public spaces, back on its' self. The participants challenged the sites heteronormative power by firstly being open about their non-heterosexual identities in a public setting and secondly, by breaking expected codes of conduct. In both instances presented here, the participants resisted the expectations of silence placed on them as *outsiders* in the heterosexual landscape thereby disrupting the power micro-practices.

Ultimately, data from this study reflect and extend existing literature which supports the idea that the self is fluid and wimmin come to a lesbian self via a number of different pathways and experiences in their lives. For instance, two of the participants in this study state that they always felt different to their heterosexual peers growing up and never felt any attraction to the oppose gender. Another two had been previously been attracted to and involved in heterosexual relationships and did not totally rule out the possibility of future opposite gender attraction. The fifth participant had always felt attracted to wimmin but because of a combination of family of origin, cultural and religious expectation had felt conflicted with her same sex feelings of attraction and had previously tried to deny them.

The data presented here can also be used to name and break down the myths in the lesbian community which police and validate particular activities, values and politics as essential for membership in the lesbian landscape, for example, the rejection of Male to Female transgender lesbian identified wimmin at wimmin only events. The data unsettled and named the hierarchy which exists in the lesbian community that holds wimmin who have not had contact or sexual relations with a male as higher or *more truly lesbian* than lesbians who have had relationships with men or still find men attractive. Thus a variety of positions within the lesbian landscape displayed by the data were negotiated by the participants in ways that preserved and enhanced their self understandings.

8.4. Conclusion

As data from this chapter have illustrated, understandings of lesbian selves are shaped by many elements in the heterosexual community as well as diverse issues within the lesbian community/ies. *Post-initial coming-out* lesbian participants in this study negotiated their positioning within the lesbian community by building and maintaining connections with significant others around them. As the data illuminate, establishing stable connections with the lesbian community enabled participants to feel secure and supported about who they were and how they identified, particularly when there were complex issues occurring in family of origin or work contexts.

An individual negotiates her self-understanding in relation to both landscapes, heterosexual and lesbian. However, neither landscape exists as a given entity but is rather defined, or developed, as a set of socially constructed ideas which are partially held by real people. As a result, both landscapes are in constant motion.

As stated previously, within any given landscape there are a number of identities available to individuals. For example, the participants in this study had a number of identities, such as heterosexual, lesbian, and bisexual, available to them. There were also sub-identities available within each of these three broader identities. For example, within the lesbian identity some of sub-categories identified in this chapter included, separatist identities, *wimmin-born-wimmin* lesbian identities, butch/femme identities, scene queen identities, political lesbian identities and victim or martyr identities.

Since landscapes and identities were socially constructed by groups of people making up a particular society or landscape, these identities were able to be modified and changed by the group. At times, parts of the individual's self were hidden because aspects of the person's self were not accepted by the landscapes within the society. For instance, within the lesbian landscape, many lesbians did not accept that some lesbians could still be attracted to, and engage in sexual relations with, men. As a result, lesbians whose primary relationships and attractions were with other wimmin but who were still attracted to men could not openly discuss this component of their selves, or even their experiences, with others. Instead, these aspects were silenced by what the dominant

majority within the lesbian landscape deemed to be acceptable components of a lesbian identity.

For each of the participants in this study the identity of heterosexual did not fit. Like a piece of clothing which was too long in the arms or too tight across the chest, a heterosexual identity did not fit the five participant's sense of selves. This exploration of the self which did not fit a heterosexual identity within a predominately heterosexual landscape was highlighted in the first two data analysis chapters, *Negotiating the Family Landscape* and *Negotiating the Work/Career Landscape*. The participants had to explore other identities within the local lesbian landscape in order to develop their own personal understanding of self, as illustrated in chapter 7, *Negotiating the Tensions between the Heterosexual and Lesbian Landscapes*, and this current chapter, *Negotiating the Lesbian Landscape and Lesbian Selves*.

The participants in this study negotiated the local lesbian landscape and the limited number of available identities from their prior positioning as *outsider* to the heterosexual landscape. Ultimately, the participants in this study were unable to edit their selves to fit any of the available central identities within the lesbian landscape and remained on the periphery as *post-initial coming-out* lesbians. It is the snap shots of this journey, or sense making process, as experienced by the five participants in an Australian urban lesbian landscape, which have been explored and presented here. The purpose has been to provide both insight and understanding of the lived experiences of *post-initial coming-out* lesbians.

Chapter Nine

Conclusion

If you think you can
or believe you can,
Begin it.
Boldness has
magic, power and
genius in it.

Goethe, n.d.

Key issues surrounding lesbian invisibility, stereotyping and identity explored in this dissertation have highlighted the significant gaps which exist in the literature and in previous research for/about *post-initial coming-out* identified young lesbian wimmin. Snap shots of the participants' lives in a variety of pertinent landscapes have illustrated the complex nature of negotiating and understanding their positioning by significant others as a result of their *post-initial coming-out* identities. This chapter reflects upon the outcomes and findings of the study, and presents some of the possible implications for future research. The chapter begins by outlining the three major outcomes of the study and revisiting the main research focus, objectives and subsequent cluster questions. This is followed by a summary of the findings as they pertain to each of the four data analysis chapters. A detailed methodological reflection is then presented and leads into a discussion of the research implications which have developed out of this study. The chapter ends with final summarising comments in relation to the overall dissertation.

The anthropological study presented in this dissertation sought firstly to investigate the under-researched and misunderstood lives of young lesbians *post-initial coming-out* within an Australian context. The data not only highlighted the experiences of the five wimmin participants within their contexts of family, work, heterosexual and lesbian landscapes, but also articulated numerous serious issues which need to be explored and addressed in more detail through further research, as shown through this original study.

Secondly, the study sought to gain insight into how young lesbians *post-initial coming-out* make sense of their lives, selves and identities, and positioning within society. These insights are taken contextually, given the negative myths and stereotypes which currently exist within the general population in relation to people with non-heterosexual

identities, specifically in this case, those with lesbian identities. What became increasingly apparent throughout the current study was that each of the participants had a strong sense of self, despite the many and varied obstacles they experienced. As the data confirm, these negative experiences were more often than not a direct reaction to their respective lesbian identities. The participants made sense of their own positioning (and the positioning imposed upon them by significant others in their family, work, heterosexual and lesbian landscapes) as lesbian identified wimmin by firstly recognising which identities required too much editing of their respective selves and did not fit their self story. They also developed strong support systems and families of choice as a means of gaining acceptance and developing a sense of belonging in a culture which positioned them as outsiders.

