

**YOUNG WOMEN'S RETROSPECTIVE ACCOUNTS OF THEIR EXPERIENCE
OF SAME-SEX SEXUAL DESIRE IN ADOLESCENCE**

By

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B.A., University of Toronto, 1991

Post-Baccalaureate Diploma, Simon Fraser University, 2000

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
(Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education)

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April, 2004

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Title of Thesis: Young Women's Retrospective Accounts
of their Experience of Same-Sex Sexual Desire
in Adolescence

Degree: Master of Arts Year: 2004

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Vancouver, BC Canada

Abstract

Seven women aged 19-25 participated in this qualitative study on young women's retrospective accounts of their experience of same-sex sexual desire in adolescence. Each woman participated in an open-ended, audiotaped interview. Each interview was transcribed and then analyzed using Arvay's (2002) narrative method of analysis. A narrative was developed from the analysis of each interview to represent the experience of same-sex desire in adolescence. Upon completion, each narrative was returned to the participant for feedback. Questions were also asked of each participant for clarification or new information. Five themes were identified upon reading across the narratives, based on their consistency across most or all the participants. These were: Growing up in a homophobic and heterosexist environment, denial and repression of same-sex desire, unfulfilled desire, secrecy and self-silencing, and reaching self-acceptance. It is anticipated that this research will help to redress the 'missing discourse of desire' in research and in social constructions of young women's sexuality, and contribute to the development of knowledge and implementation of counselling practice related to adolescent women's same-sex desire.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to begin by thanking the seven young women whose narratives are the basis for this research. Their openness in sharing their stories with me was a great honour and privilege. Without their generosity of time and their willingness to reveal information that at times was difficult and painful, this research would not have been possible. Thank you all very much!

Next I would like to express my gratitude to my research supervisor, Dr. Marla Arvey, for her enthusiasm in my project, her constant support, guidance, and inspiration, all of which enabled me to see this project to completion. I would also like to give my appreciation to Dr. Judith Daniluk and Dr. Susan James for their valuable feedback, support, and encouragement.

I want to thank my brother Julius and my sister Gita for their humour and their belief in me. I want to acknowledge Revital Hayoun, whose support and encouragement I always appreciated. I also want to thank Heather Kitching for her valuable contributions, and my fellow students and friends for their support along the way.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my partner and best friend, Alexandra Jones, without whose constant support, encouragement, unconditional love, and exceptional cheerleading skills, this thesis would never have been written. She spent numerous hours reading, offering valuable insights, and asking challenging questions. She also assisted in the transcription of the interviews, which allowed me much needed rest. She was always there with her remarkable sense of humour, her unlimited patience, and her unfaltering belief in my abilities.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Adolescence is a time of transition when important developmental tasks take place and risks increase. For many girls, adolescence is a period of dramatic physical, psychological, and social growth and change. During this period of their lives, girls enter puberty and begin to develop a sense of their sexuality and sexual identity (Daniluk, 1998). They begin to re-negotiate their relationships with their families (Savin-Williams, 1990a) and the role of peers in their lives (Brown, 1990). Same-sex friendships (Griffin, 2000; Hey, 1997; Lees, 1986) become a critical factor during adolescence. It is also during this time that some girls start to experience same-sex attractions and to question their sexual orientation (Rosario & Meyer-Bahlburg, 1996). However, within the context of heterosexism and homophobia in many North American social institutions, including school, religious organizations, and family, it is often unsafe to acknowledge, let alone express such feelings to oneself or to others (Wolf, 1997).

In recent decades, there has been a dramatic shift in awareness and an increase in social acceptance of homosexuality. Nonetheless, we continue to live in a sexist and heterosexist culture in which women's sexual desire is largely ignored and same-sex desire is devalued. This is the context in which many adolescent girls begin to feel same-sex desire, which is the focus of this study.

Significance and Rationale for the Study

The research problem appears to involve three areas. First, there is a paucity of psychological theory and research that looks at adolescent women's sexual desire or considers it to be a normative aspect of female adolescent development (Tolman, 1994).

Past research looking at adolescent women's sexuality has typically disregarded adolescent women's subjective experiences of their sexuality and same-sex desire in women (Freud, 1969; Erikson, 1968). Researchers in the area of adolescent women's sexuality have examined a number of issues, including pregnancy (Hayes, 1987; Miller & Moore, 1990), sexually transmitted disease (Bell & Holmes, 1984; Cates & Rauh, 1985; Hayes, 1987), age of first heterosexual intercourse (Meschke & Silbereisen, 1997), number of sexual partners (Belfer, Krener, & Miller, 1988; Chilman, 1983; Hofferth & Hayes, 1987; Hofferth, Kahn, & Baldwin, 1987), and condom use (Strunin & Hingson, 1987). This research has been problem-oriented and operates on the assumption that adolescent sexual behaviour is deviant or non-normative (Lauritsen, 1994).

Second, most of the research on adolescent girls' sexuality has examined the experiences of heterosexual girls and paid little attention to girls who experience same-sex desire (Fine, 1988; Tolman, 1994). To their credit, feminist researchers have explored issues related to adolescent women's sexuality that traditional social science research ignored. These have included adolescent girls' social and sexual development (Daniluk, 1998; Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995), the role of violence in adolescent girls' sexuality and sexual experiences (Tolman, 1994), and the meaning of adolescent girls' sexuality in the context of issues such as sexism, racism, and classism. Some feminist researchers have even begun to look specifically at sexual desire in adolescent girls (Fine, 1988; Thompson, 1990; Tolman, 1994). However, more research is needed to understand the significance and complexity of sexual desire in adolescent girls' lives, particularly the experience of same-sex sexual desire in social environments that denounce homosexuality.

Third, research on queer youth has provided little insight into issues that are specific to adolescent women who feel same-sex desire (Griffin, 2000). Recent theory and research on lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) adolescents, while addressing such important topics as LGB identity development (Chapman & Brannock, 1987; Diamond, 1998; Schneider, 1989; Troiden, 1989), and the effects of societal homophobia on the lives of LGB adolescents (Martin & Hetrick, 1988; Safren & Heimberg, 1999; Savin-Williams, 1994), has focused primarily on the male experience and generally overlooked adolescent women's same-sex desire. Thus far, I have found one qualitative study that examined same-sex desire in lesbians aged 17-24 (Ussher & Mooney-Somers, 2000). However, I am aware of no other research that focuses on adolescent girls' lived experience of same-sex desire. This research aimed to fill these gaps in the literature by asking young women to talk about the lived experience of same-sex sexual desire in adolescence. One goal of this research was to redress the 'missing discourse of desire' in research on girls' sexuality (Fine, 1988). This study aimed to go one step further by addressing the missing discourse of same-sex desire in adolescent girls.

Introduction to the Problem

In this narrative study, I explored the retrospective narrative accounts of seven young women aged 19 to 25 about their experience of same-sex sexual desire during adolescence. Retrospective accounts may allow individuals to look back with a fresh perspective and consider some of their experiences with the benefit of hindsight. This study focuses on adolescent women's lived experiences of same-sex sexual desire in a social and cultural context that devalues both women's sexuality and same-sex attraction and behaviour (Hetrick & Martin, 1987; Wolf, 1997). This research is important because

we know little about the meanings adolescent women make of their same-sex sexual desire or how girls who come out to others manage their sexual identity in a social context where same-sex relationships are stigmatized.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to understand adolescent women's lived experience of same-sex desire through the narratives they construct today as young women. I conducted open-ended interviews with 7 women aged 19-25, asking them to look back to their adolescent years and tell their story about their experience of same-sex sexual desire during that time. I applied a narrative research design to carry out this research.

I selected the age group of 19-25 for this research because women who are currently in this age range would have experienced their adolescence during the 1990s. I wanted to know whether the situation for adolescents had improved at a time when homosexuality and queer issues have been gaining acceptance in Canadian society, and when progressive legal, political, and social changes have made it possible for adult LGB Canadians to enjoy greater human rights and freedoms. I wondered whether these shifts in social attitudes had filtered into today's youth culture and into the diverse social environments that adolescent women inhabit.

The findings of this research can inform our knowledge and practice, and be of benefit to adolescent women. Counsellors, and others who interact with adolescent girls, such as parents, teachers, and health professionals, will be in a better position to offer support and assistance if they are informed about adolescent girls' experiences of their sexuality in general, and their experiences of same-sex desire in particular. Ideally,

adolescent girls who have more accurate and affirming knowledge, and therefore, more positive perceptions of their own sexuality, would be able to enjoy all aspects of their sexuality free from guilt, shame, and confusion, and without having to hide their understanding and experiences from others.

Research Question

What stories do young women construct about their experiences of same-sex sexual desire during their adolescent years?

Theoretical Perspective: Sexuality as a Social Construction

The theoretical assumptions guiding this research are based in social constructionism. Social constructionism asserts that social and historical contexts and structures shape people's knowledge of themselves and others (Broido, 2000). Social constructionist ideas challenge essentialist notions that, for example, women are nurturing and men are aggressive (Butler, 1990), or that for biological reasons, all women inherently enjoy sex less than men. Social constructionists reject the idea that sexuality, or the categories 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual' have any consistent meaning across cultures and historical eras (Broido, 2000; Kitzinger, 1995). Rather, these categories are culturally determined and represent only one possible way of organizing sexuality (Clausen, 1997).

In his discussion of social constructionism and the narrative construction of identity, Gergen (1999) proposed that we identify ourselves through the stories we tell, and that conventional narrative structures shape our sense of identity and place certain restrictions over who we can be. This affects how we view ourselves and our lives, what events or aspects of our lives and ourselves we give voice to, and what parts we exclude

or silence. Gergen also suggests that who we are and how we behave are negotiated and defined within social relationships. In this research I wanted to learn, through the stories of the participants, how adolescent women experienced their same-sex sexual desire, and how they perceived these experiences to be influenced by their sociocultural context, social structures, and relationships.

Social constructionism aims not to uncover 'the truth' about people or society, but to search for any value that the researcher's reading of a phenomenon might have in bringing about change for those who would benefit from it (Burr, 1995). From a social constructionist perspective, an important pragmatic and political objective of this research was to produce knowledge that might be useful to adolescent women who experience same-sex desire, and to counsellors, teachers, and other professionals who work with these women, rather than to discover and describe a strictly factual account of adolescent girls' lived experience of same-sex desire.

Definition of Terms

I would like to offer definitions for some of the terms I will use in this thesis. The term 'homophobia' refers to a distorted and irrational view accompanied by fear or hatred of homosexuality and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered) individuals (Jordan, Vaughan, & Woodworth, 1997). Homophobia may include anything from verbal taunting to physical and sexual violence. 'Heterosexism' is the belief that heterosexuality is the only 'natural' way of being, and that it is superior to homosexuality. 'Institutionalized heterosexism' includes prejudice and discrimination at a systemic level that is sanctioned by those with power, and serves to keep sexual minority individuals

invisible. Institutionalized heterosexism may be evidenced as the failure to acknowledge the existence of LGBT individuals or as hostility and violence (Jordan et al., 1997).

‘Coming out’ of the closet involves the process of becoming aware of one’s lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer sexual orientation, or transgendered identity/status, accepting it, and sharing it with other people (Black & Underwood, 1998; Cass, 1979; Rust, 1993). deMonteflores and Schultz (1978) defined ‘coming out’ as “the developmental process through which gay people recognize their sexual preferences and choose to integrate this knowledge into their personal and social lives” (p. 59). Today many would challenge the notion that being gay is a ‘preference,’ but the important point is that one comes to accept one’s sexual or gender identity and is able to share this knowledge with others.

Sexual orientation refers to one’s sexual, affectional, and romantic interests to members of the same gender (lesbian/gay/queer), other gender (heterosexual), or both/all genders (bisexual/pansexual). Sexual identity “is the enduring sense of oneself as a sexual being which fits a culturally created category and accounts for one’s sexual fantasies, attractions, and behaviors” (Savin-Williams, 1995, p. 166). Sexual identity indicates how individuals label themselves on the basis of their sexual orientation. For example, individuals may self-identify as heterosexual/straight, bisexual, gay, lesbian, or queer (Rosario & Meyer-Bahlburg, 1996). Gender identity refers to one’s sense of oneself as male or female. LGB individuals are as certain about their gender identity as are heterosexual persons (Sanders & Kroll, 2000). Transgendered persons identify with a gender identity other than the one that is ascribed to the biological sex of their birth, and they may have a same-sex or other-sex sexual orientation.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Historical Overview of Sexuality from Early Christianity to the 19th Century

To better understand the social context in which adolescent women in our culture experience same-sex sexual desire, it may be useful to illustrate some of the processes by which the current system of attitudes toward sexuality have developed throughout the centuries. For this purpose, the historical roots of sexuality and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) prejudice in the Western world will be reviewed.

There seems to be agreement among historians that in the Western world, current beliefs, values, and views related to sexuality may be rooted in the positions and actions of the church over the past two thousand years. According to Taylor (1970), the present-day Western mindset about sexuality originates in the traditions developed by the medieval church. He suggests that while sexuality prior to the Middle Ages appears to have been open and relatively free of inhibitions, over time the intentions of the Church to increase control over sexual matters and to suppress sexual expression led to the establishment of strict rules and taboos, including the notion of sex as a function of procreation within monogamous marriage, virginity as virtue, sexual pleasure as mortal sin, and an intensified preoccupation with homosexuality (Foucault, 1985; Taylor, 1970). Sex therefore came to be seen as dirty, shameful, and impure. Women, in particular, were viewed as lustful schemers plotting to seduce innocent men (Taylor, 1970).

Weeks (1981) argues that historically, sexuality in the Western world was closely linked with social and political power, and provided a means of control over individuals. The control of the church over the expression of sexual desire and behaviour (Taylor,

1970), and over adultery and sodomy during the medieval era (Weeks, 1981; LeGates, 1996), and state laws against prostitution and homosexuality in modern times (Weeks, 1981) are all examples of social and legal regulation of sexual behaviour throughout Western history. Control of women's sexuality was expressed through a double standard, whereby men were permitted to act in ways that were forbidden to women. In medieval Spain, for example, adultery was regarded as a crime only when committed by women (LeGates, 1996). Until 1857, divorce laws in Britain gave men the right to seek divorce if they could prove their wife's adultery; however, wives had no such rights over their husbands (Kent, 1987).

Weeks (1981) asserts that over the last several centuries, sexuality has become a target of social intervention and organization. The state has become progressively more involved in shaping attitudes toward sexuality by means of political power, social apparatuses, and social norms. These have included marriage and family laws, medical institutions, the judiciary, the police, educational institutions, and policies that influence the regulation of deviance. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for example, new marriage laws rendered the distinction between legally sanctioned and 'illicit' sex more significant. In 1753, the church wedding became the sole legally binding form of marriage, and marriage, in turn, was now the only site where sexual behaviour could legitimately take place. During this time, women were viewed as sexually dangerous (Kent, 1987) and in need of control of their actions.

In the 19th century, when marriage became a binding institution, the family grew to be a source of surveillance and control of sexual behaviour (Weeks, 1981). Sexual love quickly became enshrined as the central element in producing families, establishments in

which female sexuality was viewed as secondary to male sexuality. Women of the middle-class became symbols of their husbands' success and wealth, and this made them and their sexuality an objectified commodity (Kent, 1987). Middle-class capitalists relied on legitimate children to pass on their property, and women were socially regulated to maintain their chastity in order to ensure the legitimacy of children. Within the 19th century political and economic climate, women needed to be viewed as pure and harmless. The control of women's sexuality was thus reinforced and further entrenched through this moral code, which offered only two possible images of women, as respected wife and mother or lowly prostitute (Kent, 1987; Weeks, 1981).

In the second half of the 19th century, the medical profession tried to create a "science of sexuality" by turning to scientific 'truths' to uphold and perpetuate negative stereotypical images of women, and to prescribe proper behaviour for women (Kent, 1987, p.32). To this day, sexual behaviour defines women socially and morally. Sexual intercourse is still viewed in society as the natural and highest act of self-expression between a man and woman (Weeks, 1981), and is what defines a woman or man as sexually active.

Historical Overview of Homosexuality and Homophobia

Same-sex attraction has been stigmatized throughout Western history, and a principal contributing factor has been the regulation of extramarital sex throughout Western history (Weeks, 1996). Sexologists and anthropologists have recognized since the 19th century that same-sex behaviour has existed in various forms in many cultures, and that it is an essential aspect of human sexual possibilities. Attitudes toward,

definitions of, and meanings given to homosexuality have varied across cultures and eras. In Western cultures, homosexuality has generally been condemned (Weeks, 1981).

Cross-cultural evidence indicates that numerous cultures have successfully integrated some forms of same-sex behaviour into their sexual traditions (Weeks, 1996). In ancient Greece, relationships between free adult males and adolescent boys were accepted as a 'normal' part of male sexuality (Dover, 1978), and certain tribal and modern societies have accepted transgendered (berdache) roles among women and men (Forgey, 1975; McIntosh, 1996). In China, male homosexuality has a long history, with countless references in Chinese literature dating as far back as the Yellow Emperor 46 centuries ago (Hinsch, 1990; Jennings, 1994). Same-sex relations among men were allowed as long as they did not interfere with procreative duties. This accepting climate lasted in China until the 17th century, when open discussions about homosexuality led to a conservative backlash resulting in the rise of homophobic sentiment that has survived into the 21st century (Jennings, 1994).

In the Christian West, there is a long history of prejudice and legal sanctions against homosexuality, particularly male homosexuality. In pre-19th century England, sodomy was considered to be a crime and a "sin against nature" (Weeks, 1981, p. 99), and anti-sodomy laws were directed primarily at men. Buggery, also viewed as an act against nature, was subject to a penalty of death until the 19th century (Weeks, 1996). One of the most influential theologians to guide Christian thinking about homosexuality was Saint Thomas Aquinas, who believed that same-sex relations were a lustful sin, and a vice against nature. Later theologians referred to Aquinas' work to justify their own prejudice against same-sex relationships (Brown, 1989).

Christian taboos have varied in strength throughout history and have had an unequal impact on male and female same-sex behaviour, primarily as a result of social assumptions about male and female sexuality and the disparate sexual roles assigned to men and women. Some historians claim that women were viewed as asexual beings with no desires of their own, and same-sex desire among women was therefore ignored or denied (Weeks, 1996). Others assert that women were thought to be more lustful and prone to debauchery than men, yet their sexual desires were believed to be aimed exclusively toward men (Brown, 1989). Although there appear to have been divergent views regarding the 'nature' of women's sexuality, it was difficult to accept that women could be attracted to other women, or that women could satisfy one another's sexual desires. Perhaps for this reason, lesbian sexuality was rarely mentioned in canon and secular laws, and among hundreds and possibly thousands of cases of homosexuality tried by lay and ecclesiastical courts in medieval and early modern Europe, only a few involved sex between women (Brown, 1989).

Although lesbian sexuality was generally dismissed, there was nonetheless some awareness of erotic attractions among women, which led to attempts by ecclesiastical leaders to control it. As early as 423, Saint Augustine warned his sister, who was a nun, to avoid engaging in 'carnal' relations with other nuns. In 13th century France, nuns were required to avoid forming close friendships, forbidden from sleeping together, and expected to burn a lamp all night and keep their door unlocked so that the abbess could check on them (Brown, 1989).

There were also references to lesbian sexuality in the secular world. In the sixteenth century, one French commentator on the sexual behaviours of French courtiers

wrote about the apparent popularity of sexual relations between women, although he qualified this claim by asserting that most women who engaged in sex with other women were merely preparing themselves for sexual relations with men. Sex between women, when acknowledged, was typically deemed to occur for the purpose of improving sex with men, and therefore not perceived as a serious threat to male access to women's sexuality (Brown, 1989). This perception continues today in pornography and erotica, in which sex between women is frequently presented for the purpose of stimulating men.

Recognition of sex between women also led to the development of laws to punish those who engaged in it. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Spanish and Italian laws were established that condemned to death women who engaged in sodomy. Women who cross-dressed and lived as men received the most severe punishments (Brown, 1989).

Although same-sex behaviour was subject to severe punishment, 'homosexuality' appears not to have existed as an 'orientation' or identity until the later part of the 19th century, when a new interest in taxonomy and labelling led to intensified efforts to 'scientifically' classify the characteristics of diverse forms of sexual behaviour. During this time, scientific-medical theories claimed that homoerotic desire was an indication of a distinctive personal and sexual identity (Seidman, 1996). This led to the creation of the term 'homosexuality,' which came to be defined as an individual trait, both in legal practice and in psychological and medical classification (Weeks, 1996). As sexual orientation came to be seen as a central part of our being, the terms 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual' became established as terms representing what was ostensibly a core aspect of one's being.

The development of the medical model of homosexuality led to a shift from the notion of sin and crime to sickness and mental illness. Sexologists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries argued that homosexuality was a characteristic of the individual, and theories were developed to understand the causes in order to cure this 'type' of person. Medical theories of homosexuality that emerged during this time reflected wider societal prejudices. Debates among sexologists centred on the question of whether homosexuality was a hereditary and relatively harmless abnormality, or evidence of moral insanity or mental illness. On the other hand, this focus on 'scientific' explanations of homosexuality led to legal changes such as the removal of the death penalty in 1861 and the adoption of less severe punishments for same-sex behaviour (Weeks, 1996).

These medical debates called attention primarily to male homosexuality and largely continued to ignore lesbianism (Kent, 1987; Weeks, 1996). The notion of the sexless woman, and constructions of male and female sexualities, made it difficult if not impossible to consider female sexuality without a male partner (Weeks, 1996). Lillian Faderman (1981) pointed out that during this era "a sexual act without a male initiator, one which required autonomous drive, would be unthinkable" (p. 154). Whereas male homosexuality was acknowledged and condemned, lesbianism was generally denied, even though 'romantic friendships' between women were accepted during the 19th century. These, however, were thought of as 'pure,' sexless relationships compatible with heterosexual marriage. Whenever lesbianism was acknowledged, it was typically presented as a medical problem (Kent, 1987).

The scientific 'knowledge' of the 19th century, combined with anxiety over women's growing independence after World War I, led to the view in the 20th century

that love between women was a perversion that threatened to replace heterosexual marriage (Kent, 1987). The notion of 'lesbian identity' became a possibility for the first time among the new professional women of the 1920's, and it was during this time that lesbianism began to attract notice and became an issue of serious public concern (Weeks, 1996).

The personal and institutionalized homophobia that was cultivated in the early 20th century became a deeply entrenched force compelling many LGBT individuals to adopt a secret, double life or face a lonely existence. Countless LGBT individuals never came out, and many internalized society's negative attitudes toward homosexuality, which led to the denial or repression of a vital part of their identity (Jennings, 1994).

In response to this atmosphere of prejudice, social stigma, and absence of civil rights, lesbians and gay men began to organize socially and politically. Gay and lesbian magazines and political organizations started appearing as early as the 1940's and 1950's. They provided a political context for the lives of lesbians and gay men for the first time in U.S. history (Gomez, 1995). However, most gays and lesbians did not see themselves as a political body during this time. It was the Stonewall riot that is frequently cited as the beginning of an era of lesbian and gay activism in North America (Deitcher, 1995). The 3-day Stonewall riot took place in New York City in June of 1969. It was carried out by the patrons of the Stonewall Inn, in protest of routine police raids on this popular Greenwich Village gay bar (Duberman, 1994). This uprising, fuelled by years of pent-up anger against the New York police for its harassment of gays and lesbians, instigated a movement that drew gays and lesbians out of the closet and into a community united in a

common struggle for recognition and equal rights, and for the ultimate elimination of homophobia (Gomez, 1995).

Clearly, there is ample evidence to suggest that same-sex desire has existed throughout human history and constitutes a vital element of human sexuality. It is also apparent that Western societies have historically condemned same-sex attractions. The process of gaining acceptance and support for homosexuality has been slow and challenging, and those who experience same-sex attractions and/or identify as LGBT continue to be confronted with prejudice and homophobia.

As their sexuality develops, some adolescent girls will find themselves attracted to other women, an experience that still takes place in a social context where it is often unsafe to acknowledge and express one's sexual desire, particularly when it is directed toward members of the same sex. Given that same-sex desire has always existed, and the reality of living in a heterosexist world, how adolescent women experience their same-sex desire is the focus of this study.

Understanding Twentieth Century Attitudes Toward Same-Sex Desire

Historical evidence of same-sex desire suggests that what we call 'homosexuality' today has existed throughout history and was understood and expressed in a variety of ways in different sociocultural contexts. Western societies have traditionally held negative attitudes toward same-sex attraction, and treated those who expressed their same-sex desires with prejudice and contempt. Since the nineteenth century, Western society has attached a 'homosexual' identity or personality to those who experience same-sex desire. Likewise, many individuals in our society who experience same-sex desire come to adopt a homosexual, lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity. Continuing

prejudice and discrimination against homosexuality, and the link between the experience of same-sex desire and identity, make it essential to explain contemporary societal attitudes toward homosexuality, keeping in mind that many adolescents who experience same-sex desire may not see themselves as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Although adolescent girls may not adopt an identity on the basis of their same-sex feelings and behaviours, it is likely that homophobic attitudes in their environment will influence their experiences of same-sex desire.