Lastly, the study sought to further develop and refine the Memory Work methodology, particularly as it pertains to a doctoral research program. As highlighted in the methodology chapter, Chapter Three, Memory Work is an excellent means by which to break down traditional researcher/researchee dichotomies, support and promote feminist centred research, and advance new and emerging qualitative methods of research. A detailed personal reflection and account of how Memory Work has contributed to understanding *post-initial coming-out* young lesbians in an Australian context is presented later in this chapter (refer to sub-section 9.2., *Methodological Reflections*).

The main research focus of the study was,

To explore and provide snap shots of the *lived* experiences of young lesbian wimmin *post-initial coming-out* within an Australian context

An integral component of the study involved four research questions. These were developed as a means of integrating and organising the literature and data. The four questions were,

- ❖ How do young lesbians deal with, and (re)construct their relationships with family and friends *post-initial coming-out* (Brown, 1995; Elliott, 1985; Signorile, 1995)?
- ❖ How does being a young lesbian shape career development and career choices (Botkin & Daly, 1987; Campbell & Morrow, 1995; Chung, 1995; Fassinger, 1993; 1995; Hetherington, 1991; Morgan & Brown, 1991; Morrow, 1997; Morrow & Campbell, 1997; Morrow, Gore, & Campbell, 1996)?

- ❖ What are the *post-initial coming-out* experiences and tensions for young lesbians in the heterosexual and lesbian landscapes [for instance, negotiating anxiety, discrimination, stereotypes and societal expectations (Anderson, 1995; Burnett, 1998), understanding and navigating positioning as an *outsider* (Banks, 1998; Goffman, 1959); negotiating unwritten rules within sub-cultures (Barry, 2003; Burnett, 1997), and positioning and repositioning self within society (Brown, 1995; Burnett, 1998; Patterson, 1995)]? and
- ❖ How do young *post-initial coming-out* lesbians negotiate the lesbian landscape and their lesbian selves?

This chapter reiterates the major findings and propositions as discussed and presented in the four data analysis chapters (please refer to Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8) which reflect the four research questions. The themes for each of the nine Memory Work sessions were developed and modified by the five participants as a result of particular ideas or thoughts they had about the central focal point for the study, the *lived* experiences of young lesbians *post-initial coming-out* in an Australian context. A summary of the major findings and propositions from each of the data analysis chapters is presented in the next section.

9. 1. Overview of the Chapters and Findings

The literature presented in Chapter Two supports the experiences, myths, and stereotypes lived by the five participants and discussed in each of the four data analysis chapters. The data for the study were drawn from the nine Memory Work Sessions and accompanying Memory Texts. There were collective elements and themes which occurred within and across sessions, highlighting the shared nature and commonality of themes and issues as they related to the *lived* experiences of the five participants *post-initial coming-out*. The collective elements and themes provided detailed insights and grounds for analysis as a result of the embedded social relations and culture (Koutroulis, 1996) within the recounted memories. Key aspects of the four data analysis chapters are presented in the following sub-sections.

9. 1. 1. Negotiating the Family Landscape

Negotiating the family landscape was the first of the four data analysis chapters in the current study. It illustrated that a family's reaction to, and subsequent positioning of, a young lesbian family member significantly affected how that particular wommin

perceived and positioned herself, not only within the family unit, but within the wider context of society. The family of origin unit is usually the first place where an individual experiences acceptance, *insider* status, or rejection, *outsider* status, as a result of their non-heterosexual identity. Often this initial experience of acceptance or rejection greatly impacts and shapes young lesbians' understanding and positioning of themselves within a predominately heterosexual landscape.

Participants within this study experienced a variety of interactions and reactions from their family units despite the length of time they had maintained their lesbian identities. These responses ranged from acceptance and understanding to denial and rejection. At least one of the participants experienced her family as fluctuating between acceptance and denial, termed here as a *shifting* relationship, whilst other participants experienced their families as staying rooted in either of the two extremes.

Where a lesbian identity was, or had the potential to be, in conflict with the values held by the participant's family of origin, the data support the idea that the participant's pursuing higher levels of education did provide one avenue to achieve valid independent living arrangements and the opportunity to recreate themselves in new ways within the family of origin structure. For example, Ani's undergraduate degree in a health related field enabled her to access a valuable new identity in her family of origin when one of her grandparents became ill and the family required help in negotiating the health system and managing medication information and related health care support systems.

Significant events and celebrations (such as weddings, births, deaths, birthdays, and Christmas) enjoyed within the various family units were seen as important cultural markers by each of the lesbian participants, whereby they and their same sex partners and friends continued to be either accepted, rejected or ignored by their family of origin. These events subsequently reaffirmed or denied the participant's role and positioning within their family of origin. The data highlight how the participants and their same sex partners and friends, individually and collectively, continued to seek, develop and negotiate new ways of communicating, participating and creative space within the

various family units for recognition and acceptance of their respective lesbian identities. The techniques by which these negotiations took place varied, but often related to identifying and making connections based on common areas of interest, such as photography or their sibling's children/parent's grandchildren.

Haug (1987) argues that it is this very uncovering and understanding of everyday life and interactions with significant others which has the potential to modify attitudes and the positioning of self within society because it is at the very point of everyday *lived* experiences where society reproduces itself. A doctoral study by Koutroulis (1996), focusing on women's experiences of menstruation, argues that menstruation was experienced in interrelationships and therefore in encounters with family and others. These interrelationships exposed how ideology and social control occurred. The same can be said with this study and the participant's experiences of understanding their *post-initial coming-out* lesbian selves via their memories and analysis of interrelationships with significant others in their everyday lives.

The data from the current study support the idea that *post-initial coming-out* negotiations are shaped by the socio historical and socio cultural constructs operating within families of origin. In particular, the mother/daughter relationship was identified by the participants as playing a significant role in their positioning within a non-supportive family structure. Additionally, some histories and cultures are conducive to positive experiences and negotiations, whilst others actively work against the recognition and acceptance of lesbian identities. For the *post-initial coming-out* lesbians in this study, negative experiences of this type were identified specifically in association with non-supportive families of origin. The data also illustrate that non-supportive family interactions were complicated by unexamined myths and stereotypes about homosexuality and fundamental religious beliefs. Participants reported feeling alienated and fearful of rejection, and they experienced difficulty creating cohesive and positive self narratives. As a result, participants recounted experiencing continual guarding, editing and censoring of self to negotiate, significant non-supportive family relationships.

Ultimately, the data in this chapter explored how the participants re-evaluated and understood their lesbian selves *post-initial coming-out* within a heterosexual socially situated context given the influence of relationships with significant people in their family

of origin. This is a focus which to date has been under examined in the literature and current body of research within an Australian context.

9. 1. 2. Negotiating the Work Landscape

The second data analysis chapter in this doctoral study focused on the participant's work landscapes and the impact their lesbian identities had on their positioning and repositioning within each of their workplaces. Data from this study support the idea that career choices and options were affected by adopting a lesbian identity. For example, while a *post-initial coming-out* lesbian self was only one of a multitude of factors that participants used to define who they were, it played a substantial role in the decisions they made about career choices and their interactions with others in a workplace setting. For instance, if the participant had invested a large amount of time, energy and study in their career choice, they were more likely to be guarded initially about their lesbian identity within the workplace context, presumably as a means of self protection against homophobia. This heightened awareness of feeling guarded about a non-heterosexual identity in a workplace was also determined by the particular career of the participant. For example, a lesbian identified teacher in a private school run by a religious organisation was more likely to remain closeted about her identity in comparison to a social worker working in a rape crisis centre run by a collective of both heterosexual and non-heterosexual wimmin. Data in this particular chapter also highlight and confirm the individual strength of each participant within their respective work landscapes.

For each of the participants in this study, the role of, and their participation in, tertiary education played a large role in their career decision making process. That is, it was seen as a necessary means of obtaining a position within a career of their choice. Often, tertiary education was also seen as a legitimate means of distancing oneself from the family of origin unit in order to explore and connect with a multitude of identities which make up lesbian communities both within Australia and overseas. Engaging in higher level studies also enabled those participants whose non-heterosexual identities were in conflict with their family of origin values to pursue a legitimate means of living outside the family home without the constraint of feeling as though they had to seek out an unfulfilling heterosexual marriage.

Each of the participants experienced different levels of homophobia in their respective work landscapes. With each incident came new understandings and decisions about themselves and others in the work context. For instance, Ani had always been open about her lesbian identity in all areas of her life, however, when she gained employment in a residential Government institution shortly after completing her undergraduate degree she grappled with being closeted because of the institution's reputation for reproducing homophobic attitudes and actions. Ani realised her personal safety was at stake if she was open about her non-heterosexual identity in this new work landscape. The experiences illustrated throughout this chapter subsequently resulted in a repositioning of self. Sometimes this meant the participant stayed within the same career context but moved companies, whilst other experiences resulted in dramatic alterations in career paths.

Participants were deeply conscious of the image they constructed and maintained within their respective work contexts. They were aware of the great personal cost of homophobia in their work settings because of their own previous encounters or the experiences of others with non-heterosexual identities. These circumstances resulted in participants being sensitive to, and acutely aware of, the attitudes and actions of coworkers and superiors in relation to people with non-heterosexual identities.

Two of the participants, Lucy and Tulli, both had unsupportive *families of origin*. They experienced *outsider* status and non-acceptance from an early age. They also experienced increased levels of homophobia in their respective work landscapes as compared to the other participants. While it was outside the scope of this dissertation to further explore the connection between unsupportive *families of origin* and increased vulnerability to homophobia in the work landscape, it is recommended that this would be a valuable area for future study.

Research by Kissen (1993) and Smith (1993) support the participant's experiences with homophobia in the work landscape, as this research recognises that homophobia is the last form of discrimination which remains unchallenged in most contexts of society. Often, this means that people who experience this form of discrimination are restricted in their ability to access the support and understanding they need in order to challenge the situation. This may be because they do not know who to talk to or are unable to follow

through with any form of action due to the implications, both personal and work related, of their sexual orientation being known in a public forum. Frequently, issues of power and control in conjunction with misinformation and a lack of understanding about sexual orientation in general, and more specifically, lesbianism, resulted in further non-supportive experiences within the work place for the participants. Consequently, managing their image at work was an important concern for each of the participants. This is not to say that the participants were ashamed of their sexuality or wanted to appear heterosexual but rather, it was an expectation placed on them by others as a means of maintaining secure employment within their chosen field.

One way the participants took control of their positioning within the work landscape and their careers was by being *strategically in the closet*. They framed this as a way of managing their work environment, protecting their lesbian selves, and resisting unsuitable labels and stereotypes from significant others in the work landscape. Often, the decision to be *strategically in the closet* depended upon the status of their current employment; that is, whether it was seen as just something to fill in time, or as a stepping stone in their larger career picture.

Dealing with the need to be *strategically in the closet* in work place landscapes appears from the data to be, at least partially, a developmental process. For instance, participants related an increasing sense of mastery in managing, evaluating, and challenging homophobic situations and peers in the work landscape based on their earlier experiences dealing with homophobia. The importance of well established friendship and work ties within the lesbian and gay community and the usefulness of previous social and professional interactions were also noted by participants relative to dealing with these potentially negative and stressful situations.

Overall, work place relations impacted upon a *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identity at all levels within the work context. They affected the way in which the lesbian participants perceived and positioned themselves within their work place settings as well as in the wider context of society. Homophobia and negative stereotypes ultimately impacted upon career choices and experiences for each of the participants in this study. Young *post-initial coming-out* lesbians risk having their career choices restricted by the low status and limited availability of *lesbian friendly* careers. Moreover, data from this study

confirm that creating and managing work place presentation and representation of the *post-initial coming-out* young lesbian in a heteronormative work environment was time consuming, problematic and complex. Studies such as the current one aim to reduce negative stereotyping and marginalisation of working lesbians through the sharing of the *lived* experience of everyday lesbian lives.

9. 1. 3. Negotiating the Tensions Between the Heterosexual and Lesbian Landscapes

Being gay, however, meant hiding what you felt for your lover except when you were with other gay people. It wasn't in her [Kerryn Phelps] nature to be confined to a closet. Like Doris Day, she wanted to sing and shout about her love from the highest hill

Jackie Stricker in Mitchell, 2002, 227.