Traditional theory and research on homosexuality in psychology. Society and the academic community frequently mirror each other's views and attitudes about social issues. Just as twentieth-century North American society has condemned same-sex attractions, so has the academy expressed prejudiced views toward homosexuality. Until the 1970's, LGB issues were virtually excluded from research in the social sciences and when addressed, they were frequently presented in a negative light. Heterosexual men of "science" wrote primarily about the "deviance" of homosexuality (Eliason, 1996, p. 36). In psychiatry and psychology, homosexuality was viewed as a mental illness to be 'treated' like any other disorder. Research and theorizing about homosexuality reflected these judgmental views. The main objectives of theory and research were to look for the origins of homosexuality and to find a cure.

Freud (1943) believed that homosexuality was related to innate bisexual tendencies in all people. However, he stated that the majority of individuals progressed toward heterosexuality, and those who deviated from this path of 'normal' development did so because of their failure to resolve the Oedipal complex. Normal development in such cases might be arrested in an 'immature' stage, and this could lead to

homosexuality. Freud also believed that homosexuality could result from poor parent-child relations, and that male homosexuality might be related to continuing castration anxiety. In spite of his heterosexist ideas, Freud appeared to accept homosexuality as a variation of sexual development and believed that homosexuals should not face prejudice.

Later psychoanalysts were strongly opposed to homosexuality, believing it to be a mental illness. Bieber, for example, suggested that homosexuality is caused by the fear of heterosexual interactions (Bieber, 1962). Other researchers looked for the 'cause' of homosexuality by focusing on family dysfunction. In a British quantitative study of 83 self-identified homosexual men and 84 married men assumed to self-identify as heterosexual, Bene (1965) sought to find a connection between homosexuality and men's relationships with their fathers. He administered a questionnaire and a semi-projective test to determine feelings of like/dislike and love/hate toward family members, and to obtain information about parental over-protection and over-indulgence. He found that homosexual men expressed more hostility and less affection toward and from their fathers and mothers than did the married men. These negative feelings were more pronounced for fathers than for mothers. Bene also described the fathers of the homosexual men as ineffective.

Wolff (1971) conducted a quantitative study of 108 middle-class adult lesbian and heterosexual women for the purpose of learning more about female homosexuality. She examined the characteristics of the parents of participants and found that the most prominent parental characteristics of parents of lesbians were a rejecting or hostile mother and a distant or absent father. She asserted that female homosexuality results from insufficient love from the mother, and girls and women who come from such a family

will therefore seek love from other women. Likewise, a poor relationship with the father prevents girls from relating to men and thus leads them to search for love from women.

Proponents of behavioural theory also attempted to explain the 'cause' of homosexuality by conceptualizing it as a learned behaviour. According to this view, early psychological conditioning related to reinforcement or punishment of sexual behaviours, thoughts, feelings, and fantasies, can explain the development of sexual orientation. Pleasurable same-sex incidents, coupled with dissatisfying or frightening heterosexual experiences, were purported to lead to the development of a homosexual orientation (Feldman & MacCulloch, 1971; Masters, Johnson, & Kolodny, 1986). Masters et al. (1986) asserted that the 'observation' that some female rape victims become lesbian supports this view. They failed, however, to account for female rape victims who do not come to identify as lesbian. They also believed that the 'cause' of homosexuality might lie in prenatal programming.

Research on sexual orientation from the 1950s to the 1970s. Attitudes toward homosexuality in psychology and other disciplines began to change in the mid-twentieth century as researchers presented data suggesting that homosexuality is not deviant, abnormal, or unnatural. Kinsey's research on sexual behaviour was the first comprehensive study to provide data indicating that a considerable percentage of the population have at least some same-sex experiences during their lifetime (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953). Over a 15-year period, Kinsey and several of his colleagues conducted interviews to obtain case histories from 7789 women and 8211 men in the U.S. Their quantitative study was based on a diverse sample in terms of age (2-90), race, class, education level, and geographic region.

In this study, approximately 4% of men and between 1% and 6% of women reported having exclusive same-sex contact, and up to 28% of women and 50% of men reported having at least some homosexual experience since adolescence (Kinsey et al., 1948; Kinsey et al., 1953).

Based on the findings of this study, Kinsey concluded that contrary to popular beliefs about homosexuality, many people are not exclusively heterosexual or homosexual, but fall somewhere on a continuum which ranges from exclusive heterosexuality to exclusive homosexuality. The study also provided evidence that homosexual behaviour is not rare or abnormal. Kinsey stated that the large incidence of homosexuality in many cultures throughout history, including the present time, suggests that the capacity for homosexuality is "basic in the species" (Kinsey et al., 1948, p. 660).

From the results of this study, Kinsey developed a seven-point scale that was based on the relative amounts of heterosexual and homosexual experience of an individual, and argued for the need to recognize sexual experiences on a continuum, rather than assume that individuals engage only in homosexual or heterosexual experiences. Kinsey opposed the custom of labelling individuals according to their choice of partner, proposing instead that personality is not inevitably related to homosexual behaviour. He also asserted that homosexuality does not reflect psychopathology in an individual (Kinsey et al., 1948; Kinsey et al., 1953). He argued further that, given the evidence that homosexual activity persists on a large scale even in the face of considerable public sentiment against it, it would likely appear in a much larger portion of the population if there were no social restraints. These ideas, progressive for the time, helped set in motion a major shift toward acceptance of homosexuality in psychology and

in North American society. Arguably, this shift continues to evolve. While homosexuality is now more widely accepted, parts of our culture continue to hold onto homophobic views and beliefs.

Starting in the 1950s, a growing number of researchers and theorists followed in Kinsey's footsteps as they explored issues related to sexual orientation from a perspective that was rooted not in the belief that homosexuality is a mental illness or the result of dysfunctional family relationships, but rather a genuine interest to learn more about what it meant to experience same-sex desire and embrace an LGB identity in a prejudiced culture. This focus appears to have been an effort to convey realistic and affirmative information, and thus undo some of the damage inflicted by previous 'scientists' who applied paradigms that pathologized and condemned homosexuality.

Like Kinsey, Evelyn Hooker (1957) argued that homosexuality is not related to psychopathology. She conducted a quantitative study to investigate whether homosexuality is a symptom of pathology. Hooker used projective techniques, attitude scales, and life history interviews with a non-clinical sample of 30 heterosexual and 30 gay men. The results indicated there were no differences in psychological functioning between the two groups of men. This was one of the first objective studies of gay men to provide strong evidence that homosexuality is not inevitably the result of psychological maladjustment.

The research of Saghir and Robins (1973) provided support for Hooker's findings. The purpose of their quantitative study was to assess the history of sexuality in a non-clinical sample. Using structured interviews, they compared 165 homosexual women and

men to 84 unmarried heterosexual women and men, and concluded that the majority of homosexuals were well adjusted, led productive lives, and had no signs of mental illness.

Siegelman (1974) contested the popular belief among psychoanalysts that homosexuality was related to dysfunctional family relationships. The purpose of Siegelman's study was to objectively compare the parental backgrounds of non-clinical homosexual and heterosexual men using a psychometrically sound questionnaire. He administered questionnaires to 307 homosexual men and 138 heterosexual men. The homosexual men described their fathers and mothers as more rejecting and less loving than did the heterosexual men, and they were less close to their fathers than were the heterosexual men. The results of this study contradicted earlier findings that the mothers of homosexual men are more loving and dominating than mothers of heterosexual men. The data also indicated that there were no apparent differences in family relationships for groups of heterosexuals and homosexuals who were well adjusted psychologically. The overall results seriously challenged the widespread assumption that negative or undesirable parental behaviour plays a critical role in sexual orientation.

Although many studies on homosexuality continued to emphasize the experiences of homosexual men, some researchers also looked at the experiences of homosexual women. Bell, Weinberg, and Hammersmith (1981), for example, were interested in exploring how both women and men come to be homosexual or heterosexual, and in examining the interplay of various factors that shape human experience. Further, they wanted to learn more about how diverse sexual patterns are established, and what these patterns tell us about the different aspects of human behaviour. One of their main goals was to challenge previous research and theories on homosexuality that were rooted in

negative stereotypes and untested assumptions. In their quantitative study, Bell et al. conducted structured interviews with 979 gay men and lesbians, and 477 heterosexual women and men in San Francisco. Their data indicated that early relationships with parents and siblings were generally unrelated to the emergence of homosexuality in either homosexual men or women. They did not identify any early-life variables that predicted female homosexuality.

In spite of the emergence of research that was affirming toward homosexuality, lesbian sexuality and in particular, same-sex desire in adolescent women was still not being sufficiently recognized. Even though female homosexuality was now being depicted in more positive ways, same-sex desire in adolescent women was not specifically attended to in theory or in research. To this day, we know little about adolescent women's lived experience of same-sex desire.

Recent research on sexual orientation. During the 1970s and 1980s, theorists and researchers began to present homosexuality as a normal variation of human sexuality, and to expose heterosexism and homophobia as the culprits behind the struggles that individuals with same-sex attractions had to endure as they tried to accept their feelings and embrace an LGB identity. Much of the work on sexual orientation during this time focused on LGB identity development, as theorists and researchers began to assert that the process of coming out, or forming an LGB sexual identity, is developmental in nature. They claimed that individuals move, in progressive steps or stages, from identifying as heterosexual to eventually coming to see themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual. The models of LGB identity development refer to societal prejudice as the context in which individuals come to accept themselves as LGB. Most of these models

recognize that LGB identity development is not inevitably linear, but rather is characterized by individual differences (D'Augelli, 1994), including age and gender. The work of three theorists is summarized here to provide examples of these models.

Barbara Ponse (1978) applied a social constructionist framework to explore how women achieved a lesbian identity. Her research with 75 lesbians resulted in the formulation of a non-linear 'gay trajectory' consisting of five elements that could lead to a lesbian identity. Ponse observed that many of her participants reported an interval of time between their first same-sex attraction and acceptance of a lesbian identity. Many of them labelled this time period as 'coming out.' A large number of the participants expressed an essentialist understanding of lesbian identity, asserting that lesbianism is something that is always there, waiting to be discovered.

Based on her observations as a clinical psychologist, Vivienne Cass (1979) developed what is now a well-known six-stage linear coming out model. She believed that all individuals move through six stages of identity development, and she based her model on two assumptions, first that identity formation is a developmental process, and second, that behavioural change and stability result from the interaction between individuals and their environments. The six stages begin with identity confusion and end with identity synthesis, in which a gay or lesbian identity is fully accepted and integrated into total self-identity. Individuals are seen as having an active role in the attainment of a homosexual identity, and alternative paths of development are presented within each stage.

Richard Troiden (1989) described coming out in the framework of symbolic interactionism. He believed that people are socialized to think of themselves as

heterosexual, that sexual preferences develop in a cultural context that prescribes specific sexual scripts, and that coming out is therefore the adoption of an identity that departs from the individual's original socialization. Troiden defined a homosexual identity as the awareness of the self as gay in the context of 'romantic' or 'sexual' social settings. This identity consists of three levels, the first being the self-concept or self-identity, the second being the perceived level, or what a person thinks about her/his identity, and the third being the presented level, or the ways in which a person communicates her/his identity in social situations. Homosexual identity is fully realized when these three levels are in harmony. Troiden focused primarily on adolescents and young adults, and claimed that his coming out model included both lesbian and gay male development. This model involves four stages that are spiral rather than linear, and in which individuals can move up and down, and back and forth. Troiden believed that identity is never fixed, and that coming out is a lifelong process.

In the 1990's, theory and research into sexual orientation paid particular attention to the concerns of LGB adolescents. Researchers have examined coming-out and sexual identity development (Rosario & Meyer-Bahlburg, 1996; Rotheram-Borus & Fernandez, 1995; Rust, 1993; Savin-Williams, 1990b; Troiden, 1989; Zera, 1992), coming out issues, and homophobia and heterosexism at school, in the family, and in other social institutions. Other researchers have focused on the effects of homophobia on queer adolescents' lives, including feelings of isolation (Dempsey, 1994; Hetrick & Martin, 1987; Remafedi, 1987; Savin-Williams, 1994), substance use (Russell, Driscoll, & Truong, 2002; Savin-Williams, 1994), high dropout rates, verbal and physical abuse (Savin-Williams, 1994), and suicide (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Martin & Hetrick,

1988; Rotheram-Borus, Hunter, & Rosario, 1994; Safren & Heimberg, 1999; Savin-Williams, 1994; Schneider, Farberow & Kruks, 1989). Some researchers have addressed the difficulties involved in acknowledging one's same-sex desire in a homophobic environment, and the parallel processes of coming out and growing up (Schneider, 1989). Other studies have explored how family context and family structure are related to adolescent sexual behaviour (Calhoun & Friel, 2001).

Research on queer adolescents has generally paid greater attention to the experiences of adolescent boys, although some studies have begun to emphasize the experiences of lesbian and female bisexual adolescents. Only one study that I am aware of, however, has asked young women to describe their experience of same-sex sexual desire during adolescence (Ussher & Mooney-Somers, 2000). The focus of the current study is to extend this research and to examine adolescent women's lived experience of same-sex sexual desire in the North American sociocultural context.

Adolescent Women's Sexual Identity Development

While adolescent women are discovering that they feel same-sex desire, they are also in the process of developing an identity and figuring out who they are, both in the area of sexuality and in regard to other aspects of their lives. This is the social and personal context in which adolescent women experience same-sex desire. A few traditional and current theories and models of sexual identity development are reviewed in this section in order to appreciate how adolescent women's identity development relates to their emerging same-sex attractions.

Traditional psychological models of adolescent women's sexual identity

development. Numerous developmental theories and models of sexual identity development have been described in psychology. Traditional stage theories of adolescent development include psychosexual, psychosocial, ego, cognitive, and moral development. In these theories, progression toward higher stages leads to a more autonomous and individuated self (Taylor, 1994).

Erik Erikson, for example, is well known for his work in identity formation during adolescence, which includes sexual identity. Erikson claimed that the major challenge of adolescence is to achieve a clear sense of identity through the resolution of the crisis of identity-versus-identity-confusion (Erikson, 1963, 1968). Erikson's notion of identity involved developing a concept of oneself as a unique individual, and adopting values that provide a sense of direction (Erikson, 1968; Kroger, 1996). Erikson suggested that the process of identity formation begins before adolescence and continues through to adulthood, but the struggle is more intense during adolescence because of physical changes that lead to an increased focus on self-image, cognitive changes that facilitate personal introspection, and decisions about vocational direction that require self-reflection. Erikson asserted that successful adolescent development requires movement towards autonomy and independence, although he acknowledged the social nature of human development (Erikson, 1968).

Erikson (1968) believed that young women's biological make-up and reproductive functions strongly influence the course of their sexual identity development, which is directed primarily toward heterosexual mating and procreation. He claimed that identity formation in young women differs from that of young men "by dint of the fact

that their [women's] somatic design harbours and 'inner space' destined to bear the offspring of chosen men and, with it, a biological, psychological and ethical commitment to take care of human infancy" (p. 266).

Erikson's theory does allow for a period of "psychosocial moratorium" for adolescent women (Erikson, 1968, p. 282). Erikson called this a sanctioned period of delay of adult functioning. During this time, adolescent women are allowed to venture into the 'outer space' of the male world where they may explore different identities and pursue activities unrelated to marriage and childbearing. However, they are expected to become interested in the opposite sex during this time, and their inner space remains central to their subjective experiences. Erikson asserted that this moratorium must eventually come to an end, and that "womanhood arrives when attractiveness and experience have succeeded in selecting what is to be admitted to the welcome of the inner space for keeps" (p. 283). This theory of women's development leaves little room for sexual exploration, sexual pleasure, or same-sex desire.

Erikson claimed that stage four of his psychosocial theory of development, 'intimacy versus isolation,' builds on the newly established identity of adolescence. "[I]t is only after a reasonable sense of identity has been established that real intimacy with the other sex...is possible." (Erikson, 1959, p. 101). Here, Erikson's bias toward heterosexual relationships is evident, and his heterosexist view renders the experiences of young women who are attracted to other women invisible. The assumption that one must form an identity before she or he can have an intimate relationship ignores the realities of adolescent women who experience intimacy with both sexes before they develop a clear sense of their sexual identity. It also does not fit for women and men who come to

identify as LGB later in life. Further, it overlooks the socialization of girls, who are encouraged to relate to and care for others, and are therefore more likely to form an identity not prior to, but rather through intimate connections with significant others (Gilligan, 1982; Surrey, 1991).

Freud and other psychodynamic theorists emphasized the physical and psychological changes of puberty, which were believed to represent the major developmental transition for women. Freud (1969) proposed that during puberty, girls must move from parental objects to relationships with men in order to experience ego consolidation. Freud believed that heterosexual intercourse and vaginal orgasm were the only viable form of women's sexual expression, and the mark of mature psychological development in young women (Freud, 1969; Lewis, 1980). He stated that in childhood, girls derive erotic feelings from the clitoris. In order for girls to reach psychosexual maturity, they must ultimately give up their clitoral masturbation and transfer their erotic sensitivity to the vagina. Young women who fail to make this transition are destined to neuroticism, frigidity, and immaturity (Lydon, 1969). According to Freud, sexual development in adolescent women must involve a move toward traditional, passive femininity.

Most traditional psychological theories and models of adolescent women's sexual identity development have been unable to account for the experiences of young women who feel same-sex desire, partly because these models are rooted in heterosexist assumptions, and because they were usually normed on middle-class white males. More recent work in this area, however, has begun to address the realities of adolescent women's lives. In particular, feminist and social constructionist theories dealing with

sexual development have examined adolescent women's subjective experiences of their sexuality, including their sexual desire.

Recent theories of adolescent women's sexual identity development. In the 1970s and 1980s, a number of feminist scholars began to critique traditional models of human development and to construct alternative theories of development from their research and clinical work with girls and women. They contested traditional assumptions in psychology about human development and the practice of generalizing the male experience to all of humanity while ignoring the unique experiences of non-male, non-white individuals and groups. They also challenged the tendency of developmental theories to place a high value on the role of separation, autonomy, and self-reliance in the process of forming a separate identity, while devaluing relationships, interdependence and connectedness. Based on the results of their research, a number of feminist scholars proposed that ongoing connection to others, rather than autonomy and separation, may be considered central to women's development.

Chodorow (1978) discussed the extent to which gender differences affected the developmental paths of males and females in the pre-Oedipal stage and in the resolution of the Oedipal conflict. She claimed that boys develop a masculine personality by separating from the mother at the pre-Oedipal stage of psychosexual development, and by denying relationships or attachment to their mothers. Girls, on the other hand, progress along a different path of development as they learn the feminine role from their mothers, with whom they identify on the basis of their common gender. Chodorow wanted to see more flexibility in gender roles, which she believed could be achieved when women moved into the public sphere and men took on more domestic responsibilities. Chodorow

has been criticized for excluding a race and class analysis in her theory, and for assuming a heterosexual family structure.

Miller (1976), a psychiatrist, asserted that social inequalities on the basis of class, race, and gender result in power differences in relationships, which affects psychological development. People with less social power are likely to develop a sense of self not only in connection to others (e.g., their children) but also by attending to the feelings and experiences of others (e.g., those with more power). Miller observed from her clinical work that women develop their sense of self through creating and maintaining relationships with others, and many women experience a loss of relationship as a loss of self. She stated that it is essential to create new language and theories to describe women's unique experiences

Feminist psychologist Irene Stiver (1991) criticized the Freudian interpretation of the female Oedipus complex, stating that "the inflexible application to female development of a concept derived from male development, without sufficient attention to the quality and nature of women's experiences, leads to a significant misunderstanding of women...it also blinds us to seeing the unique nature of female development in the areas of sexuality, affect, and cognition" (p. 98-99). Stiver and her colleagues proposed instead an approach they claimed recognizes women's unique patterns of development. The self-in-relation theory states that for women, the primary experience of self is relational, and the self is organized and develops in the context of important relationships. The idea of 'self-in-relation' marks a significant shift in emphasis from separation to relationship as the main goal of development and the basis for experience. Disconnection from others is not a requirement for identity development. This theory proposes that other aspects of

self, such as autonomy and assertion, develop within relationships. Mutual empathy and empowerment are also critical to girls' relationships (Surrey, 1991).

A group of feminist psychologists have been conducting research for about 15 years to learn more about the unique characteristics of women's and girls' psychological development. In one of their qualitative studies, Brown and Gilligan (1992) interviewed approximately 100 privileged adolescent girls between the ages of 7 and 18, the majority of whom were white. They observed that before adolescence, many of the girls showed a strong sense of self, including the ability to know and voice their feelings, and to give authority to their experience. There was clear evidence of resilience and relational strengths. As they entered adolescence, many of these girls experienced a 'relational crisis' as they began to lose the courage to speak their truth. They started to doubt their own feelings, to discount the value of their experiences, and to conceal their true thoughts and feelings from those with whom they had relationships. In this way, they disconnected from what they knew in order to preserve their relationships, even if this meant losing authenticity. Brown and Gilligan attribute this dissociation, which occurs between psyche and body, voice and desire, self and relationship, and private and public knowledge, to patriarchal values and beliefs that foster certain expectations and rules of femininity for girls and women, and thus exert a profound influence on girls' identity formation.

In another qualitative study of adolescent girls, Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan, (1995) conducted annual interviews over a three-year period with 26 girls in Boston who had been identified as being at-risk for high school dropout and early motherhood. The sample was diverse in terms of race and ethnicity, and most of the girls came from poor or working-class families. The girls were in grade 8 and about 13 years old in the first

year of the study. The purpose of the study was to learn more about women's development by focusing on the experiences of 'at-risk' girls, and girls from different racial and class backgrounds.

Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan (1995) found that when the girls were in grade 8, they had vitality and psychological health. This finding was consistent with previous research by Brown and Gilligan (1992) with girls from privileged schools and among girls in public schools not identified 'at-risk'. Over the 3 years of the study, the researchers observed that many girls moved into isolation as a result of disloyalty and harmful conduct in relationships. The girls also experienced increased psychological distress and a loss of their voice in relationships in which they felt uncared for. Taylor et al. concluded from this study that when girls reach adolescence, they are at risk of losing touch with what they know through experience. They attributed this in part to the lack of appreciation for and representation of girls' experiences in patriarchal culture.

Daniluk (1998) used a developmental social-constructionist approach in her exploration of the ways in which women of all ages experience and express their sexuality. She discussed the psychological and biological changes that girls undergo during adolescence, and addressed the powerful influence of social context and societal norms and messages on adolescent girls' attempts to make sense of their bodily experiences, and on the processes of gender and sexual identity formation. Daniluk suggests that the task of integrating an understanding of sexual desire into their sexual identity development is more complicated for girls who experience same-sex attractions.

The research of these and other feminist scholars has served to challenge traditional psychological theories of development that were based on Western male-

centred values such as individuation and autonomy, and to replace these with theories that recognize and value the experiences of girls and women. Many feminist theorists and researchers have asserted that any model of girls' development must take into account the centrality of relationships to girls' sense of 'self' and to their identity development. If relationships are indeed fundamental to adolescent girls' identity development, then it is also likely that relationships play a key role in adolescent girls' experiences of same-sex desire. One aim of this study was to consider how adolescent girls make sense of their same-sex attractions and their emerging sexual identity in the context of their relationships.

A few other factors that influence adolescent girls' sexual identity development include body image, eating disorders, and a history of abuse. The findings of Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan (1995) that adolescence is a time when girls experience more challenges than boys, is supported by research with large numbers of middle and high school students. In a quantitative study of 36,000 public school students in grades 7-12 in Minnesota, almost twice as many girls as boys reported having high or very high levels of stress. Nearly 3 times as many girls as boys had a negative body image, and many more girls than boys were at high risk for eating disorders. Four times as many girls as boys reported abuse (Minnesota Women's Fund, 1990). It has also been documented that girls' self-esteem falls in high school. All these factors are undoubtedly connected to adolescent girls' lived experience of same-sex desire.

State of Knowledge about Adolescent Women's Sexuality and Experiences of Same-Sex Sexual Desire

Traditional theory and research on adolescent women's sexuality in psychology.

Historically, social science research has offered a limited understanding of adolescent girls' sexuality. Although there have been numerous inquiries into adolescent girls' sexual behaviours (Lees, 1986; Levinson, 1996; Scott-Jones & Turner, 1988) and theories of adolescent women's sexual development (Benjamin, 1988; Erikson, 1968), the notion of sexual desire in adolescent girls in general and same-sex sexual desire in particular, has largely been ignored. Some of the literature has portrayed adolescent girls' sexuality and sexual behaviour unfavourably, frequently presenting it as problematic and dangerous.