The third data analysis chapter focused on how the participants negotiated both the heterosexual and lesbian landscapes in relation to their *post-initial coming-out* lesbian selves. In order to locate and explore the lesbian landscape participants recognised that they had to firstly explore the heterosexual landscape and its finite number of available identities. Frey (2004) and Goffman (1967) both argue that there are only a finite number of identities available within any given landscape or community. These identities are constructed and reinforced by the people who make up the community, insiders, and are often reinforced through popular media like newspapers and television. As a result of the participants being unable to edit their selves in such a way as to fit an acceptable heterosexual identity, they found they were positioned as *outsiders* or (O)ther within the heterosexual landscape, an identity shrouded in stigma and oppression (Goffman, 1963). Each of the participants had to find, understand, negotiate and create a place for themselves, given the tensions between heterosexual and homosexual identities within an Australian lesbian landscape. The participants were forced to look elsewhere, that is, outside the heterosexual landscape, to find a sense of belonging and acceptance.

The most striking way in which the tensions between the heterosexual and lesbian landscapes manifested themselves were in the everyday lives of the participants. The participants identified and described a *splintering* effect where the fabric of the social world did not remain constant so that they were unable to develop a cohesive self within their daily pattern. This splintering occurred because of the constant and often

unexpected movement they had to make between the heterosexual world and their lesbian community, and as a result of the stress and tension placed on their *post-initial coming-out* selves. Often these two landscapes did not sit comfortably with each other as the lesbian landscape remained hidden or unacknowledged within the heterosexual horizon. The participants in this study recognised that constantly being positioned as an (O)ther or outsider in the dominant heterosexual landscape was not beneficial to their overall sense of well-being or safety. They consistently described feeling a sense of rejection, tension and invisibility in the heterosexual landscape. Because they were unable to find a place or identity for themselves within the dominant landscape, they felt they did not belong and rejected the heteronormative context. Instead, these wimmin sought acceptance and safety by exploring the lesbian landscape.

Examples of the participants' experiences within a medical context were used to illustrate how they were positioned as (O)ther within the heterosexual landscape, and subsequently stigmatised and oppressed. Times of illness are often stressful and leave people feeling vulnerable (Eliason, 1996). When dealing with medical issues, participants in this study reported being forced outside their safe zones into random public spaces where they could not predict the response of significant others to their *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identities. It was not that the participants experienced any greater amount of illness than their heterosexual counterparts, but rather, their oppressed positioning was particularly evident within a medical context. When this oppressed positioning is combined with invisibility, misunderstanding and a lack of compassion about non-heterosexual identities, an individual's overall health care can be compromised. A lesbian wommin is left with two choices; either deny/negate, her identity, or confront the heteronormative elitism and potentially receive substandard care as a result. Therefore, assumptions about a heterosexual identity can impact greatly, not only the day to day aspects of *post-initial coming-out* lesbian lives, but also the overall health care they received (Cochran, Mays, Bowen, Gage, Bybee, Roberts, Goldstein, Robinson, Rankow, & White, 2001).

Along with concerns about medical/health care, participants in this study voiced concerns about the larger legal issues framing and constraining lesbian landscapes in contemporary Australian society. In particular, the lack of legal recognition for their relationships affected, and was played out in, their everyday lives. Participants noted

feeling particularly vulnerable where they or their same sex partner had a non-supportive, challenging family of origin. In addition, lack of formal legal status for their partnerships had serious implications for producing and raising children.

As shown above, a positioning of inferiority, or stigmatisation, of non-heterosexuals by significant (heterosexual) others affects the overall physical and mental health and well being of the *post-initial coming-out* lesbian in an Australian context. Like other oppressed groups of people, for example, Indigenous Australians, there is a lack of recognition about the amount of extra work people who are positioned in society as (O)ther have to do to maintain a positive sense of self. This positioning also brings with it increased levels of physical stress and a direct denial of access to appropriate resources, which would cater to and recognise their specific needs. These resources would also provide support around the negative experiences those positioned as (O)ther have endured through no fault of their own, but rather, as a result of how they are viewed within the dominant landscape. In this study, as a result of lacking these resources, an element of discord always existed between how the *post-initial coming-out* lesbian lived her everyday life and how society perceived and subsequently positioned her as a result of her non-heterosexual identity. Participants experienced a very real sensitivity and uncertainty about their positioning, perception and overall safety in the heterosexual landscape, having to search elsewhere to locate a sense of acceptance.

9. 1. 4. Negotiating the Lesbian Landscape and Lesbian Selves

While the first three data analysis chapters explored the *post-initial coming-out* young lesbian in family, work, and heterosexual landscapes, the final data analysis chapter explored the multi-dimensional and diverse nature of the lesbian landscape in an Australian context in the late 1990s and early 2000s. It provided insights into the various components which constitute the lesbian landscape in an Australian context and into the ways each of the participants made sense of and negotiated this landscape *post-initial coming-out*. The chapter also sought to highlight from the data how the lesbian landscape was often invisible, or at the very least misunderstood, to the uninitiated.

Data from the current study regarding this lesbian landscape highlight three themes, including negotiating politics within both the lesbian and heterosexual landscapes,

dealing with the media in the heterosexual landscape, and finally navigating the various sub-group identities available in the lesbian community. These themes ultimately identify and unsettle hegemonic hierarchies within the lesbian community which rank lesbian wimmin according to their level of attraction to, and experience with, wimmin verses men. Addressing these themes involved moving between, around and through heterosexual, non-heterosexual and queer politics. Participants mentioned the strategies of dealing with issues and building alliances within the lesbian community as important methods for negotiating these landscapes. Some of the issues addressed included the management of wimmin only spaces, *wimmin born wimmin* separatist convictions, lesbian domestic violence, drug and alcohol usage, and access to safe donor sperm in order to fall pregnant. Participants felt the constraints of heteronormativity and homonegativity when viewing the finite range of possible identity choices (Goffman, 1959) available within the lesbian landscape. Negotiating these available choices involved the participants editing and re-editing their selves in an attempt to fit possible identities on offer.

Participants noted that at times these negotiations were difficult, yet ultimately necessary in order to make and maintain meaningful connections and relationships with significant others. The data confirm that the participants felt they were unable to edit their selves in order to fit one of the limited central front stage performances (Goffman, 1959) of lesbian identities available within the landscape. The reluctance participants felt in attempting to conform to an accepted identity within the lesbian landscape led them to seek out other identities and spaces within the landscape which did not require such a high level of self editing. Consequently, they moved to the periphery of the landscape in order to create a lesbian self which connected with their experiences and self story.

Within each of the previous four data analysis chapters it became evident that, as each of the participants negotiated their positioning as *post-initial coming-out* young lesbians in a variety of contexts, they drew upon both their experiences of (O)therness, or *outsider*, and their desire to find or create spaces within in which they could experience a sense of belonging and understanding. As a result of being positioned as *outsiders* in a heterosexual landscape for most of their lives, it was not unusual for the participants to experience feelings of apprehension in new settings as a response to possible rejection or covert homophobia. When these feelings were raised by the participants with

significant others (who were usually heterosexual and unaware of the issues experienced by *post-initial coming-out* lesbians), it was common for the participants' feelings to be ridiculed or dismissed as paranoia, over sensitivity or reading too much into a situation or event.

As highlighted throughout the data, fear of rejection, or (O)thering, within both the heterosexual and lesbian landscapes resulted in a censoring of self to portray an identity which was acceptable within the given context. At times this censoring led to feelings of loss and grief. These feelings were embedded within the title of this dissertation and discussed in the first chapter. However, despite, or perhaps because of, the variety of both negative and positive experiences each of the participants encountered, they were all strong, independent, brave young wimmin who lead productive lives. They actively developed strong friendship networks which provided support and a sense of belonging and acceptance. Ultimately, data from this study build on and expand existing literature supporting the concept that the self is fluid and wimmin come to a lesbian self via a number of different pathways of experience in their lives.

9. 2. Methodological Reflections

Memory-work disrupts conventions of research and knowledge construction; its contribution to the experience-theory link makes this method accessible to many ways of thinking and knowing

Koutroulis, 1996, 332.

It is proposed here that the Memory Work methodology, as used in this study, has provided snap shots of *insiders'* experiences of *post-initial coming-out* young lesbians in an Australian context. These in-depth snap shots would not have been possible with alternative qualitative methods (Burnett, 1997; Cotterill, 1992; Koutroulis, 1996). It is the "theoretical underpinnings of memory-work, derived from Marx and Foucault, amongst others, [which] integrate questions of language, power, the body and ideology [as equal in value and contribution] rather than elevating one at the expense of the others" (Koutroulis, 1996, 316). These theoretical underpinnings of Memory Work provide both a method and a framework for understanding *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identity in a variety of contexts in an Australian setting. This method of data collection allowed the development of deep connection making, or intimacy, to grow between the participants

and provided a space where personal information could be shared in a safe environment. It is argued here that the data which grew out of this methodology are unlike those produced through the use of other methodological tools currently available, as Memory Work methodology elicits profoundly rich descriptions, values the everyday *lived* experience, and uncovers interactions with significant others at the point where society reproduces itself (Haug, 1987; Koutroulis, 1996).

Memory Work is a useful tool to recognise and facilitate the expression of personal experience, through the medium of memories, as a valid source of knowledge. Turner (1992) argues that an individual's understanding of self rests on social recognition, which in turn is based on collectively shared memories. Thus, it is through the Memory Work process that the construction and analysis of both the social realm and the self are brought into the research context. It is this very construction of meaning making at a group level which facilitates the questioning of assumptions and exposes the *taken for grantedness* embedded within the everyday *lived* experiences which ultimately shaped the way the participants were positioned within society both by themselves and significant others.

As highlighted throughout the four data analysis chapters, the participants were controlled and constrained by a number of mediums, for example, unwritten rules. Ultimately, they had a desire to belong and be part of a group. This desire to become an *insider* meant they had to decide how much editing of their selves they were prepared to do in order to fit one of the available identities. Transgression of these rules risked consequences of rejection. The possibility of rejection validated the importance of knowing what the unwritten rules of the particular group were, along with the requirements of entry as an *insider*. Memory Work methodology allowed the participants to collectively unpack and understand the unwritten rules whose enforcement stood to control and censor their selves within a given landscape.

While many of the Memory Texts relayed powerfully troubling experiences, they were usually accompanied by much laughter either during the reading of the memories or afterwards in the group analysis. "The memory-work analysis showed where power is enacted and where resistance takes place and, as Foucault (1979) argued, how [individuals] are the site of, and an expression of regulatory codes of behaviour"

(Koutroulis, 1996, 325). It is argued here that laughter was used by the participants as an active way of resisting the often unpalatable behaviour of significant others. It is further suggested here that laughter was used as a means of connection making (which is also a form of resistance), between each of the participants in a way which relayed a deep understanding and appreciation of the experiences which were being retold. Laughter softened the onslaught of powerful emotions which often accompanied the memories, in addition to being a way of avoiding the victim position and enabling participants to regain a feeling of being in control. Throughout each of the nine Memory Work sessions participants were able to identify and discuss how *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identities had been constituted in an Australian culture, and the subsequent causes of negative meanings which had often been attached to these identities. The process of analysis allowed them to discuss how they might approach potentially similar negative interactions or experiences in the future. This, in turn, provided a transformation in the positioning of self in relation to significant others by allowing *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identities to be thought of in a manner which was both powerful and positive.

9. 2. 1. Personal Reflections on the Overall Memory Work Process

Memory Work methodology proved to be a highly innovative and effective tool for data collection and initial analysis in a study of this nature. It enabled the participants to work collectively in ways which permitted them to participate in a *sense making process* around their positioning in a number of contexts such as the family, work, heterosexual and lesbian landscapes. However, it also placed the author in a vulnerable position due to the great personal, emotional and mental cost invested, should communication have broken down between any members of the group. While this break down in communication did not occur to the extent where it dissolved the ability of the group to continue with the Memory Work process, it was something the author had to be constantly aware of and on guard for throughout the research. This position of vulnerability was also coupled with a desire on the behalf of the author to maintain the privacy of each of the participants whilst at the same time preserving the authenticity of their experiences.

Koutroulis (1996) also expressed concerns of this nature (that is, the break down of communication between group members and maintaining participant confidentiality and

privacy) in her dissertation on women and menstruation when one of the members of her group left abruptly after some heated verbal and written communication. A similar experience occurred in the current study when there was a mis-communication, or mismatch of expectations and understandings, during a group initiated and organised camping trip early in the research. While the situation was defused through intensive discussion and a restatement of roles, expectations and understandings, it did have the potential to erode the group's cohesiveness. It also highlighted the precarious and uncertain duality of roles (Merriam, 2002) the author took on as both *insider* and *outsider* in relation to the research process.