Freud (1931, as cited in Choi & Nicolson, 1994) claimed that personality and biological sex are fundamentally linked, wherein men are active and women passive, and that these characteristics are a natural and inescapable consequence of biology. Freud stated that vaginal orgasms are central to women's psychological health, whereas clitoral orgasms are a sign of penis envy, hostility to men, or psychological abnormalities. Having or not having a penis is central to human development, and women's sexuality is defined by the notion that vaginas are 'entered' by the penis, which, according to Freud, symbolizes women's submissiveness. According to this view, pursuing sexual pleasure would be abnormal for women. Freud's ideas about sexuality have been remarkably influential in later theory and research in psychology.

The contribution of sexology in the 20th century has also been central to defining what is considered sexual in our society. Although sexology aimed to 'liberate' women by providing evidence of their ability to enjoy sex, it also mirrored sexist attitudes toward women. For example, Havelock Ellis portrayed men as active pursuers and women as

passive and receptive to male sexual advances, but also as ambivalent exploiters of men (Choi & Nicolson, 1994).

One of the principal assumptions of sexology was that sex equals heterosexual intercourse, and that orgasm achieved through intercourse is the most important source of sexual pleasure. Reich (1942, as cited in Masters & Johnson, 1966) claimed that psychological health and the capacity to love depends on the ability to have orgasms, while the inability to achieve orgasms is a sign of illness. The research of Masters and Johnson (1966) on the human sexual response cycle advanced the notion of the primacy of genital sexuality, orgasm, and heterosexual intercourse, while largely ignoring other important aspects of sexuality such as desire, and the pleasure that can be derived from parts of the body other than the genitals. Research in sexology thus focused primarily on the frequency and type of orgasm, suggesting that orgasm must be the overriding goal of 'normal' heterosexual intercourse, and disregarded other forms of sexual expression and pleasure.

Much of the research in psychology on adolescent girls' sexuality has focused on such issues as sexual activity, the age at which girls first become sexually active, frequency of intercourse, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases. Although these issues are important to understand, disproportionate focus on them has obscured the reality that girls experience and must deal with various aspects of their emerging sexuality, including sexual desire (Fine, 1988; Tolman, 1994).

Feminist contributions to theory and research on adolescent women's sexuality.

While mainstream social science research has continued to ignore the topic of adolescents girls' sexual feelings, desires, and experiences, feminist theorists and

researchers have begun to address the meaning and importance of women's sexuality as well as its systematic suppression in patriarchal society (Daniluk, 1998; Rich, 1980, Snitow, Stansell, & Thompson, 1983; Vance, 1984).

Feminist scholars have explored a number of areas related to adolescent women's sexuality, including the role of social context and power relations (Daniluk, 1998), sexual violence, sexual desire (Tolman, 1994), and the idea that girls' experiences of sexuality and sexual desire are a significant yet neglected force in girls' development (Fine, 1988; Thompson, 1995). Lees (1986) interviewed 100 15 to 16 year-old girls in Britain, focusing on how adolescent girls' sexual experience is socially constrained, and the ways in which power relations between girls and boys restrict and limit girls' experiences of their sexuality. She found that regardless of social class, girls are defined primarily by their sexual reputation, that is, whether they are "nice," "respectable," and "chaste," or "easy" and "cheap" (p. 10). These and other findings led Lees to the conclusion that girls continue to be defined in terms of their sexuality in a patriarchal culture in which women are subordinate to men, and seen primarily as wives, mothers, or whores. She also suggested that patriarchal culture makes it difficult for adolescent girls to authentically express their sexual desires.

Choi and Nicholson (1994) offered a feminist critique of the ways in which female sexuality has traditionally been represented in patriarchal culture. They debated against an essentialist, reductionist view of sexuality, highlighting the socially complex experience of being sexual. They asserted that women's biological capacity to bear and feed children has been presented in patriarchal societies as the determining element of what is 'natural' and conversely, 'unnatural,' such as childlessness and homosexuality.

They suggested that women have traditionally been portrayed as the 'other' in male-dominated theory and research, and they challenged traditional views of women's sexuality. They argued that the contradictory ideas of sexologists, who depicted women as passive yet resistant and devious, and men as aggressive and active, exemplify the unreflexive quality of male-centred knowledge. They re-evaluated women's sexuality from a feminist perspective, highlighting the diversity of women's needs, desires, emotional and physical responses, and the differences between male and female experiences. They also discussed the continued existence of a double standard of morality imposed on male and female sexuality.

Ussher (1994) also challenged traditional, essentialist notions of sexuality in her review of social constructionist and post-structuralist critiques of sexuality. Social constructionism views sexuality, sexual behaviour, and sexual identity as learned rather than 'intrinsic' or essentially determined. According to this perspective, sexuality is constructed and represented at the level of culture and through the complex relationships between cultural and historical factors. Social constructionist critiques have addressed the real world in which women live, and have recognized the reality of oppression in women's lives that affects their experience of their sexuality. Women are seen to be regulated through sex, by means of their objectification, through 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Rich, 1980), and through pervasive sexual violence and abuse.

Post-structuralist thinkers have challenged essentialist ideas by focusing on issues of power and regulation (Ussher, 1994). This perspective identifies the dichotomy between the individual and society as invalid, and both are seen as the subjective products of discursive practices rather than as pre-existing facts. Proponents of this view

have argued that discourses related to female sexuality act to regulate and control women, and maintain male power. From this perspective, the notion of 'woman' is created and regulated through language and discourse, and representations of 'woman' in language or visual media are not simply a reflection of 'reality,' but are central to creating perceptions of what it is like to be a woman.

Daniluk (1998) discusses how women of all ages experience and express their sexuality. She suggests that disempowering sexual meanings are linked to many of the problems women have with their sexuality, and she locates the source of sexual discontent not in adolescent girls themselves, but in the interaction between girls' physical and psychological realities, and the messages they receive from society. Societal messages frequently endorse certain types of sexual expression, such as heterosexuality and intercourse, while denouncing others, such as homosexuality and marital infidelity. The limited meanings offered to adolescent girls from their social environments may restrict their options for making sense of their sexual desires. For girls who have same-sex sexual attractions, how they understand and make meaning of their desires will also be influenced by how other people interpret this desire. Daniluk concludes that our understanding of sexual desire in adolescent girls is limited, attributing this to an overemphasis on heterosexual intercourse and orgasm in previous sexuality research, and to social mores that place a higher value on heterosexual male-defined and male-controlled sexuality.

Some feminist theorists and researchers have directly addressed sexual desire as it is experienced and understood by adolescent girls. Michelle Fine (1988) conducted an ethnographic study of male and female adolescents at a comprehensive public high

school in New York City in the late 1970s. This study included interviews with about 55% of students who had dropped out of school and an archival analysis of over 1200 students in ninth grade. In addition, Fine analyzed the ways in which girls speak about and experience their sexual feelings. She concluded that girls know of and speak about their sexual desires. She also discovered that in schools, there is a “missing discourse of desire” in discussions of girls’ sexuality, and a clear privileging of married heterosexuality over other sexual practices (p. 30). She argued that adolescent women are still taught to fear their sexual desire, rather than encouraged to explore their sexual feelings.

Tolman (1994) critiqued prevailing societal beliefs that discourage girls’ exploration of their desires by focusing on the dangers of sexuality, ignoring the possibility of sexuality and sexual desire outside heterosexual marriage, and maintaining the myth that girls do not have sexual needs beyond the context of relationships. She also criticized developmental theories in psychology for their failure to recognize adolescent girls’ experiences of sexual desire. Tolman’s (1994) research sought to find out whether adolescent girls speak of themselves as having sexual desire, and if so, what they say. In her qualitative study of 30 adolescent girls, Tolman listened to the stories of sexual desire told by urban (n=14) and suburban (n=14) heterosexual girls, and 2 girls from a gay and lesbian youth group. This sample was diverse in terms of class, culture, educational privilege, race, religion, and individual difference in family situation.

From the interviews, Tolman (1994) found four voices of sexual desire: the voice of the self, an erotic voice, a voice of the body, and a voice of response to one’s own desire. One critical finding was that the girls’ responses to their sexual feelings were

deeply informed and shaped by the social contexts in which they live. Specifically, living in an urban versus suburban environment appeared to influence how vulnerability and pleasure figured in girls' experiences of sexual desire. Suburban girls told more narratives about pleasure than did urban girls, who spoke more about vulnerability. The role of violence was also critical in both urban and suburban girls' ability to know their sexual desire as pleasurable.

Tolman and Szalacha (1999) conducted three analyses of the interviews with adolescent girls from the earlier study by Tolman (1994) in order to understand qualitatively and to quantify related dimensions of desire. Tolman and Szalacha observed both differences and similarities in urban and suburban girls' descriptions of their experiences of sexual desire. The girls talked about their sexual desires in a comparable manner, and described desire as an embodied experience. However, they understood their desire and managed their sexual feelings in distinct ways, which Tolman and Szalacha interpreted to be a reflection of their different social locations. While this study leads to greater insight into adolescent girls' sexual desire in general, it largely ignored adolescent girls' experiences of same-sex desire. The authors themselves noted that the small number of bisexual and lesbian participants preclude an examination of how sexual orientation may be incorporated into their analysis.

There is little doubt that there are adolescent girls who experience same-sex desire, whether or not they come to self-identify as lesbian or bisexual. One comprehensive survey of 35,000 high school male and female students in Minnesota found that almost 3% of all youths reported having same-sex fantasies (Remafedi, Resnick, Blum, & Harris, 1992). Only a handful of recent studies, however, have

acknowledged same-sex desire in adolescent girls. Hey (1997) conducted an ethnographic study of adolescent girls' friendships in the mid-late 1980s. The participants were girls aged 12 to 16 attending one of two urban schools in Britain, the first located in a middle-class suburb and the second situated in a working-class neighbourhood of the same city. From her fieldwork in these two schools, Hey concluded that girls "do experience their relations with each other as a passion" (p. 114). She did not assume that the participants held any particular sexual orientation, but acknowledged the possibility of sexual desire within the friendships of adolescent girls who identify as heterosexual and are in the process of negotiating heterosexual identities and friendships.

Thompson (1990) conducted a narrative study with 400 adolescent girls in the U.S. from 1978 to 1986. Using in-depth interviews, Thompson asked participants about their sexual, romantic, and reproductive histories. To learn more about the quality of adolescent girls' sexual initiations, Thompson analyzed the stories of a representative subsample of 100 girls who had engaged in heterosexual intercourse or had sexual experiences with other girls, and examined their assessments of early sexual experience and first intercourse. Of this subsample, 10% identified themselves as lesbian and a few more had sexual experiences with girls but did not identify as lesbian.

Thompson (1990) identified two predominant narratives of sexual initiation. The first narrative, told both by heterosexual and lesbian girls, was a story of disappointment, pain, boredom, lack of knowledge, and for many girls, an absence of desire. In this group, the lesbian girls' first experience with another girl typically involved orgasm, and they reported feeling more comfortable with heterosexual penetration than did the heterosexual girls. Lesbian girls who felt pain and boredom with heterosexual intercourse

interpreted this as proof of their same-sex sexual orientation. The second narrative, told by a smaller number of heterosexual and lesbian girls, was a story of pleasure, and involved sexual curiosity, exploration, positive attitudes toward masturbation, and an awareness of bodily sensations. These girls were more prepared for heterosexual intercourse because they had prior sexual experiences and knowledge. The lesbian girls in this group reported being intensely aware of their sexual desire, and thought of themselves as sexual beings. Most of the girls who told the pleasure narrative felt that they have the right to feel sexual pleasure.

In a recent qualitative study in Britain using in-depth narrative interviews, Ussher and Mooney-Somers (2000) examined the first experiences of same-sex desire in a group of 8 women aged 17-24. These women were all members of the 'Lesbian Avengers,' an international organization whose aim is to promote awareness of lesbians. Many of these women reported that they had not recognized certain feelings as same-sex desire when these feelings initially occurred. In retrospect, however, they reconstructed these feelings as sexual. For some of the participants, feelings for another woman had often led to fear and confusion. The participants stated they knew that lesbian desire is seen as dangerous, and that lesbians continue to be portrayed as perverse and predatory. This led some of the participants to resist identifying as lesbian when they first acknowledged their same-sex desire. Other participants reported that having a sexual experience with another woman led them to identify as lesbian right away, in spite of the likelihood of stigmatization.

The results of Ussher and Mooney-Somers' (2000) study suggest that in a culture where heterosexuality is still the norm, coping with and understanding one's same-sex desire is a complex process. At the same time, the young women in this study described

same-sex desire and lesbianism in positive ways, and this may be a reflection of a shift in societal attitudes toward a more accepting stance on same-sex attractions.

Rationale for the Study

Until recently, young women's sexuality and sexual desire was largely ignored in the study of adolescents (Lees, 1986). Research on adolescence focused primarily on boys, and most studies accepted sexism, racism, and heterosexism uncritically. Sexism in the lives of adolescent girls was rarely addressed because sexuality has generally been viewed as 'natural' and immutable, and not as a product or construction of culture and its rules and codes. Past studies of sexuality by psychologists and sexologists focused on heterosexual intercourse and achieving orgasm, ignoring the context and power relations inherent in sexual relationships. They largely disregarded or misunderstood adolescent women's sexual desire, particularly their same-sex desire.

In the past, few studies examined adolescent girls' lived experiences of same-sex desire. However, the growth in the number of recent studies examining adolescent women's experiences of same-sex desire may reflect the recognition for the need to learn more about this topic and to address the 'missing discourse of desire' in research and theory about adolescent girls' sexuality (Fine, 1988). One goal of the current research was to build on the results of previous studies that emphasize the importance of listening to adolescent women's stories (Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995), adding to the knowledge base that we have only just begun to accumulate about adolescent women's same-sex desire. The purpose of this study was to learn about adolescent women's experience of same-sex sexual desire, by listening to young women's retrospective accounts of their experiences.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research procedures for this qualitative narrative study, in which 7 young women aged 19-25 provided retrospective accounts of their lived experience of same-sex desire during their adolescent years. This chapter has two parts. The first section explores the use of narrative as a theoretical perspective and narrative inquiry as an approach to doing research. The second part of this chapter will outline the research design of this study. This includes the narrative approach (Arvay, 2002, 2003) that was used to analyze participants' stories, and a description of how the evaluation of worth of this study was conducted.

Research Question

The question that guided this inquiry was: What stories do young women construct about their lived experience of same-sex sexual desire in their adolescent years?

Part One: Narrative Approach to Research

This research question was addressed through a narrative methodology. Narrative inquiry is a suitable method for analyzing the lived experiences of adolescent women in the social and cultural context of their everyday lives since stories provide the researcher with the participants' worldview and offer insight into personal constructions of participants' worlds. Narrative inquiry is located in a social constructionist epistemology. From a social constructionist perspective, reality is socially constructed and known only through the perceptions of individuals who are situated in particular contexts. How we see the world and what we know is the product not of objective observation, but of social practices and interactions in which people are constantly engaged with each other. The

focus of analysis for social constructionists is therefore the social interactions between people during which shared versions of knowledge are constructed, primarily through the use of language and dialogue (Burr, 1995).

Social constructionists search not for 'the truth out there', as they reject the notion of a singular, objective truth. Rather, all knowledge comes from seeing the world from a particular viewpoint or position. The goal of this research was therefore not to learn the 'truth' about adolescent women's experience of same-sex sexual desire, but rather to jointly construct this experience from participants' current perspectives as they told their story during the interactive research interview (Burr, 1995).

Narrative inquiry. It has been proposed that human beings are storytellers who live their lives in a storied manner (Lieblich & Josselson, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1988), and make their lives and the lives of others known through the stories they construct (Arvay, 2002; Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 1993). Our stories reveal our intentions, and the meanings we make of our experiences. Narrative modes of knowing are an attempt to understand lived experience in context, and meaning as it is constructed through social discourse (Bruner, 1986, as cited in Arvay, 2002). Narrative inquiry also focuses on the power relations that are played out in the social world. Meanings depend on those involved in the telling and listening of stories, and on the power relations that are present or believed to exist in these interactions (Arvay, 2002).

According to Spence (1982), narratives are not records of facts or some objective reality that involves 'what actually happened.' Rather, they represent a meaning-making system that makes sense of the intricate web of human perceptions and experiences. Narratives can thus help us understand the complexity of our experience and how events

in our lives are connected in meaningful ways. In research, narratives may be viewed as participants' efforts to struggle with the confusion and intricacies of the human condition, as well as the means by which both researchers and participants shape their understandings and make sense of them. The task of the researcher is to write a narrative that encompasses participants' personal stories from the participants' perspectives (Josselson, 1995).

Based on these notions of narrative as a meaning-making structure that enables people to make sense of their experiences and come to know themselves and others, narrative methods may be particularly suitable for conducting research in the human sciences. Narrative inquiry is an open and flexible approach that enables us to explore those aspects of human experience, namely openness and emotionality, which have traditionally been underrepresented in the human sciences. It also allows us to come to terms with human constructions of reality, which are characterized by ongoing change and renewal, and to bring a sense of order and coherence to ever-changing human conditions (Brockmeier & Harré, 2001).

Narrative inquiry proposes that knowledge is co-constructed through dialogue. In research, both the storyteller and the recipient of the story are involved in constructing meaning, and both are located in a larger social and cultural context. The narrative is made up of the storyteller, the researcher and all the potential audiences the researcher represents, which makes the story a part of the participant's public life (Ochberg, 1994). In storytelling, it is language that provides the link between experience and understanding, and by listening to participants' stories of their experiences, we may "enter into dialogue with their meaning system" (Josselson, 1995, p.37).

According to Barthes (1966, as cited in Arvey, 2002), narratives can explain life and provide meaning on two levels. At the individual level, stories can reveal something of one's past, present and future life; at the sociocultural level, stories may bring together shared cultural beliefs and values. Thus, the narratives told by young women in this study about their same-sex desire in adolescence acted at the individual level to create meanings of their experiences, and also reflected the myriad social and cultural influences that informed the telling of these narratives.

The authority with which dominant narratives present cultural versions of reality is often achieved by concealing large parts of that reality, by dismissing, suppressing, or ignoring opposing or alternative voices (Brockmeier & Harré, 2001). According to Wertsch (1998, in Brockmeier & Harré, 2001), revealing alternative truths or realities is the power of narrative as a 'cultural tool.' Thus far, most 'narratives' of adolescent women's sexuality in human science theory and research have represented dominant discourses of sexuality, and have largely silenced or marginalized the voices of young women, in particular those who experience same-sex sexual desire. In this study, a discourse of heterosexism and homophobia was used to understand adolescent women's lived experience of same-sex desire. This discourse offers a critical perspective regarding the structures and practices in society that perpetuate antigay prejudice. The narratives I sought were ones that made known the personal realities and experiences of marginalized young women, as reflected in their voices and through the meanings they created in the telling of their stories.

One problem to be alerted to in this research is that the stories women tell about their lives are inhibited by the narrative structures and the forms of living that our culture

validates (Riessman, 1993). For example, women may choose to share only those elements of their narratives they believe the researcher and other prospective audiences will find least intolerable or uncomfortable, leaving out important facets of their lived experiences. In this study, one participant openly admitted during the follow-up interview that in the first interview, she had chosen not to reveal information about which she felt ashamed. As she was telling me the part of her story that caused her embarrassment, she stated that for the first time she was able to let go of some of the shame she had felt for so long.

Participants may also have chosen words that are 'acceptable,' rather than draw on language forms that might be nearer to their lives, thereby sidestepping the opportunity to reconstitute their lived experience. Related to this potential drawback is Fine's (1994) observation that qualitative research has frequently reproduced a colonizing discourse of the "Other," those situated at the margins of Western dominant culture (p. 70). Even if participants tell their story in raw, unrestrained fashion, researchers typically 'translate' their words into language and theoretical concepts that adhere to traditional and dominant Western academic requirements. In writing my participants' narratives, I used the third person. Although I tried to preserve the language used by participants and to represent them as accurately as possible, I realize that I applied my own interpretation and understanding to 'translate' their thoughts and feelings into my own language and writing style.

Researcher subjectivity. I would like to discuss my role as a researcher in this study. I believe that reflection on, and understanding of this issue has helped me to interpret the findings with greater insight. First, I attended to power relations in my

relationships with participants and in my construction of research narratives. I kept a reflexive journal in which I tracked my thoughts, assumptions and observations throughout the research process, particularly in my construction of the participants' narratives. Reflexivity includes acknowledging other readings of the text as equally valid, such that my narratives are not deemed to hold the final word. However, I am aware that my 'reading' of the stories may carry greater weight than the original stories of the participants. Reflexivity also involves the recognition that including participants in the analysis through member checks, for example, does not resolve the problem of power relations between the researcher and researched (Burr, 1995). Ultimately, the narratives I wrote reflect my subjective interpretations, which arise from my own position. Although I have done my best to stay as close as possible to the participants' original stories, I am aware that the final narrative is my interpretation of their storying efforts.

I have also considered how my location in society affected my interactions with different participants, and the kinds of information they might be willing to share with me, based on how they placed me. As a white woman, a graduate student engaging in research, and a self-identified lesbian, I was aware of my role during this research as both an insider and an outsider (Collins, 1986), and the impact this could have on what participants were prepared to disclose. Some of the participants might have seen me as an insider because I have had similar experiences with same-sex desire. Therefore, they might be more likely to speak openly about certain aspects of their experiences. However, I was doubtful that my status as an insider on the basis of this similarity alone would be sufficient to grant me full access to "inside knowledge" (Olesen, 2000, p. 227). It was just as likely that participants might perceive me as an outsider on the basis of

characteristics such as age, ability, education, or race, and thus withhold certain parts of their experiences during the interview.

The women in this study appeared to feel comfortable talking to me, possibly because I told them that I have had similar experiences with same-sex desire and I openly made known my position regarding women's sexuality, queer issues, and same-sex desire. They used terminology that 'outsiders' may not be familiar with, for example, 'FTM' (used to refer to individuals transitioning from the female to the male gender), and 'heterosexism,' without first having to explain what these terms mean. They also talked openly about the fact that they are attracted to women. Their apparent ease in discussing these issues and their use of insider 'jargon' was most likely a reflection of their knowledge that I hold positive views about same-sex desire.

At the same time, I may have been received with mixed feelings as a relatively privileged white graduate student, although if this were the case, it was not readily apparent in the interviews. Women who are in college or university may have felt most comfortable sharing their stories with me because they may have perceived me as similar to them, an insider because of my education. In contrast, some of the participants might have viewed me as an authority figure because of my age and education, and perhaps felt restrained or uncomfortable talking to an older adult. If this were the case, it would likely have influenced what they revealed about themselves. In fact, one of the participants in this study, a woman aged 19 and in second year university, appeared reluctant to speak if her thoughts were not "profound." My interpretation is that she may have perceived an education gap between her and myself, and perhaps assumed that I expected to hear only the most "profound" aspects of her experience. It might also explain why she seemed

hesitant to say much about herself or her experiences during the interview.

Women of colour may rightly have believed that I could not adequately represent their lives in the language of white academia. They may also have felt that as a white woman I did not understand what it is like to belong to a racial minority in a white dominant culture, and as an outsider, had no right to try and interpret their experiences. For these reasons, I reflected on the ethical implications and responsibilities of my role as a white woman considering issues of race. I felt that it was my role and responsibility to reflect on and discuss the ways in which belonging to a racial minority group in a white-dominated society influences the lived experience of same-sex desire in adolescence, as told by the women in this study, without assuming that the experiences of the participants can be generalized to others who belong to the same racial or cultural group. It was important, also, to bring the stories back to the women as many times as necessary to ensure that I adequately represented their experiences. The two women in this study who belong to a racial minority group reported that my representations of their experiences with race, culture, and same-sex desire accurately reflected what they had told me.

Working class women may have felt alienated and resentful if they believed I had class privilege as a university student, and they may have thought that I could not understand their experiences. I attempted to address these issues at the beginning of each interview by explaining why I was doing this research, and disclosing my identity, my role, my values, my background, and my worldview. I tried to reduce status differences as much as possible, while remaining aware that the researcher has greater power in the researcher-participant relationship, because ultimately, it is the researcher whose written word is read and whose voice is heard.

My own knowledge, values, biases, and presuppositions influenced the way I approached this research, and on my relationship and interactions with participants. One expectation I initially had is that at least some of the participants would feel uncomfortable speaking about their sexual desire in the interview, as young women are rarely, if ever, asked to talk about their sexuality or to disclose their sexual subjectivity (Fine, 1988; Ussher & Mooney-Somers, 2000). I discussed this openly with participants in the hope of alleviating some of their discomfort, but I also let them know that what they revealed was entirely up to them. I endeavoured to create a safe and non-judgmental atmosphere so that participants would feel more comfortable telling their story.