With time, reflection and hindsight it is the author's opinion that the above mentioned experience occurred because of three major issues. Firstly, the nature of group dynamics lent itself to a period of establishing shared understandings and roles. Even though the members were drawn from prior friendship group, ultimately the roles and expectations for the formation of this particular group were inherently different in purpose and intention. However, one way the author tried to ensure group cohesiveness was to structure each session so that it concluded with a meal. Each of the participants took turns at hosting a session and everyone contributed to each meal by bringing a plate of food to share. As with each of the nine memory work sessions, each of the meals were also assigned a theme. Although this theme assignment was not an intentional action, it did provide a sense of cohesiveness to the meal retrospectively. The meal themes only became apparent to the author upon reflection after the completion of the Memory Work sessions. The process of preparing and sharing a meal together felt like a natural and nurturing way to end each of the individual sessions. At the completion of all nine sessions a large formal dinner was organised by the author as a way of drawing the entire process to a close and as a means of thanking the participants for their co-facilitation. This process allowed the author to give something back to each of the participants, an important aspect of feminist research.

The second major issue that apparently contributed to the early mismatch understandings among the group was the intense nature of the themes under investigation and/or the ways in which the experiences were unpacked within a group setting. This can be overwhelming and unsettling for any of the individuals within the group at different times, and can result in unexpected reactions, emotions and

memories. This is discussed at length within the literature related to Memory Work (Koutroulis, 1996; Small, 1999) and was highlighted several times, both by the author and by one other participant who had been involved in a prior Memory Work study. The information about potential reactions to intense material was shared in group discussions and written materials provided to each of the participants prior to the commencement of the Memory Work sessions, as well as during subsequent sessions. The author ensured she regularly communicated with each of the participants, usually by telephone and/or email, about how they were feeling emotionally while the Memory Work sessions were in progress. The author openly discussed with each of the participants the variety of reactions they might experience as a result of unexpected emotions triggered by their memories. She continuously stated how important it was for each participant to be vocal about their self care needs, including potentially needing to take a break or receive support during the Memory Work sessions.

The third major issue seen in hindsight as affecting the early misunderstandings within the group was an inherent imbalance of power associated with any research project. The nature of a doctoral study ultimately means that one person has more invested financially and emotionally than others who make up the Memory Work group. As a methodology Memory Work enables an equal power structure to occur for the participants within the group. The tension between a desire to share the power of voice equally among all participants, consistent with Memory Work methodology, and the realities of academic power structures was keenly felt by the author of this study. Participation in the group sessions was, of course, voluntary, preserving each wommin's autonomy. While each participant gained new insights and understandings about themselves and others, only the author could make the final decisions regarding the meta analysis and voice, as it is currently only acceptable within tertiary institutions for Faculty of Education doctoral dissertations to be authored by one person. While the group's contribution and initial analysis is recognised as pivotal to this particular methodology, the nature of doctoral studies necessitates the exclusion of the group at some level during the process in order for the author's individual meta analysis to occur.

The author experienced, acutely at times, the emotional challenges of being positioned as both *insider* and *outsider*, researchee and researcher, within her own study. In this case, the author also continued to function on a day to day basis despite the perils

associated with the long term nature and intensity of a study such as this. For instance, at times the re-reading and long term meta analysis of the experiences of the participants felt overwhelming for the author. At other times, carrying the responsibility of maintaining participant confidentiality, while accurately describing the data was also difficult. Thus, the research process of meta analysis and writing became intimately intertwined with, and affected by, the events of daily life (Pillow, 2002).

Memory Work methodology firmly places the researcher and her/his own *lived* experiences at the centre of the research question and process, a positioning which has been called for by many feminist researchers over roughly the last three decades (for example, Kitzinger, 2004; Krieger, 1991; Merriam, 2002). Memory Work involves many elements of risk taking (for example, group work, trust, persistence) which are often misunderstood or under valued within institutions of higher education. This is particularly relevant given the new business style approach, which embraces and adheres to tight budgetary constraints and timelines that potentially constrain new and innovative ways of thinking and understanding whose discovery often proves expensive. Nonetheless, this methodology was pivotal for producing the rich, in depth descriptions of actual everyday *lived* experiences and the interpretations of these experiences for *post-initial coming-out* young lesbians in an Australian context, which are the unique contributions of this doctoral study.

9. 3. Recommendations

When someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing

Rich, 1986, 199.

The findings from this study not only have far reaching implications for further research but also potentially impact upon the day to day practices in education facilities, work place settings and relations, medical institutions, funding for facilities and services for specific community groups, and mental health services which may be accessed by young lesbians *post-initial coming-out*. For example, data from this study suggest that,

- ▼ There is a need for increased visibility, understanding, recognition and validation of lesbians within society generally;
- ▼ There is a need for more research which highlights the experiences, needs and issues of lesbians of all ages across a variety of economic, cultural, and social settings;
- ▼ Issues around identity and self construction as they relate to young lesbians *post-initial coming-out* deserve further exploration;
- ▼ There is a need to explore the connection between non-supportive *families of origin* and lesbians' increased vulnerability to homophobia in work landscapes.
- ▼ Increased awareness of, and funding for, family support networks like Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) which offer education, understanding and support for families who have non-heterosexually identified family members is needed;
- ▼ There is a need for the development of appropriate resource materials and in-service training for parents, school and university staff, medical staff, social workers and therapists in relation to the needs and experiences of young lesbians *post-initial coming-out*; and
- ▼ Increased funding for specific services for lesbians in the areas of education, health and social services is warranted.

The data generated by this study firmly support contentions made in the literature review regarding the relative invisibility and erasure of lesbian lives from the Western cultural landscape. Since funding dollars are most often tied to visibility and community affiliations, research which highlights lesbian experience is useful in correcting the imbalance that hegemonic heteronormativity otherwise perpetuates. The challenge of developing a positive self narrative and positioning oneself in adaptive ways within and across larger communities is a project that requires many levels of support in order to come to fruition. This is especially true in cases where young lesbians have non-supportive families of origin, and/or experience the effects of cultural homonegativity at work. One meaningful layer of support that could be developed further is through social educational programs such as PFLAG. Research projects such as this study can be used to argue for increased funding for these types of programs. In conjunction with

researchers, these groups could then work to develop the curriculum to train and educate helping professionals and society at large regarding young lesbians' lives and experiences.