During the interviews, the women in this study openly discussed the fact that they felt same-sex desire in adolescence. They spoke about their relationships with friends and family, and their social contexts. However, most of the participants, as expected, spoke little about the physical dimensions of their desire, particularly their bodily sensations and expressions of desire. When I shared this finding with the participants in our follow-up interviews, some of the women disclosed that it was uncomfortable and embarrassing to talk to a stranger and a researcher about intimate sexual details, and to use language they would feel comfortable using only with close friends or intimate partners. Other women felt comfortable enough in the second interview to speak more openly about their bodily experiences, using such terms as “clitoral erection” and “going down on a woman” to describe what they have felt and done to express their same-sex desire.

As a lesbian who has experienced same-sex desire and who has known other women with similar experiences, I had some preconceived notions about what the stories might reveal. Many adolescent girls who experience same-sex desire repress or deny their

feelings, even after they have sex with another woman. Other girls/young women will come out and begin to identify as lesbian or bisexual soon after they become aware of their same-sex feelings. Still others may not even be aware that the feelings they have for other adolescent girls are sexual, although they may re-interpret these feelings as sexual at a later time. As expected, many of the stories revealed these patterns of recognition, self-acceptance, and self-identification.

My interest in this research reflects my own experience of same-sex desire in adolescence, and I approached this research from the perspective of someone who is supportive and affirming of same-sex sexuality and desire, in both women and men. As a lesbian and a feminist, I believe there is immense value in listening to and honouring women's stories about their experiences. For this reason, it was vitally important to create a safe space in which women could tell their stories. I exercised great caution when I wrote participants' narratives, striving always to represent them and their experiences respectfully, and as accurately as possible. The participants' stories frequently resonated with my own past and my struggles with the same issues around same-sex desire.

Part Two: A Narrative Research Design

Procedures

Participants. The sample consisted of 7 women aged 19-25 who provided retrospective narrative accounts of their lived experience of same-sex attractions in adolescence. I selected this age range because I was interested in knowing more about adolescent women's experience of same-sex desire in the 1990's. Women currently aged 19-25 were adolescents during the 1990's and were therefore able to provide the information sought for this study. I chose this number for my sample because in

qualitative research the aim is not to generalize to the population of adolescent women who experience same-sex desire, but rather to produce rich, in-depth knowledge about the lived experience of a few participants through the stories they tell. The length of the interviews and the type of data analysis used in this study would also have made it extremely time-consuming to interview more than this number of participants.

Selection criteria and recruitment. The selection criteria for participation in this study included being female, having had the experience of same-sex desire as a woman during adolescence, and the ability to articulate one's experiences in an interview setting. To find participants for this study, I searched broadly in various communities in Greater Vancouver where I expected to find women aged 19-25. I posted recruitment posters (see Appendix A) in the following locations in Greater Vancouver to increase the likelihood of finding young women of all sexual orientations: University and college campuses, fitness centres, community centres, libraries, and women's centres. I also contacted organizations by email where I thought I was likely to find lesbian and bisexual women aged 19-25. Some of these groups included Youthquest and GAB Youth Services. I also sent a letter of introduction by email (see Appendix B) to LGB social and support groups in several of the universities and colleges in the Lower Mainland. I left my phone number and email address so that potential participants could contact me for further information.

My sampling approach also included snowball sampling, whereby one of the women who saw my poster at a community centre spoke about my study to another young woman. She, in turn, contacted me and took part in the research. Snowball sampling is a convenient method for finding participants in a "closet" population that is not easily accessible (Palys, 1997, p. 139), such as lesbian and bisexual women.

I initially hoped to recruit participants from the wider community to try to generate a diverse sample in terms of race, class, and sexual identity, recognizing that this was an ideal objective. It must be noted that seeking a diverse sample did not mean I was seeking generalizability. A diverse sample would not mean that, for example, a black lesbian can speak for all black lesbians, but perhaps her story would illuminate the cultural elements at work in her story regarding race. This goal proved difficult to attain. Six out of the seven women who participated in this study were university or college students. Five of the women were Caucasian and two identified as Asian Canadian.

None of the participants self-identified as heterosexual. Three of the women stated that they have not adopted a sexual identity label on the basis of their sexual attraction to women, while the other four women described themselves as either lesbian, queer, gay, or pansexual. One participant stated that although she does not subscribe to a sexual identity, she does not mind when others label her a lesbian or dyke. Another woman located her same-sex attractions on the Kinsey scale rather than speak about them in terms of a sexual identity label.

Data collection procedures. The initial step in the data collection was to pilot test the research question and procedures with one person. The purpose of the pilot study was to familiarize myself with the procedures, to get a better idea of how I opened up the topic and invited women to tell their stories in the interview, to test the equipment that I was going to use, and to uncover and decide how to handle unanticipated problems. I used the same research design, method, and procedures in the pilot as in the actual study. I did not use the data from the pilot study in the analysis, because the participant was over the age of 25.

I utilized the four-stage narrative method developed by Arvay (1998, 2002) for the data collection procedure and data analysis. In the first stage, after volunteers contacted me, I phoned or emailed them in order to assess their suitability to participate, and to begin to develop rapport. First I asked whether they had experiences of same-sex desire in adolescence. I then ascertained their availability and commitment of time, and their ability to share their story. Once their suitability to participate was established, I explained the research question and the research process in detail, described the roles and responsibilities of both researcher and participant, expressed my values about the research relationship, and briefly explained the philosophy behind the research design, for example, the storied nature of our lives, that telling our story can be a transformative experience, that stories change with each retelling, and that the researcher cannot recapture the lived moment of telling in the research text. I wanted to convey this information because as a feminist it was important that my research remained transparent and collaborative, which meant being open with the participants about all aspects of the research.

I primed the participants by asking them to consider their lived experience of same-sex desire for about a week prior to the interview, so that they would have a better idea what they wanted to talk about. I also invited participants to bring to the interview any artefacts that relate to their lived experience of same-sex sexual desire, such as artwork, poetry, fiction, photographs, and journals. I explained that these could become an integral part of their story. One participant brought an artefact to the interview. This was a journal she had kept during her adolescent years, and in it she had written about issues related to her experience of same-sex sexual desire.

The interview. I conducted unstructured interviews with the 7 participants. All the interviews took place at the University of British Columbia. I obtained written informed consent from all the participants at the beginning of each interview (see Appendix C). The consent form contained the information participants needed to make an informed decision about taking part in the study, including the purpose of the research, any potential risks and benefits, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. I discussed the fact that interviews would be audiotaped, but that all notes and audiotapes would be destroyed upon completion of the analysis. In order to ensure anonymity, I asked the participants to choose a pseudonym to be used in place of their real name. I also offered to change any potentially identifying demographic information. All but one participant used a pseudonym. The one participant who chose to use her real name felt it was common enough that she would not be recognized. Further, she stated that she was not concerned about anonymity.

During the interviews, I took notes, writing down questions that I wanted to ask later, and anything else that seemed pertinent. Participants were interviewed individually, with each interview lasting 1 to 2 hours. I attempted to build rapport with participants by openly sharing information about the research, by coming out to them, and by using basic counselling skills such as active listening, attending, reflecting and summarizing. I did this both during and prior to the interviews, when I first contacted the participants.

I began each interview by delivering an orienting statement (see Appendix D). I also asked the participants what same-sex sexual desire means to them. I pointed out that women of all ages, and most relevant to this study, young women, are typically not asked to talk about their sexual desire, particularly their same-sex attractions, feelings, or

thoughts. I attempted to express my genuine wish to know their perceptions and experiences of their same-sex desire when they were adolescents. Asking young women to speak about their same-sex desire may be an effective way to interrupt the prevailing discourse on sexual desire (Tolman, 1994), and to begin to develop a new discourse in which same-sex desire has a prominent place. Building on Tolman's work with adolescent girls, and Ussher and Mooney-Somer's (2000) research on sexual desire in young lesbians, my objective was to hear the retrospective accounts of young women about their experience of same-sex sexual desire in adolescence.

I invited each participant to tell her story with the following orienting statement: "The principal question I want to ask you is, can you tell me, in your own words, your story about your experience of same-sex sexual desire when you were an adolescent?" Several participants found this question too open-ended and were uncertain how to begin. When this happened, I asked more specific questions about the participant's experience, using the prompts I had developed (see Appendix D). My goal in the interviews was to "invite stories" (Polanyi, 1985, in Arvey, 2002) from the participants regarding the research question, and to support participants in making their own choices about what to narrate.

Arvey (2002) states that researchers have to attend to the stories participants tell on two levels: at the micro-level of the individual experience of the participant and the macro-level of cultural discourse. I tried to engage at both an experiential and reflexive level, to hold "dual consciousness" (p. 213). I attempted to do this by listening not only to the content of the stories, but also to how the stories were told, which included paying attention to nuances, imagery, metaphors, paradoxes, silences, pauses, and body

language. I tried to apply Arvay's method as she encourages the researcher to reveal and clarify contradictions, ambiguities, and complexities, and express tacit knowledge through metaphor and body language. I did this by using my own body language, for example, nodding to express understanding or agreement, by asking for clarification when I was uncertain about the meaning of something, by asking about the participants' nonverbal behaviours, by comparing similar experiences that I have had, and by sharing my observations of complexities and contradictions in the stories. Narrative inquiry focuses on the storying aspects of the research because how the story is told can serve to illuminate the social and cultural contexts in which it is constructed, and help us understand its meaning within these contexts (Ezzy, 2002).

Chase (1995) points out the reality of narrative difficulties and complexities that may arise in the story, and the need to attend to the ways in which culturally problematic elements of stories may produce gaps, silences, disruptions, or contradictions. Given that women, particularly those who feel same-sex desire, have traditionally been silenced about their experiences, it was imperative to remain attentive and support participants in giving voice to the full complexity of their experiences. I tried to do this by listening for gaps, silences, and contradictions, and reiterating the invitation to participants to tell their story. In the follow-up interviews, I encouraged participants to fill in some of what they left out in the first interview, or to express more fully their contradictory feelings, and in this way bring out the richness in their stories (Chase, 1995).

Transcription process. After each interview was completed, I transcribed the conversation. All the interviews took place over a 3-week period, and the conversations were transcribed prior to the data analysis. According to Lapadat and Lindsay (1999),

transcription is a theoretical, interpretive and subjective process that is never complete. Transcripts are “constructed texts” (p. 76). Each researcher makes choices about what to transcribe and how to represent speech in text. Transforming the speech act into written text involves selection and reduction (Gumperz & Berenz, 1993; Riessman, 1993). Therefore, some parts of speech are included while others are excluded (Mishler, 1986). What is included or omitted depends on the researcher’s and/or transcriber’s assumptions (Arvey, 2002; Kvale, 1996), and theoretical preferences (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999).

Although reproduction of the conversation in its exact original form is unattainable (Arvey, 2002), partly because neither transcription nor language is transparent (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999), I attempted to reproduce the speech act as closely as possible. I listened carefully to the speech events, recording each element of the speech produced, for example, laughter, pauses, silences, gaps, hedging, and tone of voice. I observed those parts of speech that I recorded in my field notes that were inaudible on the tape, including body language, movement, facial expressions, environmental influences, and other contextual cues (Arvey, 2002). I attended to the process of telling the story as much as the story’s content.

In three of the interviews (Suzy, Karen, and Kase), it was difficult to hear parts of the conversation. I contacted these women and asked if they would meet with me to read their transcript and see if they could fill in some of the gaps. They all agreed. During our meetings, I asked the participants to read their transcripts and fill in those sections of their dialogue that I had marked “unclear.” When they could not recall the exact words they had used, I asked them to use whatever words they thought would best convey the general idea. All of these women also provided me with new or updated information,

some of which I later incorporated into their narratives. For example, I included in Kase's narrative a change she discussed in the second meeting. She reported that some time after our first interview, she met a man whom she found attractive, and this led her to reconsider the meaning of her sexual orientation and her location on the Kinsey Scale.

There are research implications to having an extra meeting and asking participants to retell parts of their story. From a social constructionist perspective, knowledge is jointly constructed through dialogue in social interactions (Burr, 1995). Therefore, an extra interview provided an opportunity for these three participants and myself to continue engaging in the co-construction of their narratives, thereby adding a new layer to their stories. I also saw these extra meetings as a chance to develop further rapport with the participants, which I believe influenced what they told me and how they spoke about their experiences. Two of the women appeared more at ease and spoke more openly during the second meeting and in the final interview when they provided feedback on their narratives. Finally, because it was not the intention for the procedures of this study to be standardized, I did not feel the need to meet with the other four participants for an extra interview, even though doing so might have further enriched their narratives, as it did with Suzy, Karen, and Kase. It appears from this study that having more time with participants may influence rapport building, which could in turn create a deeper and more open conversation. It may be that more research time is needed when personal topics involving painful or shameful experiences are being discussed.

Data Analysis

According to Chase (1995), the task of narrative analysis is to discover how participants embed general social processes in their personal narratives, and how

narratives embody the relationship between a particular life story and the social world in which the narrator lives. Chase has focused on how narratives may embody, reproduce, and sometimes change cultural scripts. Other narrative theorists and researchers have discussed the ways that narratives push at the boundaries of what is unspeakable in particular contexts (Greenspan, 1992), or how narration shapes self and identity (Arvay, 2000; Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992).

I have considered these aspects of narrative in my data analysis, and the ways in which social and cultural context might shape or restrict the narratives of young women (see Reading D: A Critical Reading), as well as the ways that each interviewee makes use of cultural resources and struggles with cultural limitations (Chase, 1995). By analyzing the stories of young women recollecting their lived experience of same-sex desire in adolescence, my hope was to learn about the kinds of narratives that are possible for this group of young women in the current social and political climate, and about the social and cultural context that makes their stories both possible and perhaps difficult to tell. I considered metaphors, gaps, pauses, and hesitations in speech that may have indicated a struggle to understand the meaning of an experience, and at what was not stated but alluded to in the text (Arvay, 2002)

Narrative Analysis. Once all the interviews were transcribed, I conducted four readings of each transcript, as per the method delineated by Arvay (1998, 2002):

- a) *Reading for Content.* In the first reading, I read the transcription to see if the content of the interview appeared coherent, and to identify any changes or corrections to be made.
- b) *Reading for the self of the narrator.* In the second reading, I read for the narrator's various 'I' positions. Arvay (2002) suggests that the researcher ask: Who is telling this

story? How is she situated in this story? What is she feeling? What are her struggles? How does she present herself? What meaning is she trying to convey? What parts of self does she share and what parts are kept hidden? Why? As the protagonist of her own story, what does she want to convey to the reader? The purpose of this reading was to highlight the ways in which the narrator constructed herself in the text.

c) *Reading for the research question.* Here, I looked for the participants' responses to the research question. I attempted to find places in the text where each participant spoke about her lived experience of same-sex sexual desire in adolescence. Arvay (2002) instructs the researcher to ask: What meaning did the narrator make of her experiences? How did she make sense of these experiences? What was not said, or implied? What were the contradictions between her words and actions and/or my interpretations as a reader? What metaphors did she use, and how did they help her to make meaning of her experiences? In this reading, I looked for details of participants' personal experience with the research question, as well as layers of tacit knowledge. This interpretive reading process is "reflexivity-in-action" that involves multiple layers of meaning-making as the reader moves from the "story-as-told" to other possible interpretations of meanings, always searching for the multiple meanings of the research question (Arvay, 2002).

d) *A critical reading: Reading for relations of power and culture.* This reading is a critical analysis. As I read the text I looked for suggestions of power imbalances along the lines of gender, race, sexual orientation, and any other areas in which people experience oppression. Arvay (2002) suggests that the researcher ask: In what ways did the narrator appear to struggle with social injustice? Where was she silenced? When did she lose her voice? Is the narrator conscious of the political and cultural influences in her

life? How do I understand her history, her context, and her social world? In what ways are her 'personal realities' challenged? In this reading, my goal was to unearth the cultural discourse at work in the text. This reading comprises a cultural critique of the various forces (i.e., political, social, psychological, biological, technical, etc.) that are involved in the construction of the self that is narrated in the research text.

I attempted to achieve clarity on each reading, and then formulated a plot line placing the episodes in sequential and temporal order. I wrote the narrative accounts in the third person. Finally, I read across all the participants' narratives to highlight commonalities and major disparities. An across narrative thematic analysis will be presented in the results chapter.

Sharing the Narratives

Once the narratives were written and reviewed by an outside reader for content and flow, I emailed each participant a copy of her narrative, or gave her a copy in person. I asked each of the participants to read her story and express her reactions, thoughts, feelings, and opinions regarding the accuracy of my representations of her experiences, my interpretations, and my conclusions. At the end of each story, I included questions for the participants to consider and respond to. These questions had come up for me as I conducted the analysis and wrote the narratives. I also told the participants that I would email or phone them to set up a time to review the narrative together. The follow-up interviews were conducted in-person with six of the participants. One of the participants did not provide feedback regarding her narrative, in spite of several attempts on my part to set up a time for a follow-up interview over a period of three months. She has not told

me if she read her narrative, or what her thoughts were about it. I did not pursue her further, given that participation is voluntary.

During the follow-up interviews with six participants, I took notes and incorporated new or updated information into their narratives, with their prior verbal consent. Overall, the comments were positive, and most of the participants made only minor editorial corrections and changes to content, for example, ages at which certain events took place. In the follow-up interviews, all the participants stated that I accurately represented their experience of same-sex desire in adolescence. Some of the participants reported feeling excited to have their story written on paper, and stated they would consider sharing it with important people in their life.

Criteria for Evaluating the Worth of this Study

I have used three of the criteria set out by Arvay (1998) to evaluate the worth of the study. These are: Resonance, coherence, and pragmatic use. Arvay's criteria are based on Riessman's (1993) discussion of evaluating the worth in narrative research. The methodology of this study is rooted in social constructivism, which supports the view that the narrative accounts were co-constructed by the women in this study and myself as researcher. Therefore, positivist criteria for rigour, such as reliability or generalizability, are not well suited to evaluate this study. What follows is a brief description of the three criteria, and the ways in which this study met the requirements of each criterion.

1. *Resonance*: Resonance as defined by Arvay (1998) is about whether the narrative resonates with the reader's own personal experiences. The reader is asked to consider the following questions: Does it resonate with your own personal experiences? Does it touch you? Does it evoke emotion in you? Does it feel true?

The narratives were given to two independent reviewers, who were asked if the stories resonated with their experiences, felt true, and reached them on an emotional level.

2. *Coherence*: This concept is based on the work of Agar and Hobbs (1982), who proposed three levels of coherence: global, local, and themal. Riessman (1993) argues that coherence must be as “thick” as possible to show that an interpretation is more than ad hoc, ideally covering all three levels (p. 67). Global coherence concerns the larger goal a narrator tries to achieve in telling a story, for example, to justify an action. Local coherence applies to how a narrator attempts to connect events in a story. Thematic coherence relates to content. The contents of a narrative can be grouped together to form themes, and coherence is achieved at this level when common themes emerge over and over in an interview. The researcher’s interpretation of the text, which is influenced by her values and beliefs, affects coherence. In this study, I tried to establish coherence by asking participants for their comments about whether the story flowed and the events and ideas seemed to be logically connected. I also asked the peer reviewers whether the stories they read were coherent and whether they could get a sense of the person in the story.
3. *Pragmatic Use*: This criterion refers to the extent that knowledge gained from a study informs others’ research and sheds light on the human condition. I asked the peer reviewers if they thought other researchers would benefit from hearing the narratives from this research in workshops or other forms of presentation, and if they considered the results potentially useful to counsellors, parents, educators, health professionals, and others.

Independent Review

The purpose of the independent review was to have the narratives validated by two queer women who are familiar with LGBT social and political issues, and who have experienced same-sex sexual desire, using the criteria for evaluating the worth of the study: Coherence, resonance, and pragmatic use. I asked them to read the narratives and offer their review and editorial comments. Reviewer #1 was asked to read four narratives and reviewer #2 was asked to read three narratives. They were given the following written instructions:

Please read each narrative two times. The first reading is for you to gain an overall understanding or feel for what is being talked about, and to familiarize yourself with the story. As you read each story a second time, please consider and briefly respond to the following questions:

1. Is this a coherent story? Does it flow? Do you get a sense of what the story was trying to get across? Do you get a sense of the person the story is about?
 2. Does this story resonate with your own experiences of same-sex desire in adolescence? Is it believable? Does it 'feel' true? Does it evoke an emotional response in you?
 3. Is this a pragmatic story? Would it be useful for others to hear this story?
- Would it be useful to present this information at workshops and other settings to help people understand adolescent girls' experience of same-sex sexual desire?
- Would parents, educators, school counsellors, social workers, and others benefit from hearing these stories?

The comments of the independent reviewers are included in the following section

as direct quotes.

Independent review #1. I found all the stories to be coherent and easy to follow. I really got a sense of the person in each story. Each woman's personality shines through and has a different flavour. I could relate to all the narratives. I was especially able to relate to Mary Beth's story because of my own experience of Christianity as a teenager: The constant vigilance, trying to suppress thoughts I "shouldn't" have, the rebelling, feeling like I had to reject my religious beliefs. All the stories resonated with my experience of same-sex desire in adolescence. I was particularly struck by the finding that all the girls had crushes and that some of them seemed confused about whether their feelings were sexual. I can really relate to this experience. I recall having "crushes" or attractions to other girls that I never really thought of as sexual at all, except in retrospect while reading about the women in this study having this same sort of retrospective experience. I found it interesting to read about the role of culture, and how all the factors of race, culture, etc. interact to make the stories complex. I think that it would be useful for others to hear these stories. People need to know that being closeted is such hard work, and that it is such a relief to come out and not have to lie anymore! They also need to understand the harmful effects that being exposed to homophobic beliefs has on adolescent girls, and the importance of having positive portrayals of women's same-sex relationships in the media.

Independent Review #2. I was really struck by the diversity represented in these stories. I got a clear sense of three unique people and sets of circumstances, their responses to those circumstances, and all the different issues that were raised. All

the stories were coherent, and I got a sense of who these girls were and how they were thinking as they were growing up. I knew that I was bi when I was 14, and like these women, I didn't have any opportunities to meet other queer girls. I relate to the isolation, and not being able to relate to my heterosexual friends. I noticed that most of these women don't label themselves. I think this is generational. It seems to be more acceptable now to have an ambiguous sexuality.

I was able to relate to some of the stories more than others. I can really understand how Gretchen's early acceptance of her same-sex desire was made easier because she wasn't in school where there was rampant homophobia. When I was in high school in the 1980s (I went to a fundamentalist Christian high school), the big issue was abortion. Homosexuality was a non-issue and there was a certain amount of safety in that. I felt protected because my peers would never assume I was gay. People just didn't know or suspect, and you could get away with being physical with other women, like putting your arm around a girl or a teacher you secretly liked. Today, homosexuality is much more of an issue. It's more visible. Adolescents always think about who's gay, and there is still gender conformity. If you don't fit your gender, you're assumed to be gay. Social vigilance comes with the awareness of queer issues. I also related to Gretchen's partial acceptance of her same-sex desire. I was ok with liking women around that age but would not have acted on it. Sex was not a possibility when I was still influenced by the church. And like Gretchen, I had a sexual dream that made me acknowledge I was gay.

I also related to parts of Suzy's story. Her mom freaking out at her knowledge of sex at an early age reminds me of an incident when I was 9 years old. I had a friend over and we were watching TV, and I had my arm around him. My mom came into the room, saw us, freaked out and threw him out of the house. Like Suzy, I also wrote about guys in my diary, and I pretended to have feelings for boys that I was really having for girls. I would talk to my friends about boys, as though I liked them. I had self-doubt about my sexuality, like Suzy. I thought that unless I was attracted to all women, I could not be a lesbian. The very first time I had sex with a woman, I had to ask myself if I was actually attracted to her. If not, then am I really gay? Most straight women who don't enjoy their first experience of intercourse don't think of questioning their sexual orientation! I also relate to Suzy's descriptions of being attracted to intelligent women and women with sexy voices.

I found Roya's story the hardest to relate to. Her story was full of contradictions, especially where it comes to her parents. She said that she was raised to be open-minded and independent, yet she also claims her parents are homophobic, and she hasn't come out to them.

I think these stories have pragmatic value. The subtleties of the stories are things that people who work with queers don't always get. Quantitative studies tend to make generalizations, and I think qualitative studies are good for picking out specific points of interest, for example, the fact that Gretchen could accept herself secretly but not publicly. This is a useful insight into how to be helpful.

Knowing all this would help teachers to spot queer students and identify them, to be helpful and supportive.