9. 4. Concluding Comments

Acceptance, diversity, inclusiveness, participation, tolerance and joy. Ours is the world of love, questing to find the common links that bind all people. We are here because, whatever our sexuality, we believe that the days of exclusion are numbered. In our world, everyone can find their place, where their human rights and human dignity will be upheld

The Honourable Justice Michael Kirby, 2002.

As highlighted in the literature and the data analysis presented throughout this dissertation, young lesbians experience issues of invisibility, marginalisation and the impact of negative myths and stereotypes on a daily basis. In view of society's hegemonic heteronormativity and homonegativity the author chose to use an anthropological research methodology grounded in social constructivism and feminist research principles, namely Memory Work. This methodological framework allowed young lesbians *post-initial coming-out* to give voice to their own *lived* experiences and analyses. The privileging of lesbian wimmin's voices is especially important given the invisibility of wimmin's lives in Western culture generally, as demonstrated by the gaps in research highlighted in Chapter Two. Memory Work methods allow for in depth discussion of identity and positioning of *post-initial coming-out* lesbians in specific landscapes or communities, which fills a need in the research literature. Data generated in this study show that young *post-initial coming-out* lesbians position and re-position themselves within a predominately heterosexual society based on their experiences and their *sense making* of how they are positioned by significant others in contexts such as family of origin, education, work, and community landscapes.

In retrospect, the author believes the young lesbians who participated in this study have been able to generate thickly descriptive and insightful data which illustrate the participant's experiences in each of these contexts. Ultimately, through the process of group interaction, Memory Work has led each of us to think differently about our relationships to significant others in our respective family, work, heterosexual and lesbian landscapes. The process has allowed us to recognise and better understand

how we position ourselves in relation to significant others in a variety of contexts given our *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identities. It has also provided insight into how significant others have previously positioned us. Memory Work has enabled us to understand *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identities in relation to our own lives and lesbian identified selves.

While the lives and experiences of each of the participants in this study are, in many aspects, different, it is the similarities and common elements or experiences they share which bind them together and allow an insight into the lives of young lesbians *post-initial coming-out* in an Australian context. This study has highlighted the limited research and understanding which exists in relation to the lives of non-heterosexually identified people, in particular, lesbians. It has called for an increase in funding to research issues of importance including *insider* driven research aimed at recording the *lived* experiences of non-heterosexually identified people as well as research issues of importance. The study highlights the need for future research to take a more wimmin centred and focused direction.

The five participants in this study were strong, independent and very brave young wimmin searching for acceptance and an understanding of their *post-initial coming-out* lesbian identities in an Australian context. They continually demonstrated high levels of resilience and perseverance in spite of constant negative attempts by significant others, in a variety of landscapes and contexts, to position them in ways which perpetuated denigrating myths and stereotypes. The sharing of the participants' experiences were inspirational and continually fuelled the author's determination to complete the study. The experiences of the participants described throughout this dissertation held common threads which yielded new understandings of their everyday *lived* experiences and positioning in a number of different contexts. While there were a small number of participants involved in the study, the data produced were rich, providing an *insider's* view of a previously under researched area of study and yielding new avenues for further research.

Chapter Ten

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Chapter Eleven

Appendices

11. 1. Memory Work Information for Participants

Dear

I would like to invite you to become a participant in my Ph.D. research project. The study is concerned with exploring the *lived* experiences of young lesbian wimmin *post-initial coming-out* in an Australian culture using Memory Work methodology.

Your participation is purely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. However, it would be in the best interest of the group (maximum six people) and the study if you could commit yourself to eight minimum and 12 maximum sessions over the next few months. Meetings will be determined by the group to suit all participants. For more detailed information please refer to the outline I have included about your role and the letter of commitment I have enclosed with this letter.

This research study (ethic research number – QUT reference number 1930H) has received university ethics clearance and will adhere to guidelines developed by the university ethics committee.

I have enclosed a number of extracts about Memory Work methodology and the aims and objectives of the study with this letter for your information. I would like to run an initial meeting (I'll provide lunch) on Sunday 10th March, 2002, 1.00pm at the above address to define as a group,

- ❖ a collective understanding of Memory Work (please read the enclosed materials time permitting);
- ❖ the development of ground rules in terms of participant expectations, confidentiality of information, ownership of information, possible conflict resolution techniques, etc; and
- ❖ brainstorm possible topics/themes for the eight to 12 sessions in relation to the overall theme of the study (please think about this before the meeting and come with some ideas). You will also need to think about a possible

pseudonym you will use in the writing of your memories to protect your identity).

Please let me know if you are unable to attend the initial meeting or are not interested in participating in the study.

If you can think of anyone who is between the ages of 23 and 33, identifies as lesbian, has been *out* for a minimum of two years, holds Australian citizenship, has completed or is completing a tertiary degree and/or works within a tertiary institution and may be interested in participating in the study please call me so I can organise an information package for them.

Your sincerely,

Lynn Burnett

Aims and Objectives of the Research Study

The objectives of this research are to:

1. Investigate the experiences of young lesbians *post-initial coming-out*;
2. Explore how their sexual orientation affects their relationships with their family and friends, their schooling experience, career choice, and their mental and sexual health; and
3. Theorise the *lived* experiences of young lesbian wimmin within an Australian context.

Thus, the main purpose of the study is:

To explore and theorise the *lived* experiences of young lesbian wimmin *post-initial coming-out* within an Australian context.

What You Need to Know About Your Role/s

- ❖ Decide on a pseudonym for yourself;
- ❖ Bring some ideas for possible themes/topics to our first meeting to share with the group;
- ❖ Each session would usually last for a maximum of three hours;
- ❖ In preparation for each meeting you are expected to write a memory in third person (approximately 1 page in length) about your earliest memory as it relates to the predetermined theme/topic for the session;
- ❖ All your work is done at the meeting! Over the three hours we listen to each memory in turn and then as a group look at the similarities and differences of each memory, what is spoken and unspoken, and how the memories relate to culture/societal expectations; and
- ❖ Read the transcripts from each session and make sure you are happy with the information it contains.

What You Need to Know About My Role

- ❖ As above;
- ❖ I will transcribe each meeting and forward a copy to each participant.
- ❖ I will be required to produce a written dissertation, write journal articles and give conference presentations as a result of the study. I will not use data the group has not given permission to use (eg, from the transcriptions of each meeting). You are welcome (and encouraged) to co-write and present with me at any time.

Examples of Themes From Other Memory Work Groups

1. Memory Work group exploring the coming-out experiences of young lesbians (Burnett, 1996) –

- ❖ First time at a gay bar
- ❖ First feelings of difference
- ❖ First feelings about coming-out
- ❖ First lesbian experience
- ❖ First time you thought about discussing your sexuality with a member of your family or close friend
- ❖ Safe sex
- ❖ Feeling guilty
- ❖ Feeling fabulous
- ❖ First time at an all wimmin's venue
- ❖ Deciding not to come-out
- ❖ Career choice
- ❖ Consciously deciding to get into the closet
- ❖ Feeling alienated

2. Women's exploration of emotion and gender (Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, & Benton, 1992) –

- ❖ Saying sorry and being sorry
- ❖ Happiness
- ❖ Fear and danger

- ❖ Holidays
- ❖ Remembering and forgetting
- ❖ Anger

3. Women's exploration of the body and sexualization (Haug, 1987) –

- ❖ Sexuality
- ❖ The body
- ❖ Hair
- ❖ Having a tummy
- ❖ Knickers
- ❖ Legs

❖ **11. 2. Consent Form**

**Agreement of Commitment to Memory Work Group Exploring
Post-Initial Coming-Out Experiences of Young Lesbians**

I, _____, agree to participate as a member of the above
aforementioned Memory Work group. I understand my role and agree to attend and
actively participate in a minimum of eight sessions and a maximum of 12 sessions.

I understand that participants' identities and personal information should remain
confidential at all times. I agree not to discuss or present any information of a
personal or sensitive nature outside the immediate group without prior permission
from the group.

I understand that data from the original transcripts will not be presented in a public
forum without all participants first citing the transcripts. I understand that I can, within
reason, negotiate with the group (and/or Lynn Burnett) about withholding information
from the transcripts I do not wish to be released or would like modified.

I understand that the data collected by the group in the Memory Work sessions will
be required for use in Lynn Burnett's doctoral research study and subsequent
publications and presentations but will not be used without my initial consent.

Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Witness _____

Signature _____

Date _____

11. 3. Memory Text Samples From This Study

Memory Work Session Seven Negotiating the Lesbian Landscape

Ani's Memory Text

She was walking down ____ street, girlfriend in hand and ready to conquer the world. She had on her new Doc Martin boots with her bright purple shoe laces ready to stomp on anyone who dared challenge her. She **looked** confident even if she didn't feel it. She casually glanced to her left to a spunky looking gal who was looking straight back at her. They smiled. She got embarrassed and then remembered her girlfriend on her right hand. The stranger and Ani glanced at each other again when the stranger commented on her shoe laces. "Nice, she said. A nervous smile was all Ani could muster up. "You know what they mean don't you?" Ani nodded – she was learning the new language of being half out and still a bit in. "So are you?" she asked. "Uh-hu" she replied with a grin from ear to ear. In unison they both said, "Cool", giggled and walked off separately. In amongst hundreds of people, Ani and her stranger had danced, serenaded and wooed each other without anyone noticing.

Tulli's Memory Text

The Shoes

She dressed carefully. She wanted to look good. She chose a kaki short skirt, stockings and her favourite purple velvet shoes. She loved the shoes she'd bought during her first trip to M_____. They were different from anything she'd had before. She felt daring and dangerous. She thought they were very "lesbian".

She arrived and started talking to the wimmin she knew, after a while she noticed she was getting funny looks from wimmin over the other side of the room. She quickly checked herself over to make sure nothing on her person was amiss. Everything was fine. She couldn't work out what was wrong then she looked around the room and noticed she was dressed very differently to everyone else. There were no skirts, stockings or purple velvet shoes to be seen anywhere.

Sam's Memory Text

Sam walked up the steep staircase toward the pumping music, with her two flatmates following close behind. The top story of the nightclub was thick with women. Some were dancing, some drinking, some chatting and some watching. Most were in small groups but not all of them.

Sam loved going out in summer – there were more women out and singlets were in.

As they moved through the crowd to a space at the far side of the room Sam scanned the room to see if she recognised anyone.

There was a girl she had almost started something with 8 weeks ago, an old volleyball partner, a girl she bumped into now and then on the scene, a friend they had organised to meet that night. They ordered drinks and watched people dancing and had a dance themselves. Sam loved the atmosphere, a place where you could dance without sweaty men, a place where there was so much potential for a single girl to meet a variety of interesting people.

One of her flatmates returned from the bar and told her that a woman that Sam had met at a lunch a year ago, and was interested in, was at the club. It was too crowded in the room for Sam to see her and she couldn't recall what she looked like. Too late the woman was brought over to her. She looked great – fit and sporty. The rest of the night became a blur.

Lucy's Memory Text

Lucy went to the Pride festival with some friends. She was really excited to be there. So much shopping, so many stalls, etc, blah, blah. Then her friend wanted to go to the drinking tent. They went over to a group of older dykes that Lucy didn't know, but they were friends of her friend. What a great opportunity to meet new people, she thought.

One of these older dykes took quiet a liking to Lucy. Lucy's girlfriend arrived and headed straight towards her. Lucy was relieved as the older dyke was attempting to chat her up by this time. She was making lude suggestions and trying to rub herself up behind her. All the time, winking at her friends. When Lucy's girlfriend joined them, the older dyke was a bit put out but she didn't stop the verbal onslaught, even though Lucy moved into her girlfriend's arms.

Rosie's Memory Text

Rosie had a friend, B_____, from M_____ staying, she was a bit feral and involved in the “in and activist” lesbian crowd in inner-city M_____. They decided to go out to O_____ to dance and for her friend to hook up. They dressed for fun. They wore clothes a bit out there, not the normal pants and top – more layers and Rosie wore a skirt.

They got to O_____ and most people were in groups. They danced a little and grabbed a table. They put on the most inviting and friendly faces they had, but no-one talked to them. B_____ attempted to talk to a few people and asked a few women to dance. Everyone was in established friendship groups or at least recognised each other.

They left early, feeling rejected. They felt like they definitely wore the wrong clothes and hair. They were a bit pissed off because they naively expected dykes to be more open minded and less stereotypical about appearance. In fact, they left feeling really disappointed.