Limitations of the Findings

First, the sample size in this narrative study is relatively small ($n=7$), and participants were drawn from an unrepresentative pool (Riessman, 1993). Second, the findings for this qualitative research are context-bound, and so may not be generalized beyond the experiences of the women who participate. However, it must be noted that generalizability is not a goal of qualitative research. The objective is rather to illuminate participants' experiences by providing rich, in-depth descriptions. Third, I am aware of my own limitations as a white graduate student attempting to represent the experiences of women of other ages, races, classes, and educational levels. Another limitation is that the sample does not include heterosexual women. Further, the construal of same-sex desire was not operationally defined as per quantitative research. Finally, from this study, we are unable to know about adolescent women living in other cultures, countries, or even rural British Columbia, because all the participants grew up in urban and suburban neighbourhoods.

CHAPTER IV

Results

The purpose of this chapter is to present the retrospective narrative accounts of seven young women's experiences of same-sex sexual desire in adolescence. Each narrative account represents an abridged version of the original interview and is an attempt to answer the research question: What stories do young women construct about their same-sex sexual desire experiences during their adolescent years? It is an attempt to enable the reader to gain insight into these young women's experiences as told by them. I have tried to stay as true to the participants' voices as possible, realizing that the narratives I wrote are a joint construction of their lived experience and our participation in an interactive conversation. The narratives reflect my voice as much as theirs, since I wrote the final narrative accounts. This chapter begins with the individual women's stories, followed by an across narrative thematic analysis represented in five themes: Growing up in a homophobic and heterosexist environment, repression and denial of same-sex desire in adolescence, unfulfilled desire, secrecy and self-silencing, and reaching self-acceptance.

Introduction to the Narratives

I have chosen to express the narratives in the third person to reflect my subjective interpretation of the participants' telling of these narratives and my role in their construction. The narratives are chronological accounts of the participants' experience of same-sex sexual desire from childhood to early adulthood, with a focus on their adolescent years. Regarding confidentiality and anonymity, I have used pseudonyms for the participants and all third parties mentioned in the interviews. The names of all

individuals are thus fictional. Any identifying markers, such as names of suburbs or small towns, were disguised to provide anonymity.

Narratives

Story #1: Gretchen

Introduction. *Gretchen is a 21-year-old university student. She grew up in a family consisting of two married, heterosexual parents and one brother. She was raised in a suburb outside a large Canadian city, where Christianity and heterosexuality were the norm, and sexual 'deviance' was not well tolerated. Although Gretchen's parents are not Christian, and Gretchen does not view them as homophobic, she states that they are traditional, and under the influence of certain individuals in their conservative community, for a time her mother became "anti-tolerant." Gretchen's relationship with her parents has been characterized by emotional distance, and she says that she has never told them much about her life, especially her sexual feelings for women.*

Childhood sexual games and same-sex desire. *Gretchen first became aware of having sexual feelings for girls around the age of eleven. When asked what comes to mind when she thinks about sexual desire during that time in her life, Gretchen is immediately taken back to her elementary school days and her female friends, who were very important to her.*

When Gretchen was ten, she had a close friend with whom she spent much of her time, and who would regularly sleep over at her house. She recounts an incident where she and her friend were playing "sexual games" and she felt uncomfortable with the feelings that were stirred up in her body. At the time she did not recognize these feelings

as sexual, but now she views this incident as her first physical experience of same-sex desire.

Around this time in her life, Gretchen and her female friends would play kissing games, which were bound by firm rules and guidelines. Gretchen soon discovered that she enjoyed kissing girls, but understood the unspoken rule that this was forbidden territory outside the structured setting she and her friends created. At that time, 'sexual desire' was not a very conscious thing for Gretchen, and she did not know that sexual attraction could happen between girls. However, she knew she felt something that perhaps she was not supposed to feel. Gretchen did not yet judge these feelings negatively, but she had already figured out that she was not free to express or talk about them. She now sees what happened then as episodes in her life that involved same-sex sexual desire.

Learning to hide her thoughts and feelings. At age 11, Gretchen moved to another country where she and her family lived on a boat for three years. During this time, Gretchen was home-schooled and had little contact with other children her age. Gretchen recalls this as a difficult period in her life. For one, she felt isolated without her friends, and she felt emotionally distanced from her parents. She also began to recognize that her feelings for girls were sexual, and that these feelings were not socially acceptable. This is when she began to develop a 'mental conflict' about being sexually attracted to girls. Although she did not know that queer women existed, Gretchen knew how she felt, and she quickly learned that she must hide her thoughts and emotions.

Gretchen tried to conceal her feelings not only from the world, but also from herself. Over time she came to accept these social injunctions, and took it upon herself to

get rid of her same-sex desire. She made contracts with herself to avoid having sexual thoughts, feelings, or fantasies about girls for specified periods of time, hoping that eventually they would go away. For two years she created contract after contract, each one as futile as the last. After countless attempts to suppress her same-sex feelings, frustrated and worn out from making pacts with herself, Gretchen finally admitted to herself that her persistent same-sex attractions were not going to go away, and that she would have to stop trying to repress them.

Age 13: Accepting her same-sex desire. Having learned somewhere, possibly during her years of attending Christian schools and from her traditional community, that homosexuality is wrong, Gretchen continued to believe that she was deviant and "screwed-up" because of her same-sex feelings. However, she decided that there was nothing wrong with being deviant, and that she would no longer fight it. At the age of 13, Gretchen accepted her same-sex desire.

Gretchen attributes her ability to accept herself at such a young age to the fact that she was not exposed to the rampant homophobia that is present in junior high schools. She believes that had she been attending a regular school during this time and subjected to discrimination and harassment, it would have been much more difficult to accept herself. Gretchen's acceptance of her same-sex feelings was "synonymous with my complete individuality...with my affirmation of myself." It brought her great joy, and a sense of clarity and openness. She also learned around this time about the existence of 'queer women' as a sexual identity.

Gretchen's acceptance of her same-sex desire was primarily emotional at first, and her "sexuality was still somewhat removed." Although she now gave herself

permission to fantasize about girls, becoming sexually involved with another girl or masturbating "would have been going just too far..." In fact, it would be several years before she was ready to physically express her same-sex desire and tell others about it. In the meantime, she came up with a plan to hide her feelings from society. The plan was to grow up, pursue a profession, and marry a gay man who would be her best friend. This idea arose from the belief that she could not be gay and 'out'. Since she was resigned that no one should ever find out, it seemed like a clever way of keeping her secret and protecting herself from criticism and rejection.

The adolescent years: Dating, political involvement, and living a double life.

When Gretchen was 14 and her family returned to Canada, she began to date boys, even though she knew she was not really interested in them and had no emotional connection to them. It did not take long for Gretchen to decide that she needed a break from dating. For two years, she did not go out with any boys, but she dated girls during this time. There were few queer girls in her community, and Gretchen found she had little in common with the girls who were available. She dated primarily out of loneliness, and found her relationships less than satisfying. She did not become sexually involved with these girls, and she only came out to a select group of friends.

Around the age of 14-15, Gretchen began to join feminist and queer youth groups. As a result of her involvement in these groups, same-sex desire became closely tied to politics. Gretchen developed an interest in such issues as politics of the body and reproductive rights. She also got to know other adolescents who were accepting of diverse sexualities and with whom she felt more comfortable talking about her feelings.

During her teenage years, Gretchen believed that she felt same-sex desire because part of her brain was male: "I thought it was possible that there was some portion of my...brain make-up that was a male, and then the rest of me was female. And that's the way I justified a lot of it." She assumed that most other girls did not have this "boy part" inside them, and thought she might be the only person who felt this way. In her sexual dreams, Gretchen would have sex with girls as a boy, which reinforced her belief about having a 'male' brain.

Gretchen's parents were unaware of her experiences during her adolescent years, including the process of discovering her same-sex desire and her sexual identity, and her growing knowledge of feminist and queer politics. While Gretchen's parents were waiting for her to begin dating boys so that they could explain the facts of life to her, she was leading a whole different life they knew nothing about. Gretchen thinks they suspected that something was going on, because she gave them plenty of hints about her sexual attraction to girls, but they did not bring it up and they continued to expect or at least hope that she would eventually become interested in boys.

Gretchen was selective about who she came out to during her teenage years. Her parents and her community were traditional, and she believed they would not accept her 'deviant' sexuality. High school was also an unsafe place to come out, due to the presence of homophobia. The only safe place where Gretchen could be herself was with her small group of friends, whose acceptance and openness made her experience of same-sex sexual desire bearable.

Coming of age: New opportunities to express same-sex desire. At the age of 17, Gretchen began to physically express her same-sex desire, mainly through fantasy and

masturbation. She also continued to date girls. However, it was not until she was 19 and started to go to gay bars where she could meet other queer women that Gretchen began to express her sexual desire more openly. For the first time in her life she felt capable of being sexual with women and feel ok about it. She describes this as an exciting time, a time for celebrating her sexuality. "...when I was 19 and after being holed up in suburbia for my entire life, I wasn't like, 'Gee, I really wanna have a consistent emotional relationship with some girl' ...it was very much a physical thing and very much an affirmation, a celebration of the purely sexual side of same-sex relationships." The focus was on the physical expression of sexual desire, and "there was very little relationshiping going on."

Coming out to family. Gretchen came out to her mother about a year ago, at the age of 21. She explains that she would have told her mother earlier, but her mother was "anti-tolerant" and Gretchen thought coming out would have made her life more difficult. However, Gretchen felt that her mother was becoming less homophobic over time, and this change prompted her to finally come out. Gretchen's mother handled her coming out somewhat negatively, but has since become more accepting, to the point where Gretchen now talks openly with her about dating women. Ironically, coming out has brought Gretchen closer to her mother, whom she now trusts more than ever. She still has not come out to her father, but she suspects that he would not be surprised or upset by the news.

Conclusion. Gretchen wishes that her adolescent years had had more of a balance, and more opportunities to be open and be able to express all aspects of her sexuality. At this point in her life, the ideal expression of same-sex desire includes both

the physical and emotional elements, and sexually healthy behaviour means having an emotional connection with the women she gets involved with. Gretchen considers anonymous sex that lacks any emotional connection to be very isolating.

For Gretchen, the idea of same-sex desire remains closely tied to politics and identity. She is involved in queer politics at her university, and has become part of a community where she feels she belongs and where she can be open about her sexual orientation. Gretchen now identifies as pansexual, which is a term that includes both sexual orientation and gender identity. Gretchen has chosen this label because it does not box her into any particular gender. She has learned, from her relationships with people who do not subscribe to the male/female gender dichotomy, not to take gender identity for granted, but rather, to be conscious of the existence of a range of gender and sexual possibilities.

Story #2: Roya

This narrative consists of two parts. The first section includes an introduction followed by a chronological account of Roya's experiences of same sex desire from age two to the present. The second part is a poem that I wrote to illustrate my understanding of Roya's experiences of sexual desire.

Part One

Introduction. *Roya is a 21-year-old woman who lives in Vancouver. She was born in Canada, and lived in various parts of the country with her parents and brother during her childhood and adolescence. She has known for most of her life that she is sexually attracted to women, though she has not adopted a sexual identity label based on her same-sex feelings. Roya has accepted her attraction to women for as long as she can*

remember, and attributes her openness and flexibility to her upbringing. Her parents raised her to think for herself, be independent, and be who she is. As a result, she has been able to develop a positive understanding of her same-sex desire while growing up in a heterosexist culture.

Two years of age: Earliest memory of same-sex desire. Roya's story begins at the age of two, with her recollection of her first experience of same-sex desire. Roya remembers having a vague sense of pleasure associated with being examined by her female doctor during an appointment. She is not sure exactly what she felt at the time, but she now seems to understand this experience as:

the equivalent of whatever a 2-year-old can have of a sexual fantasy of my doctor...I don't remember what it entailed. I just remember that, I mean I was about 2 and I remember being like, 'Hmm...' as she poked and prodded me, you know, the stethoscope and stuff. And I was all like, 'I'm into this.' But I don't think I...I mean I was 2, I don't know.

This is the first incident Roya recalls that, in her mind now, was akin to the experience of same-sex desire. Asked how she is able to remember this particular incident, Roya replies that she has always been a "sensually-driven person," and that these kinds of experiences, although now only a hazy memory and perhaps only slightly related to her current understanding of sexual desire, have remained with her.

Five years of age: Intense feelings and sexual exploration. Roya describes herself as a sensual child with the capacity to feel intensely about all kinds of things, including but not limited to her emerging sexuality. She often felt ecstatic about life, "just an overwhelming kind of orgasmic feeling, just to be outside, you know..." She has a clear recollection of her sexual feelings at this age, and remembers that she began to masturbate around this time. Her parents would catch her "in the act" and tell her not to

do it. Roya wondered why she was not supposed to masturbate, but she did not stop. In fact, she looks back at herself as a "masturbating fiend" from the age of five to eleven.

Nine to twelve years of age: Same-sex desire as sexual play. When she was nine, Roya had a best friend with whom she spent a great deal of her time. They frequently slept over at each other's house, and Roya remembers that they engaged in sexual play:

We were just always together, and I seem to recall that we used to play with each other a bit. But it was always in this, very kind of, "We didn't actually do it," kind of....I think I was more into it than she was. I was very much so, like, "Cool! This is interesting." Um, it would be like (whispers playfully): "After we were asleep." It was in my sleep, I wasn't responsible for it...

Roya regarded this exploration as interesting, but was reluctant at the time to acknowledge the sexual nature of their play.

At age 11, Roya met another girl who she became very close with, and with whom she played games such as drawing pictures on each other's backs. She remembers that she and her friend would take risks during this game, such as "moving just a little too much on the side," as they cautiously pushed the boundaries of acceptable play between friends.

Ages 13 to 17: Transcending play. "I like you": Around age 13 was Roya's first acknowledgement of same-sex desire for her new best friend Liz, with whom she had a long-distance friendship and whom she would see at summer camp for a few weeks every year. Roya and Liz were close and acknowledged their love for one another. They were "...open with each other about it, about just how absolutely incredibly in love with each other we were." They also told their friends about their love for each other.

Roya shared her most sensual moment ever with Liz. They were at camp one summer, and Liz wasn't feeling well. One night when Liz was feeling particularly ill,

Roya climbed into her bed, curled up next to her, and started reading aloud from her book. Roya describes this moment of closeness and intimacy that she and Liz shared as "the best, the best moment that I've ever...It's like the top, it's never been topped." It was the greatest moment because it was wonderful in itself and it did not lead to sex. It's not that Roya did not want to have sex with Liz, it's that she did not want this moment to be spoiled by taking it any further.

In spite of their closeness, and although Roya was sexually and emotionally attracted to Liz, they never considered themselves to be in a romantic relationship, and they never had sex. Roya did not want to make a move until she felt certain Liz was clear about how she felt, and this never happened. Roya felt resigned to Liz's mixed messages. However, she was also frustrated that Liz did not seem to share her feelings, or at least did not appear to be ready for a commitment of any kind. At 15, Roya "was solid" about what she wanted, and did not judge her same-sex feelings, which felt natural to her. Her self-knowledge and self-acceptance added to her frustration with Liz's inability to decide what she wanted. She often felt used by Liz, who would kiss her in front of boys at parties, but never when they were alone. For a long time Roya waited, wondering if Liz would ever want to be more than friends. This never happened, and over time Roya became tired of waiting. She gradually accepted that they would never be together as a couple, and moved on.

During high school, Roya's sexual involvements were primarily with boys, but she also had sexual encounters with girls. She did not become emotionally connected to most of the boys she went out with, and she took girls more seriously than boys. However, she feels that girls did not take her seriously. For example, she would find herself at a party

kissing a girl for the benefit of boys, and she would feel awkward and disgusted, like she was "being used as a vessel for male entertainment." She would have preferred to have private, intimate moments with the girls she was attracted to, but this wish never seemed to materialize.

Roya recalls being "promiscuous" in high school. She does not regret it because she remembers her headspace:

I wasn't hindered by the conservative norms or constricted by the conditioned ideas of what and who a girl was s'posed to be...Some people inevitably saw me as a skank. A slutty immoral blahblahblah. Others didn't really judge one way or the other. I was me and I happened to have a lot of sex. Whatever. A few people even admired and looked up to me. They saw me as a liberating force for women. This was reinforced by the fact that I never really apologized for myself.

Roya did not feel bad about having sex the way other teenage girls she knew did, and she rarely talked about sex with her friends. "I wasn't obsessed with it the way other people were, and why should anyone be? It's just one aspect of an entire multifaceted individual." Sex was just something she did, and she refused to bow down to social restrictions on girls' sexual behaviours. Roya did not always find her sexual encounters satisfying, because her desire to "share moments" with the person she was being intimate with was often at odds with her partners' primary goal, which was to "get their rocks off."

Conclusion. *Although Roya had many sexual experiences in her adolescent years, she did not have a girlfriend until recently. About a year ago, when Roya was living in Ontario, she met Carly, a woman who was visiting from British Columbia. Some time after Carly returned to B.C., Roya decided to move to Vancouver. She claims, "I didn't come to Vancouver looking for a relationship with Carly. I came to Vancouver because*

her personality turned me on.” She states that she wanted to be in Carly’s presence and had no other expectations of her at the time. Eventually, though, she and Carly became romantically involved.

Roya has chosen not to adopt a sexual identity label to reflect her same-sex desire and her relationships with women. She considers labels to be limiting and prefers not to take on an identity on the basis of only one aspect of herself. She also explains that she has not had a ‘coming out’ process, which is related to her wish to avoid being labelled on the basis of her sexual desires.

Roya’s parents are “not aggressively homophobic,” but she believes that her dad may be “a little homophobic,” and somewhat uncomfortable with the topic of homosexuality. Roya has not told her parents about her same-sex attractions or her relationship with Carly. She figures that if she is ever in a long-term relationship, “...eventually my parents will catch on.” She also believes that her mother has already figured it out.

Roya speaks about feeling misunderstood by others. She considers herself to be a “conceptual” person and relates this to her struggle to articulate her thoughts and feelings to people. When she was a teenager, she wanted more than anything to share intimate, sensual moments that did not always lead to sex. Her intentions were typically mistaken for the desire for sex, and she ended up having more sex than she would have liked. She found it difficult to express her true wishes, to tell the people she was attracted to that she was looking for the sensual more than the sexual. In her current relationship, Carly has helped Roya learn to express herself more directly and honestly. She has

“pushed” Roya to communicate, requiring that she recognize and clearly state who she is and what she wants from their relationship.

Part Two

This section of the narrative is a one-page poem that illustrates my understanding of Roya’s experience of sexual desire. I wrote this poem by taking words and phrases used by Roya in different places throughout the interview, and combining them to create a verse. I took out hedges such as “um, uh, like” so that Roya’s words flow together more smoothly. Otherwise, I have used direct quotes of Roya’s words. I have chosen to italicize rather than place the poem in quotation marks.

I was compelled to write this poem because I found Roya’s speech to be lyrical, and I wanted to try to capture the way in which she spoke about the sensuality and intimacy that are such vital elements in her experience of same-sex desire. I wished to convey not only the content of Roya’s speech, but also how she expressed her thoughts and feelings. The style in which she spoke revealed at least as much about Roya’s impressions as what she actually told me.

Roya mentioned in our follow-up interview that she felt the poem resonated with her experience of sexual desire. She particularly liked how sensuality was illustrated in the poem, since for her this is the most important aspect of sexual desire.

Roya: Impressions of Sexual Desire

*When I think of sexual desire, for me it’s a lot of imagery
But not actually sexual-based imagery
My sexual desire is not very sexually-based
It’s not a physical act*

*When I feel sexual desire I’m thinking about it
Looking at the person I’m interested in across the room
Watching them be, a little far away...*

*If someone's really captivating me in conversation
I'll feel kind of that little tingle
"Wow, you're really interesting!"*

*The tease of someone being kind of unattainable, but not quite, you know?
It's not the act of having them that's desirable to me
It's watching them
Seeing them be
Just existing, who they are*

*I like to think that I'm very capable of having love affairs with people
Without ever actually touching them
A little distance, you know*

*I really like to listen to my girlfriend play guitar
For me, that's like a moment
A really sexually intense moment*

*I get really overwhelmed with a really just deep feeling of love and appreciation
That I know and get to share space with this person,
That I'm involved in their life*

*It's yummy, yummy creamy
Really, really good food turns me on
If it's really, really yummy, I'm like, "Wow! Mmmmm!"*

*Don't get me...I do enjoy the sex part
But for me that's not the primal, not the means to the ends and the ends...
I'm not sure
It's [sex] not necessary for me... to feel sated, I guess*

Story #3: Suzy

Introduction. Suzy is a 25-year-old woman who identifies as queer. She was born in the Philippines and immigrated to Canada with her family at the age of two. She spent her childhood and adolescence living with her parents and sister in the Lower Mainland. Suzy currently lives in her parents' home, is attending university, and has plans to pursue a Master's degree after completing her undergraduate studies. Suzy has been in a relationship with a woman named Jackie for several years. Suzy identifies culturally as 'Asian-Canadian born in the Philippines' and prefers to use the term 'queer' to describe

her sexual orientation. Suzy has been attracted primarily to women since her childhood and adolescence.

Suzy grew up in a Catholic environment that was hostile toward homosexuality and had a profound influence on her experience of same-sex desire. Suzy's childhood is filled with painful memories of sexual repression and antigay rhetoric. Suzy remembers, for instance, sitting in church and feeling immense pain as she listened to the priest denounce homosexuality and watched her mother nodding in agreement. Her mother has openly stated that being gay is sinful and immoral, and while she "tolerates" the fact that Suzy is "homosexual," she disagrees with homosexuality.

Homophobic attitudes in her community drove Suzy into the closet during her adolescent years. When she realized that she was sexually attracted to women, Suzy decided it would be safer to keep her feelings hidden from others. In spite of her negative experiences with the Catholic faith, however, Suzy has been able to interpret some of her experiences in a positive light by drawing on her belief in God. For example, Suzy's ability to accept her same-sex desire was anchored in the notion that God made her that way, and hence, there was no point in trying to change.

Age 4-9: Learning heterosexuality and suppressing forbidden knowledge. Suzy states that she knew quite a lot about sex at an early age. She believes that much of her understanding about sex came from watching television. She also attributes her early understanding of sexuality to her family's beliefs and values, which were informed both by their Catholic faith and by Asian culture. At the age of 4, for example, Suzy was already aware that sex was supposed to take place between a man and a woman who

were married. She knew that Ken and Barbie were a couple, and this meant that you had to be a boy to like a girl, and vice versa.

Suzy also learned early on that she was not supposed to know about sex. One day when Suzy and her mother were watching a show on TV, and Suzy conveyed her understanding that the show contained sexual undertones, her mother reacted by yelling and "freaking out" at Suzy, saying that she wasn't supposed to know about this. Her mother's reaction of outrage to Suzy's understanding of sexuality made it clear to Suzy that the expression of sexual knowledge was not acceptable, and that she needed to keep certain kinds of information to herself. She later learned that one bit of information that must be kept hidden was her sexual attraction to women.

Age 9: First experience of same-sex desire. Suzy clearly remembers the day when she first became aware of feeling same-sex sexual desire. She was watching a movie at home with her parents, when all of a sudden it dawned on her that she might be in love with the lead actress:

...she had cute hair, red hair and curly, and she was so hot! I was sitting there and watching it and like, I'm getting, you know, a reaction. I'm like, "What's that?" And I'm like, "I think I'm in love with Leah Thompson" [the lead actress].

Suzy was not yet able to distinguish between being in love, and feeling sexual desire without being in love. According to Catholic teachings, love and sexual desire had to happen together. Although having sex was not a consideration for Suzy at this point in her life, she was nonetheless aware that her "reaction" to this actress might be sexual.

Age 12-18: Secret desires. By grade seven, Suzy knew she felt something for girls that she was not supposed to feel, and that other girls apparently felt only for boys. She had a female friend whom she was sexually attracted to, and who she thought she was in

love with. Suzy kept her feelings to herself, and felt guilt and shame for admiring parts of her friend's body, such as her breasts. Instead, she would write in her diary that she was in love with certain boys, something she knew her friends would approve of. Asked why she wrote about being attracted to boys when she knew that she was attracted to girls, Suzy replied, "Because I was supposed to." Suzy also believed at the time that she "was sharing something valid...everybody was in love with J and E [boys], so I had to be, too." She and her friends would read each other's diaries, so Suzy knew this was not a place to reveal her true thoughts and feelings. Rather, her diary became a space where she could disclose only those ideas that were acceptable to the outside world. Her same-sex feelings had no place here, and they remained confined to Suzy's inner world, in which they were also yet to be fully accepted.

Suzy would rather have spent time with her female friends, but they were becoming interested in boys, and Suzy wanted to fit in. This was another reason she pretended to be in love with the boys her friends found attractive. Suzy can recall only one instance of a short-lived attraction for a boy at school, whom she briefly fell in love with but never actually spoke to. This episode in her life still baffles Suzy because it does not fit with how she sees herself. She calls it a "strange" attraction that she has never been able to make sense of.

When she was 12, Suzy's family moved to another part of the city, and she changed schools. Suzy had always attended Catholic schools that required wearing a uniform, and in her new school she noticed that many of the other girls rolled up their skirts above their knees to expose their legs. Suzy, however, would not do this. Instead, she wore her skirt longer than she had to, in order to hide her body and avoid drawing

attention to herself. She did not know who was supposed to be attracted to her, and felt more comfortable if she thought her body was not being noticed. At the same time, Suzy noticed other girls' bodies and was aware of her attraction to some of them. She was particularly attracted to girls who she believed were comfortable with themselves. These were girls she also wanted to have as friends.

In grade 10, Suzy became attracted to a girl named Carmen, who was popular and cool, and whom Suzy wished to emulate. At first Suzy, who considered herself a geek, admired Carmen from a distance. She longed to hang out with Carmen, and thought Carmen would be like a sister to her. Over time, the two girls got to know each other and became close friends. Eventually Suzy realized that she had strong feelings for Carmen. Suzy remembers, "I fell in love with my best friend. For sure! For sure! Because I was writing poems...I was thinking about her all the time..." She did not tell Carmen how she felt because she knew that Carmen was straight. Instead, she would listen as Carmen told her how much she loved her boyfriend or discussed problems she was having with him. This caused Suzy tremendous pain, but to preserve the friendship she continued to listen to Carmen's stories.

Suzy's feelings for Carmen lasted through high school, a period of time she describes as depressing. Suzy felt like she did not fit in, and led a lonely existence in which she kept her same-sex desires hidden from her family and friends. Although it was painful to have to cover up her feelings and constantly pretend to be someone she wasn't, the pressure to blend into mainstream teenage culture, which was straight and heterosexist, and to do what everyone else was doing, was strong. It was so pressing, in fact, that Suzy recalls making a diary entry in which she wrote, "If I don't get a boyfriend

by the time I'm 18, I'm going to kill myself." Not only did Suzy entertain the thought of killing herself, she seriously considered ending her life.

Age 17: A brush with death. Suzy speaks of a critical incident that occurred when she was 17, which forced her to accept her same-sex feelings and come out to herself. One evening, she took her father's B-B gun, and thinking that the safety valve was on, put the gun to her head to see what it would feel like. She pulled the trigger, and discovered that the safety valve was actually off. The pellet hit Suzy in the temple, and "the only thing that stopped it actually going through my head was the air thing, the air cassette thing...wasn't in."

Coming this close to death was a turning point for Suzy. She began to re-evaluate what was important to her and came to the realization that it was ok to feel same-sex desire, and it was ok to be in love with Carmen. She soon came out to herself, but for a time continued to keep her sexual orientation hidden from Carmen, because they spent a great deal of time together and she worried that Carmen would "freak out" if she knew. When Suzy did eventually come out to Carmen, it did not at all damage their friendship. In fact, they are still friends today. However, Suzy has never told Carmen how she felt about her when they were teenagers.

Suzy's acceptance of her same-sex desire made it "seem ok" to be attracted to women, and it took away the pressure to find a boyfriend. Suzy no longer had to try to be attracted to boys. She became more comfortable with herself once she realized there was nothing wrong with being attracted to women. In fact, she turned to her religious beliefs to help explain her feelings in a positive way and to give herself permission to accept who

she was. She would say to herself, "God made you that way...why bother worrying about it if there's nothing you can do about it."

Online communities and same-sex desire. When Suzy was 18, she discovered the Internet and its many exciting possibilities. She began to spend much of her free time meeting other queer people in gay-friendly chatrooms, and remembers this period of her life as the most fun she had as a teenager. Suzy found support and acceptance for the first time as she came out to her new friends. It is also during this time that she met her current girlfriend, Jackie. Suzy had met a woman online named Kathy, who lived in another Canadian city and wanted Suzy to visit her. Suzy wanted to meet Kathy so she could have sex with her and because she believed that meeting Kathy was her last chance to ever meet a lesbian. Kathy happened to know a woman named Jackie, who lived in Vancouver and whom she asked to meet Suzy to make sure Suzy was not a "freak."

Suzy met Jackie and passed the test with flying colours. With evidence that Suzy was not crazy, the invitation to visit Kathy was confirmed. In the meantime, Suzy and Jackie connected and began to spend considerable time together in the months before Suzy was scheduled to visit Kathy. At first Suzy thought that although she greatly enjoyed Jackie's company, she could not be in love because she was not sexually attracted to her. Furthermore, she figured she must be in love with Kathy because she wanted to have sex with Kathy. However, it was clear that Suzy and Jackie were developing a mutual attraction.

The time finally came for Suzy to visit Kathy. She had not expected this, but as soon as they met, it was clear to Suzy that Kathy was in love with her. Suzy also discovered that she did not return Kathy's feelings. When they had sex, Suzy did not

enjoy it. On the whole, the visit was a disaster and left Suzy wondering what she was going to do being gay and not being able to get pleasure from having sex with women. By the end of her trip Suzy was distraught, and confused about the meaning of her sexual orientation.

The answer to Suzy's questions would soon become clear. When Suzy returned to Vancouver, she discovered that she was developing an attraction for Jackie. She and Jackie began to spend more time together, and Suzy met Jackie's friends. One evening Suzy, Jackie, and some of their friends went out to a gay club. While Suzy and Jackie were dancing, someone pointed out that they were a really cute couple. The two women looked at each other, thinking that if someone else thought they were a couple, maybe they should consider trying it. They both realized in that moment that they wanted more than friendship. That night, they went back to Jackie's apartment and had sex for the first time. Suzy now knew that she was attracted to Jackie and that she enjoyed having sex with women.

Coming out to her mother: Getting a mixed message. When Suzy was about 20 years of age, her mother confronted her about her sexual orientation. It was around Christmas time, and they were driving home one evening when Suzy's mother asked if she was inviting her "new friend" over for Christmas. Suzy was somewhat taken aback by this question, because she had never invited anyone home for Christmas, not even her closest friends. She wondered what her mother was getting at. She asked her mother why she wanted to know, and her mother replied, "Well, you know, I'm not stupid. I know what you are." Immediately, her mother launched into a religious speech, admonishing Suzy about homosexuality and warning her that she could be destined for hell. At the

same time, she informed Suzy that she would tolerate her homosexuality because she did not want to lose her. Suzy's mother ended the conversation by stating, "So, bring her."

Not long afterwards, when Suzy and Jackie were talking about moving in together, Suzy's mother suggested that Jackie move into the family home where the two women could live in the basement and save money while they attended university. Suzy and Jackie agreed to this, and ended up living together in Suzy's parents' home for 5 years. During this time, Jackie and Suzy's mother got along well, but Suzy characterizes her mother as "two-faced" and is uncertain of what her mother really thought about Jackie and their relationship. In fact, Suzy describes her parents' attitude toward her sexual orientation with some hesitation: "To my face they kind of just, you know, it's there, it's hanging there, but it's...they never really ask me anything about [it]..." Suzy's parents both know that she is gay but this is not openly discussed, and Suzy is pretty certain that their attitude toward her sexual orientation is less than affirming.

The Present. Today, Suzy is sexually attracted primarily to women, although she dislikes the term 'lesbian' and prefers to identify as queer. For Suzy, sexual desire has always consisted of both mental and physical attributes. She cannot "just have sex." She has to be attracted to the mind as well as the body in order to experience sexual desire.

I guess it's all in my head, pretty much. I have to be mentally attracted to them before I can be physically attracted to them I guess, because like, you know, if it's just, you know, nothing in your head and you're just doing it, it's really not very satisfying... I have to be really connected to them in some way... and after that, then you know, all of it comes together, the pleasure.

Suzy is attracted to women who are smart. She speaks of a recent attraction to a woman who works for an organization where she volunteers. The qualities that Suzy finds

particularly attractive are this woman's intelligence, her tireless dedication to the organization, and her physical appearance.

Suzy's auditory senses are sensitive and she often finds herself sexually aroused by certain sounds. When she hears someone with a "sexy voice" talking, or someone with a really good voice singing, she can feel a tingling sensation throughout her entire body, especially in her head. Likewise, she dislikes shrill-sounding voices, which she finds off-putting and unattractive.

The impact of race and culture. Suzy has long since accepted her same-sex desire, but self-acceptance is always in progress, subject to ongoing reflection and introspection. Suzy's experience of same-sex desire, and her self-acceptance, has been influenced by racism: As an Asian woman living in a white-dominated and racist society, Suzy has experienced racism first-hand, and this has affected how she views herself within this culture and her perception of how others see her. For instance, Suzy is aware of racism within the predominantly white queer community, and she believes that some white queer women would not be attracted to her because of her race. This has affected Suzy's self-awareness and self-esteem as she navigates her way around the queer community.

Suzy's culture and religion have also had a profound impact on her lived experience of same-sex sexual desire, and her identity as a queer woman. She explains that all the Filipino people she has ever known are Catholic, and that Filipino culture and Catholicism cannot be separated. The impact of religion and culture has therefore been one and the same in Suzy's life.

Suzy describes Filipino culture as interdependent: All individuals are connected by fluid boundaries between self and other, and the sense of 'self' is not as concrete as it

is in more individualistic societies. Within this interdependent configuration of self and other, Suzy's experience of herself as a separate individual and a queer person has sometimes been at odds with her location in a community that does not accept same-sex desire. Being queer is not only about Suzy's own identity but also reflects on her family and her larger community, and she has struggled to construct a queer identity within this structure. Suzy continues to reflect on her experiences within this context. This includes considering the question of where she belongs as a woman of colour in a white-dominated queer community and as a queer person in the two heterosexist cultures she inhabits (Filipino and Canadian).

Story #4: Mary Beth

The Impact of Evangelical Christianity on the Experience of Same-Sex Desire

Introduction. This is the story of Mary Beth, a 23-year-old woman who was born and raised in a suburb of Vancouver. Mary Beth is the youngest of three children. She describes her family as intelligent and loving, and appreciates many aspects of her upbringing. However, because her parents are "born-again Christians," not only was homosexuality viewed as sinful and immoral in her family, but anything even remotely tied to sex was taboo.

Mary Beth remembers being the only kid in her class to be pulled out of sex education, because her parents did not want her to learn about sexuality outside the parameters of their belief system. Her mother, who is a nurse, taught her about the biology of sex, but neglected to tell her about the emotions and physical sensations that are involved. When she was a teenager, Mary Beth was given Christian books filled with religious prescriptions on various topics, including sex. She did not learn anything about

sexual desire from these books. Mary Beth was told that sex within the context of heterosexual marriage was pleasurable, but it was never made clear how or where it was pleasurable. The notion of same-sex sexual desire was completely absent in the explanations of sex that she received.

Mary Beth depicts the suburban community in which she grew up as white, upper-middle class, and Christian in the "America sense of the word." It was in this social environment that Mary Beth first realized she had sexual feelings for women.

Learning gender identity: Suppressing gender-bending childhood fantasies. As a child, Mary Beth was a daydreamer. She remembers one important detail about her romantic daydreams: She was always male, and in pursuit of women. In the beginning, this was not a conscious experience. It just happened this way. At some point in her development, however, Mary Beth came to realize that she was playing the "wrong" gender role in her fantasies:

It was when I got a bit older, and one day I was having a daydream where I was wooing some woman in sort of a western-style setting...John Wayne'ish type thing, and it kind of clicked that I'm supposed to be on the other end...and then I thought, "this is strange"....you know, the religious background. I realized, "This is bad. I'm not supposed to be thinking this way."

Once she learned that it was unacceptable for her to pretend to be a boy, Mary Beth tried to control her fantasies by reversing her gender. However, she found this tremendously difficult to do. "Every time I had a thought that to me was wrong, I was in the wrong role...I tried to flip it, but I couldn't...so I just eliminated all thoughts of any sort of sexuality...got rid of it completely." Her unsuccessful attempts to switch to the female role led Mary Beth to conclude that

her only choice was to condition herself to eliminate her romantic daydreams.

This was her first attempt at repressing unacceptable feelings and images.

Adolescence: Repressing sexual desire. "My teenage years were definitely a write-off in terms of sexual desire." Mary Beth was brought up with the idea that all things sexual were taboo, so as an adolescent she did not experience or express her developing sexuality. Having a crush, and feeling "in love," was the essence of her experience of same-sex desire in adolescence. However, there was rarely anything consciously sexual about Mary Beth's feelings when she was in love with someone.

Mary Beth does not remember feeling sexual desire for boys, and when same-sex feelings surfaced from time to time, she quickly pushed them down, believing they were from the devil. At times, a physical sensation would sneak up on her. It would feel:

like a sudden physical, "Whoa! That's a sexual feeling I'm having, and it's physical..." But because I was so repressed...those would happen in just like random moments, for like a moment, and then I'd be like, "Whoa, what's going on? Whoa! Oh, f_ _ k! This is no good."

Mary Beth avoided experiencing same-sex desire by suppressing her bodily sensations and trying hard not to think about sex. Her vigilance and self-restraint paid off: Same-sex desire rarely crept up on her during her teenage years.

In spite of her heroic efforts to rid herself of 'inappropriate' and shameful feelings, Mary Beth did occasionally develop crushes on her female friends. She would bond with a girl and tell herself that she felt love rather than sexual desire. She did not allow herself to consider the possibility that her feelings might be sexual, because feeling any sexual desire was objectionable, and feeling same-sex desire was simply unimaginable.

Mary Beth recalls feeling attracted to a close friend when she was about 13. "There were little moments here and there where I'd be...aware for about five seconds that I was having sexual feelings for this girl, and then I would just kind of 'phoom,' get out of the room, you know..." Mary Beth "misdirected" her sexual attraction for her female friend onto a male friend, whom she was not attracted to. It seemed safer to have a crush on a boy because this, at least, was somewhat acceptable. She interpreted her attraction to her female friend as "a really strong friendship feeling," denying that her feelings might be sexual.

Mary Beth believed during most of her adolescent years that she ought to be dating boys. Everyone around her was dating, and she could not understand why she was not also dating. Because she was not sexually attracted to boys, she did not understand the concept of "dating [someone] who you are magnetically attracted to." She thought instead that dating could take place among male-female friends who liked one another sufficiently to go out together. The idea of dating her male friends, for example, seemed practical and logical. If they clicked and got along well...then why not date? For Mary Beth, whose social environment included a strict Christian family and a socially conservative high school, the mere thought of dating women was out of the question. Yet it was girls, not boys, whom she was magnetically attracted to in those fleeting moments when sexual desire sneaked up on her.

Mary Beth remembers the impact that television had on her experience of same-sex desire during her adolescence. Sometimes, when Mary Beth was watching TV, she would come across a show with "girl-on-girl action." When this happened:

I'd just STOP. Even though I didn't wanna admit that that's why I stopped, I would stop and I'd be just riveted, you know...I would just feel

something like a tightness in the chest, and...I wouldn't be able to turn the channel.... I know inherently that I stopped on that channel because there was some sort of dykey action going on, you know.

Mary Beth would watch these shows glued to her seat, and the intensity of her physical reactions scared her into denial. She did not want to admit that she was fascinated with the idea of passion between women, and turned on to the point of having a "clitoral erection." If she heard her parents coming into the room, she would immediately change the channel so they would not know what she was watching. She would feel guilty then, even though she realized that she was not doing anything wrong. She took great care not to reveal to the outside world what she felt at those times. Television was the only place where Mary Beth could witness other people expressing the feelings that she was carefully avoiding.

Mary Beth did not enjoy most of her teenage years. In fact, she was so unhappy in her suburban high school that after grade 11, to her parents' dismay, she transferred to another school. Mary Beth's new school was located in a different part of the city, which she found to be far more diverse than the community in which she grew up. Her new friends were open-minded and had more life experience than she did. For the first time in her life, Mary Beth found herself surrounded by a group of people who were accepting of homosexuality. In this environment of understanding and acceptance, Mary Beth slowly began to call up memories of same-sex desire that she had repressed since her childhood. She started to feel more comfortable with the idea of homosexuality, which over time enabled her to acknowledge and accept her same-sex desire, both to herself and to her new group of friends.

Acknowledging her same-sex desire. *Mary Beth was eighteen when she first*

admitted to herself that she was attracted to women. It was also around this time that she began to feel rebellious against her family and against Christianity. In her new, more open social environment, Mary Beth started to pay attention to her attitude toward homosexuality. For example, she noticed that she would giggle whenever gay issues were brought up, and realized that she felt confused and awkward around this topic. She was afraid of her same-sex desire because it was real, and excited by it because it was rebellious.

Mary Beth had a female friend who was gay and who talked openly about her same-sex experiences. When Mary Beth listened to her friend's stories, she would act surprised at what she heard, but at the same time she would find herself having sexual feelings. At first, she ignored these feelings, as she was used to doing. Over time, however, she began to acknowledge that she was turned on by the stories, and attracted to her friend. Looking back on this experience now, Mary Beth believes that her friend was trying to seduce her, although she did not realize this at the time. "I got seduced. That's what happened. I got sucked in. And I started realizing I really liked this chick! 'I really want to kiss her! Oh! I'm gonna do it,' you know." For the first time in her life, Mary Beth felt sexual tension with another person.

Accepting her same-sex desire. After she realized she was gay, it took Mary Beth another year to begin accepting her same-sex feelings as healthy and normal. During this time, Mary Beth faced the daunting task of working through the inner conflict between what she felt was right and what her religion had told her all her life, that her feelings were wrong and immoral. When she came out to her friends, most of whom were straight, they accepted her sexual orientation and helped her through the coming-out process.

Their support made it possible for Mary Beth to accept herself. She was elated, but also confused about how people's beliefs about homosexuality could differ so completely. If her friends did not think she was different or weird for being gay, but her parents were adamantly opposed to homosexuality, then who was right? She began to question her parents' beliefs, and over time came to reject the religious ideas she had grown up with. She felt that she had to banish the mind-set through which she had previously understood homosexuality so that she could see herself as a decent person.

Everything taboo, nothing taboo: Making up for lost time. After Mary Beth began to accept her sexual orientation, the next step was to let go of the taboos she had grown up with. Once she was able to let go of one taboo, Mary Beth felt like she had to let them all go:

Because everything to do with sex was taboo, once I let go of one taboo they all left, which also means that (brief pause) I'm very curious and experimental...I'm willing to do anything because of that taboo being let go. It's sort of like, you take an entire category and push it aside and then you know, you realize, one aspect of it is ok, then hey, what about everything else!

With the sexual taboos of her religious background lifted, Mary Beth's experience of her sexuality moved from one extreme to another as a whole new world opened up to her in which she could fully express her same-sex desire. Her sexuality "... went from being totally non-existent to overwhelming." For the first time in her life she was able to admit that she had sexual desire and give herself permission to act on it. She found herself encountering a part of herself she never knew existed, and engaging in sexual behaviors she had never imagined possible:

Suddenly I had a roving eye all the time...I was sleeping around with so many different girls. Every day a new girl in the bed...and seducing...I didn't know until that time that I'm a complete flirt...like suddenly just

boom boom boom! I'm just wooing every chick I find pretty...and it's all I can think about, you know. I'm looking at girls everywhere, always looking at girls.

Previously, when she was attracted to women, she would interpret her crushes as "mental," or in her head, and her feelings as love. She was not at all concerned with physical appearance. When she realized that attractions had a physical component, and allowed her body to feel sexual desire, the mental aspect was lost and replaced almost entirely by the physical.

Sexual desire: An elastic band metaphor. Mary Beth uses an "elastic band" metaphor to illustrate the impact of years of repressing her sexual desire:

I think that it's done sort of an elastic band effect...because I've been repressed for so long...once I finally...sort of acknowledged it and accepted it about myself, it was just like snapping an elastic band, and...I'm 23 now, between 18 and 23 it's been, I've been kind of on a rampage, you know, and I'm starting to slow down now.

With her acceptance of her same-sex sexual desire and her rejection of those beliefs that had necessitated the suppression of her sexuality, the "elastic band" snapped, and all the tension was suddenly released. All the powerful feelings that were buried for so long now flooded to the surface, and there was no stopping Mary Beth from experiencing the full force of her sexual desires. She wanted to try everything sexual and she actively sought out new experiences. In fact, her openness to her sexuality has led to the recent discovery that she is also sexually attracted to men, something she did not consider possible when she first came out.

Finding herself and shifting gears. When asked what sexual desire means to Mary Beth, the physical side of desire immediately comes up. "I think of it as like a very raw sexual thing. For me it's purely physical, hormonal, you know. There's a major mental,

spiritual aspect to it, but when I hear "sexual desire," for me I kind of jump into that physical category."

Mary Beth believes that, because of the many years she spent repressing her same-sex desire, she now has "a much larger sexual appetite than the average woman." She finds everything sexually exciting, and continues to enjoy discovering new aspects of her sexuality. The importance of the physical aspect of sexual desire became apparent when Mary Beth first came out and discovered that she is a sexual being. For the next several years, she had sex on her mind all the time, and physical appearance was the main criterion in a sexual partner: "It was all superficial, and it didn't matter if she was stupid...if she was pretty, then I was interested." Although the physical dimension of desire continues to be important for Mary Beth, her focus has shifted in the last couple of years. She has "slowed down" in her sexual adventures, has come to view herself as "monogamous at heart," and would like eventually to settle down with one person.

The impact of religion. Mary Beth wonders whether, as a result of all the sexual taboos of her religion, she experienced any sexual development in her teenage years. Repressing and denying her sexual feelings in the name of religion caused Mary Beth a great deal of pain and misery during her adolescent years. Even now, she continues to struggle with feelings of shame and guilt around some of her past sexual behaviors, and is still getting comfortable with the idea of self-gratification. Although Mary Beth has made remarkable progress toward embracing her sexuality and claiming sexual agency, she still occasionally hears the voice of her repressive past, which taught her, among other things, that masturbation is dirty.

Mary Beth believes that much of the anger she felt as a teenager was the result of

suppressed sexuality. Once she finally acknowledged her sexuality and same-sex attractions, she spent several years trying to make sense out of her life and the role of religion in it. It was difficult to come to the conclusion that rejecting her entire religion was the only path to self-acceptance. For a long time, she felt hatred towards Christianity, and although she is now starting to feel less hostile towards Christians and the Christian community, she still has nothing to do with the religion.

Relationship with family of origin. Mary Beth believes that her parents' antigay attitudes have hurt her, and damaged their relationship with her. They know about her sexual orientation but refuse to hear anything about it. Their unwillingness to talk openly about this subject has created distance and tension between Mary Beth and her parents. It is upsetting for Mary Beth to know that their judgment of her is negative, and that they are able to discriminate against her because of her sexual orientation. Her brothers' wives, for instance, are considered to be part of the family, and are always invited to spend holiday celebrations at her parents' home. Mary Beth knows that not only would she never be allowed to invite a female partner into her parents' home, but they would want nothing to do with any future same-sex partner or relationship that she might have.

Although her immediate family is homophobic, Mary Beth has some distant relatives who are supportive of her sexual orientation. Their acceptance has given her "feelings of liberation," and made her feel less lonely. It has also been reassuring and comforting to know that she has family members who accept her no matter who she is.

Mary Beth is currently trying to deal with her parents' unfair treatment of her. Their rejection continues to cause "turmoil" in her life, but she hopes that in time she will feel more at peace with the situation. She has also created a supportive social

network in her life, which makes it possible to feel good about herself and to acknowledge herself as a caring and compassionate human being.

Story #5: Kase

The Impact of Race and Culture on the Experience of Same-Sex Desire in Adolescence

Introduction. Kase is a 21-year-old woman who lives in Vancouver and is in her fourth year of university. She was born in Asia and immigrated to Canada with her family at the age of nine. Kase is the middle child in her family. She has an older half-brother from her father's previous marriage, and a younger brother. Culture and race have been key factors in Kase's lived experience of same-sex sexual desire during her adolescent years, and continue to influence her perceptions of herself and her sexuality.

First experience of same-sex desire. Kase first thought that she could like girls when she was in grade 9. She was on the basketball team and recalls feeling attracted to the team captain, an attractive and competent basketball player:

I remember thinking, "Wow, you know, I really kind of like her. She's really cool...it'd be nice to take her out to the movies and stuff." I'd get to hold her hand, that was all...it's like admiration, and sort of became a crush.

Kase also remembers thinking, "Some guy must be really lucky to be her boyfriend...I wonder if she would be my girlfriend. That would be so great." However, Kase had learned that homosexuality is a negative thing. She therefore dismissed her feelings, which she thought were inappropriate.

Kase delayed acting on her same-sex feelings until she was in university. She describes an opportunity she turned down to kiss another girl when she was in grade 12. One evening at a party, Kase gathered enough courage to ask a female friend whom she was attracted to if she could kiss her. Her friend agreed, but Kase changed her mind:

...looking back, I think I was so scared about taking that first step and realizing that that could really change my life later on...and then kind of scared what people would think when they find out if this happens. So, I didn't.

Kase's awareness of society's negative attitudes towards homosexuality, and her fear of judgment and rejection by her friends, prevented her from acting on her feelings. She would have to wait until she felt more comfortable with herself before she could freely express her same-sex desire.

The teenage years: Crushes on friends and denial of sexual desire. Kase discovered same-sex desire through her friendships with girls in high school. However, her high school years were also marked by a denial of her sexual feelings and the belief that her feelings for girls were merely platonic. When Kase had a crush on a girl during her adolescence, she did not think about sexual desire, because this was taboo. Rather, she would want to take care of her and protect her. Doing so brought Kase great happiness. She describes the girls she was attracted to as cute and innocent:

They were quite attractive, very good looking, and I...well, you want to kiss them and be near them....not only are they cute, they have great personalities... the more innocently cute type of girl that you just want to protect them...to comfort them....keep them safe.

She would find herself longing for physical closeness; hugging, cuddling, even kissing. However, she was unable to admit that her feelings might be sexual. Instead, she interpreted them as affectionate, "good friend" feelings. When she was 15, for example, Kase had a crush on her close friend. She wrote about her feelings in her diary: "I admit that I had a crush on Diane, but it ain't like, you know, the [gay] kind...it's like, the affection kind. It's like a good friend crush."

Diane was also close to another female friend, whom Kase was jealous of, particularly when Diane and her friend would express physical affection for each other. Kase made a journal entry in which she expressed her thoughts about this: "Hmmm, are they gay? I hope they're not...If she [Diane] is, then she would be kind of weird." Kase knew that she was attracted to Diane because she wanted to spend time with her, she would flirt and tease her in a friendly way, she wanted to protect her, and she would get jealous when Diane spent time with other girls. However, she was certain that there was a distinction between her 'friend' feelings for Diane, and the 'gay' feelings she believed Diane felt for her other friend. Kase was aware of homosexuality and did not want to associate herself with it in any way.

Kase's friendship with Diane ended when she changed schools in grade 11. In her new school, she met Julie, a girl in the same grade. Kase and Julie got along really well and shared many things in common, including their cultural background. Over time, as she and Julie became best friends, Kase developed an attraction for her:

When I look back, a lot of the actions that I did to her were as a homosexual. For example, every day I would walk her to the bus stop and I'd carry her books for her...And she'd be like, "Don't worry about it." And I'd be like, "Oh, it's too heavy for you. I'll do it for you..." I felt really close to her, and a couple of times we had sleepovers, and it was just more of a bond, you know, emotional bond. And it was just, waking up beside her and having her cuddle with you.

Kase sees this friendship as having involved intimate, but not sexual, feelings: "It's more of a love relationship than a...like...and I didn't think it would matter if we had sex or not..." Taking care of each other was an important element in her friendship with Julie. Kase remembers Julie's caring and thoughtful gestures towards her. Julie would often blow dry Kase's hair, or bring school notes and books to Kase's house when she was

sick. Kase felt protective toward Julie and also liked to do nice things for her that showed how much she cared.

In grade 12, Julie became interested in boys. Kase was upset by this new development because it meant that Julie, who began dating, was now less available to spend time with her. When Julie found a boyfriend, Kase became extremely jealous. To get back at Julie and try to make her jealous, Kase decided that she would also find a boyfriend. Soon their friendship began to dissolve, and eventually they stopped talking to each other.

The impact of culture. Kase realizes that her experience of same-sex desire during adolescence was strongly influenced by the values and attitudes of the two cultures she inhabited: Asian and Canadian. She describes Asian culture as traditional, repressed, and negative toward homosexuality, and she believes that her inability to admit to her same-sex feelings during adolescence, to act on her same-sex desire, or even to consider the possibility that she might be gay, was a direct result of the negative messages she received from her culture. She is also well aware of the presence of homophobia and heterosexism in Western culture, and recognizes its impact on her struggles with her sexuality.

Kase states that Asian people do not generally express physical affection, and she has noticed that her Caucasian friends show much more affection toward one another than her Asian friends. She interprets her own need to establish an emotional connection with a person before she can enter into a sexual relationship as a cultural construction, thinking that she was raised to be this way. Her female Asian friends also require an emotional bond with their partners before they can begin to express physical affection

and have sex. However, Kase allows for the possibility that her needs around sexual expression may also reflect her individual characteristics.

Although homophobia is alive and well in Canadian society, in recent years homosexuality has been gaining acceptance within the dominant culture. This has led to the incorporation of more realistic and positive representations of same-sex sexualities in a wide range of media, including television, film, literature, and the Internet. Kase was able to find information about same-sex desire within this culture. In fact, her coming-out process was inspired by lesbian fiction that she found on the Internet, and by television shows that portrayed erotic feelings between women.

Kase first acknowledged her same-sex desire when she began to read stories online about women having sexual relationships. She found that she could identify with these stories, and began to wonder if she, too, might be sexually attracted to women. Kase was also influenced by film and television, and by two shows in particular. One of her favourite TV series is Xena, Warrior Princess, a show in which there is an undercurrent of sexual tension between the two female main characters. The other is Buffy the Vampire Slayer, a show in which two of the female characters are in a same-sex relationship, and whose main female character is a strong, independent young woman who can take care of herself.

Once Kase gained access to queer culture through the media and witnessed same-sex desire being portrayed in a positive light, she realized that homosexuality was not to be feared or reviled, and began to move towards self-acceptance. Kase also discovered from the TV shows she watched and the lesbian fiction she read, the qualities she finds

attractive in women. They include strength of character, independence, and the ability to choose one's own destiny

Self-acceptance. Kase accepted her sexual attraction to women in her first year of university. Self-acceptance did not occur overnight. It was, instead, a gradual process. Over time, Kase realized that perhaps the reason she enjoyed lesbian fiction and film so much was that she was gay. Slowly she became more comfortable with the idea that she had same-sex attractions, and soon after she accepted this, she met a woman she liked and they began a relationship. What Kase valued about this relationship was being able to talk openly, and her girlfriend's ability to understand her. She also never felt pushed to have sex the way she did with men, and she appreciated being able to progress at her own pace.

Coming out to her family. Kase describes coming out to her parents as a negative experience. She recounts her parents' response when she told them she is gay: "My dad just curled into a ball on the floor and he goes, 'You broke me.'" Her mother also refused to accept it at first. Her parents asked, " 'Why are you so abnormal?' That's their exact words...and they feel like it's because I moved to Canada, and it's such an open culture, and that that's what made me change, the culture. Just 'cause I'm hanging around white people." Kase stood her ground, explaining to her parents that this is who she is, that homosexuality is normal, and that it is not a mental disorder or a cultural product. Her dad did not buy her explanation. Instead, he has continued to blame Western culture for Kase's sexual orientation.

Kase's father still refuses to accept that she is gay. However, he lives in Asia, so Kase does not have to deal with his disapproving attitude very often. When Kase sees her father, they do not talk about the subject. Her mother has become more accepting over time, claiming that her daughter's happiness is most important to her. If being with women makes Kase happy, that's good enough for her mother. Kase's elder brother is homophobic, and he and Kase do not discuss her sexual orientation. However, her younger brother is very accepting and supportive. He and Kase talk openly, and watch Xena, Warrior Princess together.

Sexual desire and sexual orientation. Kase feels more comfortable being with women than she does with men. She feels that she forms better emotional bonds with women. She also does not feel the need to be physically close to men, including her male friends, but with women to whom she feels attracted, Kase longs for physical closeness. She has had three boyfriends, and did not want to be physically close to any of them. In her experience, men are more pushy and aggressive about sex than women, which is a turn-off because she feels pressured to "give him something." She also cannot picture having sex with a man and waking up the next morning to find him lying beside her. However, she can easily imagine this with a woman.

Kase explains that in the past, her sexual desire for girls always started off as an emotional attraction that evolved over time into physical desire. Until recently, she could not separate the physical from the emotional aspect of sexual desire, and companionship had to precede sexual attraction. Lately, however, Kase has been able to see herself having casual sex with women and feeling good about it, without expecting every sexual encounter to involve an emotional bond or lead to a serious relationship. At the same

time, Kase would still eventually like to have a relationship that goes beyond sexual desire. While she enjoys physical closeness with women, sex itself is not always her main goal. Rather, intimacy, physical closeness, and feeling understood are the most important elements in a relationship.

Kase locates her sexual attractions on the Kinsey Scale, which represents the degree to which people experience and express same-sex and opposite-sex desire. She describes her sexual orientation as a 70% attraction to women and 30% attraction to men. Until recently, Kase's location on the scale was 90% attraction to women and 10% to men, but then she met a man she found attractive and began to question her feelings and her sexual orientation. She still prefers women but is open to the possibility of dating men, all the while maintaining high expectations with regards to anyone she considers going out with.

The impact of race on the experience of same-sex desire. As an Asian woman living in a white-dominated society, Kase has been affected by racism. Kase explains that she has experienced what she calls a "racial barrier." What this means is that at times she has expected to be treated with discrimination because of her racial background, and felt inferior in her interactions with Caucasian people. The experience of prejudice and rejection has also shaped the way Kase has related to the queer community. Until recently, she thought that Caucasian women would not be attracted to her because of her race, and she has often felt uncomfortable in the queer community, especially in group situations in which she was the only Asian woman present.

Kase explains that it is easier to have sex with Caucasian women without first developing an emotional bond, whereas she needs to connect emotionally before she can

have sex with Asian women. The emotional bond she feels with Asian women arises out of cultural similarities, shared values, and a level of mutual understanding that Kase feels is missing in her relationships with Caucasian women.

Kase says that in the last year she has “made progress” toward feeling more at ease and less inferior in her interactions with Caucasians. It has taken a lot of work, however, to get to a place where she can ask Caucasian women out without attributing a lack of interest on their part solely to racism, and to begin to feel more comfortable being part of a predominantly Caucasian queer community.

Story #6: Amy

A Story of Coming Out, and into Herself

Introduction. Amy is a 23-year-old year old woman who was born and raised on Vancouver Island. Amy is currently attending university, and working on her undergraduate degree. Amy’s parents were divorced when she was a child, and her mother raised her and her older sister. Amy’s father remarried, and she also has a stepbrother. Amy grew up, for the most part, in an open-minded environment. Both her parents took a progressive stance on social issues, including sexual orientation. However, the environment in Amy’s high school was rigid and homophobic, and for the sake of social survival, Amy kept her same-sex desires hidden from other people during her adolescence.

Amy has been attracted to women since childhood, and although she had one sexual experience with a man, it was not to express other-sex desire, but to prove to herself that she was gay. A principal theme in Amy’s life related to same-sex desire has been her values around developing honest and open relationships with people. This has

meant making the decision to come out to important people in her life at a time when this was difficult to do. When Amy did finally come out to her family and friends, it was an affirming experience that brought many positive changes to her life.

"Who do you have a crush on?" The pressure to be attracted to boys. Amy was sitting in a room with five or six other girls. These were nice girls, all of whom Amy knew and liked. They were having a discussion about the boys they had crushes on. Every girl was expected not only to have a crush on a boy, but to tell everyone in the room who it was. There was a lot of trust between the girls: What was said in the room, stayed in the room. That was the rule. And the pressure to talk was on. After some time had passed and all the other girls had bared their souls, it was Amy's turn to reveal the object of her desire. Until that moment, when she had been asked what boy she liked and couldn't provide an answer, people would say, "Oh, wait 'til you grow up." This time was different; something had shifted. Amy was now in the spotlight, and was expected to name a boy in her class who she had a crush on.

When, after an earnest attempt to comply with her friends' demand, she couldn't come up with a name, things got tense. All of a sudden, "Everyone went quiet. And there was this weird, uncomfortable moment, and like, they [the girls] kind of looked at each other and looked at me, and it got really intimidating." Amy felt confused, and pressured to provide an answer. In the end, she gave in. She thought of a boy in her class who was funny, and stated his name. The awkward tension in the room immediately turned to excitement as the other girls expressed delight at Amy's disclosure and commended her for liking a boy. Amy realized then that she had come very close to losing the approval of these girls. She was traumatized by this experience, and it suddenly dawned on her that

from now on she would have to tell lies in order to survive socially. She also learned that day that not liking boys was no longer an option. She was ten years old.

Amy was aware of her attractions to girls by the time she was ten, but she was not aware of the possibility of same-sex desire, and at this point, did not consider her attractions to be sexual. "I had attractions, but I thought of it as a friend-thing." It did not take long, however, before Amy became aware of her sexuality, and realized that she was not straight. She knew already that same-sex desire was not encouraged in society. She "started realizing that something was different, and for some reason, I shouldn't talk about it... something wasn't socially acceptable about my lack of crushes on guys." Thus began an era of secrecy and silence.

Age twelve: Am I a lesbian? Around the age of 12, Amy began to notice that she placed people into categories: "I had my friend-friends, and then I had people I wanted to be friends with. And then when I got a little older I realized that that was actually the people I wanted to date." The people Amy wanted to date were always girls. When she was attracted to a girl, Amy would want to sit next to her in class, work on group projects with her, and spend time with her. She would also put more effort into conversations. This was completely different from how she felt about and acted around her other friends. Amy's pattern was to develop a crush on a girl and get to know her for a few weeks before finding out she had a boyfriend. This would be the end of Amy's crush. She would "mope around for a little while" and then eventually lose interest. This went on from elementary school all through her high school years. Amy had several crushes on girls, but did not date anyone during high school, as same-sex dating was not an option she considered.

Amy would sometimes have dreams about girls, and about being gay. She mentions a dream she had when she was 12, in which she was making out with a girl. She would wake up after such a dream, and it would be on her mind all day. She would wonder what her dreams meant. Amy thinks that perhaps because of her dreams she began to suspect that her attraction to girls might be a sexual feeling. At the time, however, she denied the possibility that she might be a lesbian because of the traditional messages she had received that everyone, including herself, is heterosexual. She also did not identify with the gay people she knew, most of whom were "older biker-dykes." She had never met anyone her own age who was gay, and she believed that lesbians were much older, very rare, and had to look sporty or tough. She was not any of those things, so she figured she could not be a lesbian.

I think the first time that...the word 'lesbian' actually came into my head, I was twelve. When like, "Maybe I'm..." and "lesbian" kind of went together...I thought about it, "Maybe I'm lesbian. I mean, I don't like any of the boys. And I just want to hang out with these girls," and whatever. Um...but I was like, "Well, of course not."

Amy dismissed the possibility that she might be a lesbian as long as she could, but the idea just kept returning. She would wonder why she did not have crushes on boys, and why she found certain girls attractive. At the age of 13, Amy began to take her feelings more seriously. It was getting more difficult to ignore her same-sex crushes and her dreams, which were becoming more sexual. She remembers having a crush on a girl in grade 9, where the physical attraction was clear to her. She was attracted to the girl's physical features, and she fantasized about kissing her and being alone with her. She did not have any specific sexual fantasies, because she was not sure how lesbians had sex, but she recognized the sexual nature of her feelings.

Same-sex desire in adolescence: In the closet. Amy characterizes herself as "a shy kid." She was quiet as a teenager, and although she had friends, she was always cautious about how much personal information she ought to share with people. Likewise, Amy believes that people did not confide in her because she was in her own little world, and not an easy person to get to know. She desperately wanted to tell her friends about her same-sex desire, but her fear of being ostracized by her peers at school kept her from exposing her secret. She now knows that several of her friends suspected she might be gay, but at the time she was not ready to tell anyone. It took a lot of energy to keep her feelings inside. A few times she came close to telling her friends, but she held back, and often felt very depressed about this. At times she even had suicidal thoughts, but was able to hold onto the hope that things would improve after she graduated from high school.

At the age of fifteen, Amy accepted that she was at least bisexual, even though she had never been attracted to a boy. She adopted this identity on the basis of her belief that she might be a late bloomer, and may therefore some day find men attractive. By the following year, she discarded the thought that she might be bisexual and decided she must be a lesbian, because she found even the mere thought of kissing a boy repulsive. Boys were her friends, they were like her brothers. She could not imagine the idea of being sexually attracted to them.

Around the age of sixteen, Amy began to feel a strong urge to come out to her mother and her friends. However, she had no proof so she postponed telling them. Even though Amy was certain of her sexual feelings for women, and fairly sure that she lacked such feelings for men, she felt the need to gather "evidence" to prove it before she could tell anyone. To Amy, evidence meant having a sexual experience with a man and a

woman. "I knew inside, but I just felt it wasn't enough to tell people." Until she was sure, Amy was not going to say anything, even though she wanted to.

Amy was well aware of society's negative attitudes toward same-sex desire, and was especially worried about what could happen if people in her high school found out. "When you're in high school, society means your high school." Amy describes her school as an "unhealthy environment for any queer kid." It was "full of bitches" who were mean-spirited and homophobic. If she came out, she was certain to face discrimination. "I was not in a high school where people would accept that in any way. Like you'd be...destroyed. Completely." Understandably, Amy's biggest fear was exposing herself as being gay, so she kept quiet all through high school. She also did not date any girls or express her sexual desire with anyone, even though she had crushes on girls during this time.

Amy began to have sexual fantasies about women around the age of sixteen. She would get very excited whenever she developed a crush on a new girl, even though the girls she liked in high school were unattainable. Amy remembers being in a "hyper state of arousal" when she thought about girls in a sexual way. She would fantasize about "going down on a woman, fingering and being fingered, touching breasts, being naked." She also fantasized about being seduced by an older woman who she imagined knew that Amy was gay. Although Amy kept her feelings hidden from others, and was afraid of losing control and acting on her desires, she was glad that she could at least experience her sexual desire through her fantasies. For Amy, being in a "hypersexual and repressed" state was far better than not having any sexual feelings at all.

When Amy was seventeen, she spent the summer working in another province. There, she developed a crush on a female co-worker who she was certain was a lesbian. She spent the entire summer "lusting after the hot painter," admiring her from a distance, and fantasizing about having a "random affair" with her. In Amy's fantasies, the woman would figure out that Amy was attracted to her. They would go to a secluded place and immediately have sex. She never went out with her co-worker, but Amy's sexual attraction was undeniable, and this episode in her life reinforced her suspicion that she was a lesbian.

When she returned to British Columbia at the end of the summer, Amy was eager to share the news with her mother. She thought her mother suspected that she was gay. She had thrown enough hints over the years, and assumed it was becoming increasingly obvious. However, when she realized that her mother did not, in fact, suspect anything, Amy once again decided to postpone coming out. She felt angry with her mother for not suspecting anything, since she had never dated boys nor shown any interest in them, and was "obviously idolizing" a friend of her mother who was a lesbian. She did not understand why her mother was so oblivious, and felt less and less inclined to tell her anything.

A trip overseas: Gathering evidence. Amy had always wanted to travel after she finished high school, and made plans to go abroad after completing grade twelve. Shortly after she graduated, at the age of 18, Amy bought a plane ticket and flew to Europe with the intention of working and backpacking for two years. Amy took this trip with two important goals in mind. First, she wanted to get away from her hometown and carry on her family's tradition of travelling the world. Second, and no less important, was Amy's

commitment to herself to gather evidence while travelling that she was in fact, gay, and to come out to her family when she returned to Canada at the end of two years.

Soon after arriving in Europe, Amy found a job at a ski resort. While there, Amy had a two-month "passionate affair" with a female co-worker named Lauren. This was Amy's first same-sex relationship, and it was thrilling to finally be with a woman and to be able to express her same-sex desire. However, there were some obstacles. First, the relationship involved a great deal of secrecy, because the resort was located in a small town, which Amy describes as homophobic, and it felt unsafe to come out. The two women spent a lot of time trying to avoid getting caught. Amy and Lauren's relationship also took place at night, due to their conflicting work schedules. The only time they could see each other was between 1am and 7am, and this was stressful, both physically and emotionally. They also consumed large quantities of alcohol when they were together. And finally, Amy had trouble acting on her sexual desires with Lauren, finding it difficult to even touch her body. Although Amy was sexually attracted to Lauren, she often felt paralyzed about having sex with her.

In spite of all this, their relationship was very exciting, and Amy finally had the chance to prove to herself that she was gay. Unfortunately, it didn't last long. Two months into their relationship, Lauren was fired from her job and had to leave the resort. Amy was sad and upset by this abrupt ending, but she also felt that it was beneficial, because the relationship was too intense for her, and involved far too much drinking. Amy kept in touch with Lauren for a few months after their separation, but over time she lost her feelings for Lauren, and eventually stopped writing to her.

Now that Amy had evidence that she was, without a doubt, sexually attracted to women, the only thing left was to collect evidence to prove that she was not attracted to men. This meant that she now had to find a man to have a sexual experience with. She left the ski resort about a month after Lauren left, and travelled to another country to look for a job. Once there, she met a man whom she liked and felt comfortable being around. She told him she was gay, and made it known that although she was not attracted to men, she was open to the possibility of having sex with him. When he pursued her, Amy decided it was time to take the plunge. She got very drunk and made out with him. This was as far as she was able to go sexually with a man. With evidence in hand to prove that she was sexually attracted to women but not to men, Amy was finally ready to come out to her family and friends back in Canada.

Age 19: Coming out to her family. At the end of her first year abroad, Amy returned to Canada for a two-week stopover before going to Australia for another year of working and travelling. She had not originally planned to make this stopover, and was extremely nervous and stressed out, because she had promised herself that she would come out when she had evidence and when she returned to Canada. Well, she had the evidence and she was back in Canada. However, it was a year earlier than she had expected, and she was not prepared for what she now had to do. Nonetheless, she had resolved to go through with this, and she was going to honour her commitment to herself.

When in Europe, Amy had met up with a friend from her hometown who was also travelling, and came out to her. This proved to be a positive experience for Amy. Her friend had suspected that Amy was gay, had waited for a long time for her to come out, and was happy that Amy finally told her. This coming-out experience set the tone for

what was to happen when Amy came out to her family. When she finally gathered the courage to tell them, Amy discovered that nearly everyone had suspected it and was waiting for her to come out. Most of her family members had a positive reaction, and encouraged her to tell the rest of the family. Amy also told her closest friends, all of whom were supportive and excited that she finally came out to them.

The only person Amy was reluctant to tell was her mother. She knew that her mother would be upset, and wanted to avoid seeing her reaction. As predicted, when Amy came out to her mother, her mother's reaction was strongly emotional. She was surprised and upset, and she cried, not because she was homophobic (she was not), but because she had expectations about Amy's life that were related to her own desires. She had wanted to decorate Amy's wedding and now felt that she would be deprived of this important task. She also wanted grandchildren. Amy thinks these were "weird" and "irrational" thoughts for her mother to have, and believes her mother would have reacted more positively if Amy had been more feminine, a "girly dyke." However, over time Amy's mother has adjusted to this news, and is now fine with it.

Amy felt a great sense of relief after she came out. A big burden had been lifted off her shoulders, and she began to feel less shy and more relaxed in her interactions with people. She felt that it was now possible to be open and honest in her relationships, because she no longer had a 'dark secret' to hide. Coming out to her family and friends was pivotal to Amy's experience of same-sex desire in her adolescence, for it marked the end of an era of silence and secrecy, and opened up a world of possibilities as Amy began to approach life with a new sense of ease and confidence. When she returned to Canada

after her trip to Australia, Amy moved to another city, where she discovered a vibrant queer community and began to learn about queer issues.

As an adolescent, Amy had not known any other girls who (openly) had same-sex desire, and her crushes had been directed at straight women. Now, as she met new people in the queer community, she began to be attracted to other queer women, where there was the possibility of a reciprocation of feelings. She also became more conscious about what she wanted to do sexually, and she began to consider such issues as gender roles in relationships, and what her role might be in a same-sex relationship. She decided that she would no longer try to experiment sexually with men, because her experience in Europe was evidence enough that she was not straight. She also noticed that her friends began to confide in her more about their same-sex experiences. She learned that some of the people she had previously assumed to be exclusively heterosexual had actually had same-sex experiences, which they were now eager to tell her about.

Conclusion: The impact of homophobia. Amy describes her high school years as a period of "hibernation," a time when she suppressed her sexual desire while she waited to get out and live her life. She started becoming who she is only after she graduated and stopped hiding her sexuality. Amy explains that the sexual repression of her high school years has had a long-lasting impact on her life, and continues to affect her today. For example, she still requires very clear signals before initiating anything sexual, and she struggles with her fear of relationships.

Because of the presence of homophobia and the lack of opportunities to date during her high school years, Amy did not have her first date until the age of 21. She was scared and intimidated because she had never dated anyone before, even though she had

had a few casual sexual encounters and one short-term relationship with a woman. Amy felt that she was behind her peers in sexual and social experience, and was self-conscious about this. She wanted to catch up to others her age, both sexually and socially.

Amy sums up her experience of same-sex sexual desire as a "gentle progression." This has involved learning to accept herself, her feelings, and her sexuality, understanding her wants and needs, feeling comfortable and happy, and growing as a person over time. Amy continues to take steps toward greater self-knowledge and self-acceptance.

Story #7: Karen

A Story of Unfulfilled Desire

Introduction. *Karen is a 19-year-old woman who lives in Vancouver and attends university, where she is studying to become a musician. She is an only child, and her parents, while not religious, are very conservative. When Karen was growing up, there was no mention of homosexuality in her home or at the schools she attended, and for the longest time she did not know that such a thing existed. Karen became aware of having feelings for girls at an early age, but she did not know that they might be sexual. In the telling of this story, Karen connects her early same-sex feelings to her lived experience of same-sex desire in adolescence.*

Earliest memory of same-sex desire. *When Karen was five years old, she remembers liking a girl who lived down the street from her and who was in her class. At the time, Karen's family was living in Abbotsford, which Karen describes as very religious, segregated, and restrictive. Her friend's parents were religious and conservative, and did not let their daughter go out very much. However, they allowed*

Karen and their daughter to play together, because they lived so close, they went to the same school, and she enjoyed spending time with Karen. Karen does not recall exactly what she felt for her friend, as her memories of that time have faded. However, she does remember wanting to spend a lot of time with this friend, "to the exclusion of others." Although Karen did not know then what her feelings meant, she now links this early experience to her same-sex attractions in adolescence.

"You want to do what?" When Karen was in grade 6, her classmates began to date, which meant, of course, going out with boys. Karen had not yet considered the possibility of being sexually attracted to girls, but she knew that she wasn't attracted to boys, and she did not understand the point of going out with them. Her response to the idea of dating boys was, "You want to do what? Why?? ...I didn't get it."

It took Karen some time to even understand the language that her classmates used to describe their feelings for the opposite sex. Karen remembers being in the bathroom and being asked by a girl if she "liked anybody:"

I had no idea what the person meant. I sort of started randomly naming people who weren't...obnoxious. I mean, they were females, mostly. I didn't know. I never asked them what it meant. I totally didn't answer what they wanted, so they must have thought I was strange...it took me a while to figure out what they wanted.

Karen was oblivious to the feelings that other girls were developing for boys, and somewhat baffled by the idea that others believed she might be attracted to them.

By grade 6, Karen knew that she was not attracted to boys, but she did not know that there was an alternative to dating boys. There was no mention of homosexuality anywhere in her social world, and she did not know anyone who was openly gay. She just knew that she enjoyed spending time with girls, and that she wanted to be friends with

certain girls. Karen reflects, "I think if I had the same feelings for boys, I probably would have made the connection and, 'Oh, I must like him.'" But she could not make the same connection to her feelings for girls, because the idea of same-sex desire was as of yet unknown to her.

In grade 7, Karen came to the realization that she liked girls. She recalls, "I'm not sure if I knew the word 'lesbian' but I was pretty damn sure that I was attracted to women by grade 7." When she was attracted to a girl, Karen would experience an increased awareness of her presence, would want to spend considerable time with her, and there would be a feeling in her throat that would make it difficult to speak. Karen realized that her attraction to girls might be sexual and she accepted her feelings, thinking they were simply "different," and represented yet "another strange thing about me." However, she was aware that other people held negative attitudes toward same-sex attractions, so she kept her thoughts and feelings to herself. When she was 13, Karen came out to her aunt, whom she knew to be open-minded, but this was the only person Karen disclosed her sexual orientation to during her adolescent years.

Adolescence: Unfulfilled desire. What Karen remembers most about same-sex desire during her adolescent years is the absence of opportunities to express her sexuality:

When I was young, um, actually, unfulfilled desire was the thing I remember about same-sex desire in adolescence. A huge, huge crush I had on a straight girl when I was probably thirteen or....sad, sad. We ended up being friends. That's what happens to everybody at least once, ending up friends. Typical story. That's all you get!

Karen told her friend that she was attracted to girls, and although her friend was accepting, she made it clear that she was straight. Karen, therefore, did not disclose her

crush. Having an attraction made it difficult to get close to her friend and to relax around her. Karen was always afraid of "slipping, saying something I shouldn't," and possibly losing the friendship.

Karen was aware that same-sex desire is not generally accepted within mainstream society, and although she kept her feelings hidden most of the time, she would occasionally take a chance and show them. The results were less than favourable: Karen thinks that she might have scared a few straight girls by expressing an attraction and making them feel uncomfortable. It was hard enough to say anything at all when she felt attracted to a girl. It was far worse to finally gather the courage to speak, only to find herself incapable of adequately expressing her feelings, and having to endure the inevitable consequence of rejection. Karen believes that other adolescents who feel same-sex desire must also experience the need to hide their sexual attractions for fear of being rejected, and have few or no opportunities to act on their sexual feelings.

During her teenage years, Karen wrote songs and played music as a way of channelling her sexual energy and expressing the anger she felt at the lack of opportunities to act on her same-sex desire. Using her creative energy in this way enabled Karen to get rid of emotions that would otherwise have built up inside her, and to survive her adolescent years without going crazy.

Karen talks about an attribute that she believes had a major impact on her experience of her sexuality during adolescence. As a teenager Karen was fat, and she believes that her weight, and the probability that people dismissed her because of it, was the only reason her classmates didn't expect her to date boys. It was also the main reason Karen did not generally pursue the girls she was attracted to. She did not believe they

would be attracted to her, and she was self-conscious about being naked around others. At the age of sixteen, Karen became angry at not being able to date, and over the next year she lost a significant amount of weight. When she began to feel more self-confident, she started to date and to act on her same-sex desire. It was also around this time that she became involved with the music community, where she found many opportunities to meet queer women.

Karen's experiences of same-sex desire led her to political action toward the end of her adolescence. When she was in grade 12, Karen became tired of and angry about the homophobic remarks she repeatedly heard by other students in her high school. She also felt irritated because teachers would turn a blind eye to this kind of behaviour. As a result, Karen initiated a gay-straight alliance (GSA) in her school. The goal of this alliance was education, visibility, and promoting understanding of queer issues.

Karen sees herself as an "outcast" who didn't fit in at school, and who always felt different from other people. As soon as she came out publicly and set up the GSA, she began to feel like she belonged somewhere, and for the first time in her life, other students sought her out. "I had a good number of people who were anything other than normal, kind of following me around like puppy dogs. It was kind of surreal." All of a sudden she had the support, interest, and admiration of many students, both straight and gay, as the GSA took off. This was Karen's first experience related to same-sex desire that felt positive and empowering, as she was able to challenge and overcome the obstacles she faced getting the GSA started, and she was no longer invisible and alone.

Relationship with family of origin. Karen is the only child in her family and not very close to her parents, whom she describes as conservative, and "not really touchy-

feely.” Her father’s family was traditional and patriarchal, and he worked in a homophobic environment all his life. Her mother likes order and prefers not to rock the boat. In spite of this, Karen came out to her parents at the age of 17, some time after she started the GSA in her school. They seemed to accept her sexual orientation, but have not generally engaged in discussions about queer issues. Occasionally, Karen will point out and correct their misconceptions and stereotypes, or provide information when her mother asks her about the meaning of a queer term. However, Karen finds that she generally avoids talking about herself to her parents, and is glad that she is independent from them.

Conclusion. Karen has never been attracted to men, and although she is open to this possibility, she doubts it will ever happen. She is willing to be considered a dyke or lesbian by others who know she is attracted to women, but she has not adopted a sexual identity on the basis of her same-sex desire. Karen says that she has slept with women on a casual basis, but has not yet had a “serious” relationship. For the time being, dating is not her main focus, and neither is sexual desire. Rather, music is the focal point of her life, and the area into which she channels most of her energy.

Across Narrative Thematic Analysis

An across narrative analysis was conducted to highlight the main themes that emerged in this study. A number of themes were uncovered in the process of transcription, analysis, and writing of the narratives that were common to the experiences of all or most of the participants. As the analysis progressed from one participant to the next, I noticed and tracked common elements in their stories. By the time I completed writing all the narratives, I had discovered significant commonalities between stories.

The basis upon which a theme was determined to be “common” was the theme’s occurrence in all or most of the narratives. I chose five themes that I believe represent the most significant findings.

In the following section, the five major themes are presented: Growing up in a homophobic and heterosexist environment, repression and denial of same-sex desire in adolescence, unfulfilled desire, secrecy and self-silencing, and reaching self-acceptance. Each theme contains one or more sub-themes.

Theme 1: Growing up in a Heterosexist and Homophobic Environment

The dominant discourse encompassing the thematic analysis in this study, and the major theme that informs the other four themes, is the reality of growing up in a heterosexist and homophobic environment. The lived experience of same-sex desire for all the women in the study took place in social contexts in which homosexuality was viewed negatively. By the time many of the participants realized they were sexually attracted to women, they already knew that their relational worlds and communities disapproved of homosexuality. This knowledge had a profound impact on the experience of same-sex sexual desire during their adolescence.

Homophobia. Homophobia refers to the fear and/or hatred of homosexuality and lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals. All participants’ narratives contained elements of homophobia. Three women in this study offered fuller descriptions of overt homophobia. Kase, Suzy, and Mary Beth, experienced overt homophobia in their social environments. Mary Beth and Suzy grew up in families who, because of their religious beliefs, viewed and portrayed homosexuality as sinful and immoral. Kase’s family was not religious, but she described her culture as “traditional, repressed, and homophobic,”

and she too, experienced homophobia from some of her family members. These women all remember how difficult it was to realize they had sexual feelings that were unacceptable to their families.

Kase's father and older brother have never accepted that she is gay. When she came out to her parents, her father "...just curled into a ball on the floor and he goes, 'You broke me.'" Her mother also did not accept it at first. Her parents asked:

"Why are you so abnormal?" That's their exact words...and they feel like it's because I moved to Canada, and it's such an open culture, and that that's what made me change, the culture; just 'cause I'm hanging around white people.

Kase and her father have not talked about her sexual orientation since the day she came out, and her older brother has asked her not to discuss the subject with him. Her mother, on the other hand, has come to accept it and her younger brother is supportive of her sexual orientation. Asked how it was for her to come out to her family, Kase responded, "Oh, it [was] *really* hard." Homophobic attitudes, as exemplified in Kase's coming out experience, had a negative impact on her experience of same-sex desire in adolescence. The knowledge that there was homophobia in her family, and in society in general, prevented Kase from being able to embrace the experience of same-sex sexual desire, or to fully enjoy her sexuality during her adolescence.

Homophobia also had a detrimental effect on Mary Beth's experience of same-sex desire in adolescence. She describes the religion of her family and the community in which she grew up as a "... Christian in the 'America' sense of the word, white community." Because she held the same religious beliefs as her parents at the time, she believed that her same-sex feelings came from the devil, and she tried hard for many years to repress any sexual thoughts or feelings that occurred. She also tried to act

heterosexual and date boys, although she never felt any attraction to them. She kept her feelings to herself because she sensed that it was unsafe to tell anyone.

All the women in this study who grew up in homophobic environments (family, school, peers, work, religious institutions, and society at large) depicted their experience of same-sex desire as difficult, lonely, isolating, and depressing. The fear of being discovered and punished or rejected was a salient aspect of their experiences.

Heterosexism. Heterosexism is prejudice rooted in societal beliefs and values. It is the assumption that heterosexuality is natural and preferable to other sexual orientations. Growing up in heterosexist environments affected the participants' lived experience of their same-sex desire in adolescence.

Many of the women in this study who did not perceive their families and communities as homophobic, nonetheless portrayed them as heterosexist, that is, as holding the belief that heterosexuality is a better or more 'normal' sexual orientation than homosexuality. Gretchen, for example, described her parents as conservative and sometimes "anti-tolerant," but not homophobic. Because she considered them to be traditional, she did not come out to them during her adolescent years, and kept important parts of her life hidden from them. Only recently, at the age of 21, did Gretchen tell her mother about her same-sex desire. Her mother's initial reaction was negative, but over time she has come to support Gretchen. Ironically, Gretchen's openness has brought her and her mother closer, and Gretchen now enjoys being able to tell her about the women she goes out with. She has not yet told her father, but believes that he would not be upset if he found out. She hopes that her mother will tell him, so that she does not have to go through another coming-out.

Roya also stated that her parents were “not aggressively homophobic,” but she considers her father’s views about the subject to be somewhat ambivalent. As a child, Roya remembers receiving mixed messages from her parents about homosexuality. They told her, “it’s to be looked upon with tolerance and love, and...and try not to be gay.” Although Roya said that her parents raised her to think for herself, be independent, and be who she is, her same-sex desire is a topic she has never discussed with them. Even last summer, when her girlfriend met her parents, Roya introduced her as a friend rather than as her partner. Roya hopes that her parents will accept any long-term partner she ends up with, but she has not, as of yet, put this to the test. The result of living in a heterosexist environment is that Roya continues to keep her same-sex desire a secret from her family.

The pressure to be attracted to boys. Several of the participants spoke about expectations by their friends and classmates, during their teenage years, to like and to date boys. In some cases there was pressure to talk about one’s opposite-sex crushes. Karen, for example, recalls an incident in grade seven in the girls’ bathroom, where another girl asked her whom she ‘liked.’ Karen was puzzled by the question and uncertain how to respond. She did not know that she was expected to name a boy. Karen had never ‘liked’ any boys, so she could not make the connection. She responded by naming some girls who she thought were nice, and only later realized that this was not the answer the girl in the bathroom had been looking for.

Similarly, Amy recounts an incident where several of her female friends pressured her to tell them which boy in class she liked. She did not have a crush on any of the boys, and at first this is what she told her friends. They would not, however, accept Amy’s response. They insisted that every girl had to have a crush on *someone*, meaning of

course, a boy. Amy recalls how stressful it was to feel pressured to come up with an answer. At one point, "everyone went quiet. And there was this weird, uncomfortable moment, and they [the girls] kind of looked at each other and looked at me, and it got really intimidating." Amy finally gave in to the pressure and named a boy, only because she sensed that not doing so could have resulted in the loss of her friends.

The next four themes represent the ways in which growing up in a heterosexual and homophobic environment impacted on the lived experience of same-sex desire among the women in this study. These themes are: unfulfilled desire, denial and repression of same-sex desire, secrecy and self-silencing, and reaching self-acceptance. They all spring from the main theme of heterosexism and homophobia, and are all interrelated.

Theme 2: Repression and Denial of Same-Sex Desire in Adolescence

Most of the women in this study told narratives of denying or repressing their same-sex sexual desire at some point during adolescence. Many of the participants denied or repressed their same-sex thoughts and feelings as soon as they became aware of having them, and several of the women continued to do so throughout their teenage years.

Mary Beth, for example, denied her same-sex desire from the time she first realized she was attracted to girls until the age of 18. She described her teenage years as "...definitely a write-off in terms of sexual desire....I was so repressed." She would use her mind to suppress her physical responses, and interpret her attractions to girls as "a really strong friendship feeling," denying that her feelings might be sexual. In those rare moments when same-sex desire managed to sneak up on her, she felt extreme guilt and shame.

Similarly, Gretchen, in response to a “mental conflict” that she developed when she realized her attractions to girls were sexual, repressed her same-sex desire through contracts she made with herself, in which she would promise to avoid having sexual thoughts or fantasies about girls for specified periods of time. She did this for two years, from the age of 11 to 13, until she could no longer deny her feelings, and acknowledged to herself that she was sexually attracted to women.

Kase also denied having same-sex attractions during her teenage years. When she had a crush on a girl, Kase did not think about sexual desire because she had learned from her culture that it was taboo. Instead, she would tell herself that her feelings were platonic. Even though she longed for physical closeness, including hugging, cuddling, and kissing, with the girls she liked, she was not able to admit to herself that her feelings were sexual. When she was 15, for example, Kase had a crush on her close friend. She wrote about her feelings in her diary: “I admit that I had a crush on Diane, but it ain’t like, you know, the [gay] kind...it’s like, the affection kind. It’s like a good friend crush.”

During her adolescence Suzy believed, as she had been taught by the Catholic faith, that sex must only occur between a man and a woman in the context of marriage. Therefore, even though she was aware that she had same-sex sexual feelings, she interpreted them as “love,” which she distinguished from sex. She believed that “love” feelings for other women were acceptable, but like Kase and Mary Beth, she would not admit that her feelings might be sexual. When she found herself admiring parts of a girl’s body, such as her breasts, she would feel a tremendous sense of guilt and shame.

Roya and Karen were the only participants who stated that they have always accepted their same-sex feelings. Karen always felt “different” from other people, and

when she realized that she was attracted to girls, she just accepted this as another facet of her personality. She knew that other people held antigay views, but this did not undermine her self-worth. Likewise, Roya maintains that she did not negatively judge, deny, or repress her same-sex desire. Roya has accepted her attraction to women for as long as she can remember, and attributes her openness and flexibility to her upbringing. She was raised to be independent and to think for herself. As a result, she was able to develop a positive understanding of her same-sex desire while growing up in a heterosexist society.

These narratives indicate that denial and repression was a significant element of the experience of same-sex sexual desire for most of the women in this study. It was a consequence of growing up in a heterosexist and homophobic culture in which the construction of girls' sexuality as heterosexual and passive, and the silence surrounding girls' same-sex desire, led many of the women in this study to disconnect from their bodies and shut down any physical expression of their sexuality.

Theme 3: Unfulfilled Desire

"When I was young, unfulfilled desire was the thing I remember about same-sex desire in adolescence," recalls Karen. This statement echoes the experiences of the women in this study, who all told narratives of unfulfilled sexual desire. During their adolescent years, these women had few opportunities to act on their sexual feelings. As a result, the theme of unfulfilled, or unexpressed, same-sex sexual desire was consistent across all the participants. Six out of the seven participants did not have sex with women when they were teenagers, and only one participant dated girls. Most of the women in this study reported their first sexual experience with a woman at age 18 or later.

Roya was the only woman who had sex with girls before age 18. She mentioned one casual and unfulfilling same-sex sexual encounter, and a few instances of kissing girls at parties. She recalls feeling pressured to kiss girls in front of boys, and feeling disgusted by the idea of “being used as a vessel for male entertainment.” The girls she kissed were not sexually attracted to her, but used her, she felt, for the benefit of boys. She did not view these incidents as a true expression of her same-sex sexual desire.

Another participant, Gretchen, spoke about a few of her same-sex dating experiences, but said that she dated primarily out of loneliness. She did not know many queer girls in her community, and the opportunities to date were few. She found that she had little in common with the girls she went out with, and she did not become sexually involved with any of them.

Crushes on straight girls. None of the women in this study talked about having romantic relationships with girls during their adolescence. Instead, most of the participants told narratives of unrequited “crushes” they had on their heterosexual female friends, whom they longed for but who were unavailable. These crushes took place secretly and from afar, and were never articulated to anyone. Most of the participants interpreted their crushes as non-sexual at the time that they occurred. Looking back, however, they now perceive them as having involved sexual desire.

Kase, for example, talked about close friendships she had with girls in high school in which she would develop an attraction. At the time, Kase understood her same-sex feelings as “affection” or as “a good friend crush,” rather than as sexual. The thought of being gay was too threatening to consider as a possibility. She never disclosed her feelings to the girls she was attracted to, and she did not expect her friends to return her

attractions. Although she would have liked to have a girlfriend with whom she could express mutual affection, she had not yet come to believe that two girls could be romantically or sexually involved, and she was aware that the girls she knew wanted to be romantically involved with boys.

Karen recalls her experience of being attracted to a female friend, and expresses her thoughts about unfulfilled same-sex desire in adolescence. "A huge, huge crush I had on a straight girl when I was probably thirteen...sad, sad. We ended up being friends. That's what happens to everybody at least once, ending up friends. Typical story. That's all you get!" She felt resigned to the fact that her feelings would not be returned because they were "different" from what she was supposed to feel and what others ostensibly felt.

Suzy also remembers, "I fell in love with my best friend. For sure! For sure! Because I was writing poems...I was thinking about her all the time... I was like, oh my God, she is *so* attractive." Suzy never told her friend how she felt because she was afraid of losing her. She felt tremendous pain when her friend began a serious relationship with a boy, and "especially when she would tell me about her problems with her boyfriend."

Lack of knowledge about queer issues. All the women in this study reported that there were few or no opportunities to meet other girls who also felt same-sex desire. Few of the participants knew any queer people, and most had no knowledge of the existence of queer culture and history. None of these women had queer role models and few had peers with whom to share their experience of same-sex desire.

Amy, for example, who acknowledged her same-sex desire at age 15, did not know any queer people her age. Her mother had gay and lesbian friends, but these were not women Amy wished to emulate. She viewed her mother's lesbian friends as "older

biker-dykes” with whom she did not identify. She never felt that she could talk to them, and in fact, she figured she could not possibly be a lesbian because she did not look or act like them. Similarly, Karen knew and accepted by age 13 that she had sexual feelings toward girls, but she did not know about the existence of ‘gay people’ and queer identities, or about any alternatives to dating boys. “I’m not sure if I knew the word ‘lesbian’ but I was pretty damn sure that I was attracted to women.”

Gretchen was the only participant who accepted her same-sex desire relatively early, around age 13, and also had knowledge about queer people, history, and culture. When she was 14, Gretchen joined feminist and queer youth groups, where she learned about queer issues and met other open-minded adolescents. Even then, Gretchen felt frustrated because there were few queer girls in her suburban neighbourhood. Although she was not completely isolated, she was reluctant to share her feelings with others.

Thus, in adolescence, most of women in this study had little or no understanding of ‘queerness,’ few or no other queer youth to meet, no queer role models, and no one to talk to about same-sex desire. For all of these women, same-sex desire, as well as their thoughts and feelings about being attracted to other girls, went largely unexpressed during their teenage years.

Expressions of unfulfilled desire. Although the majority of the women in this study did not express their same-sex desire directly, for example, by dating or having sex with other girls, many found other ways of acting on their sexual feelings. Two of the women spoke of playing sexual games when they were younger. When Gretchen was 10, she and her female friends “... had kissing games, constantly. And I was really into that.” She did not know at the time that sexual attraction could happen between girls, but she

found that she enjoyed kissing girls, and was aware that she felt something sexual when this happened.

Similarly, Roya spoke of engaging in sexual play around the age of 9 with her best friend when they had sleepovers:

...we used to play with each other a bit. But it was always in this, "We didn't actually do it," kind of....I think I was more into it than she was. I was like, "Cool! This is interesting." It would be like (whispers playfully): "After we were asleep." It was in my sleep. I wasn't responsible for it.

Playing sexual games was a way for these young women to express their sexual feelings without having to acknowledge the sexual nature of what they were doing, and perhaps without even knowing that their emerging sexuality was what drove these games.

Several participants remembered having fantasies and masturbating during their teenage years as a way of expressing their same-sex desire. Amy, for example, spoke about masturbating to same-sex fantasies, and Gretchen recalls, "I started masturbating, because I started having persistent...every night, these really intense dreams about various girls..." Her dreams created an urgent need to express her sexual desire. As there was nobody she could have sex with, Gretchen masturbated to release the sexual tension that her dreams created.

Three of the participants, Kase, Suzy, and Mary Beth, spoke about the role of the media in the expression of their same-sex desire. In the absence of opportunities to have sexual experiences with other girls, these women found movies, television and lesbian fiction a welcome alternative for expressing their same-sex desire. Suzy's first awareness of having same-sex desire occurred while watching a television show when she was 9 years of age. She described her reaction to the lead actress as she watched:

...she had cute hair, red hair and curly, and she was *so hot*! I was sitting there and watching it and like, I'm getting, you know, a reaction. I'm like, "What's that?" And I'm like, "I think I'm in love with Leah Thompson."

Suzy listed several movies and TV shows that she watched during her adolescent years where she felt attracted to female characters, and which facilitated the process of acknowledging, and eventually accepting, her same-sex feelings.

Mary Beth spoke about being mesmerized and glued to her seat when she watched TV shows in which women were romantically or sexually involved. When she came across a show that had "girl-on-girl action," "I'd just STOP. Even though I didn't wanna admit that that's why I stopped, I would stop and I'd be just *riveted*, you know...I would just feel something like a tightness in the chest, and...I wouldn't be able to turn the channel." Although Mary Beth worked hard to repress her sexual feelings, she could not deny those moments in which her body reacted to what she was seeing. In a sense, watching TV allowed her to experience brief moments of sexual desire without having to feel like she had done anything wrong in the 'real' world.

Kase also turned to the media in the process of learning about and accepting her same-sex desire. Watching TV shows such as Xena, Warrior Princess and Buffy the Vampire Slayer allowed her to recognize qualities she found attractive in women, such as strength, independence, and the ability to take care of oneself. Reading lesbian fiction ("Slash") on the Internet eventually led to Kase's acceptance of her same-sex desire.

Two of the women in this study, Karen and Gretchen, became politically active around queer issues, as a result of their acknowledgment and acceptance of their same-sex desire. Gretchen became involved in political groups where she learned about queer issues and met other queer youth, and Karen initiated a gay-straight alliance in her high

school, in order to increase acceptance and visibility for other youth who experienced same-sex desire. These were some of the actions that the participants took while they were adolescents to express their same-sex feelings when there were few or no options for dating and having sexual experiences with girls.

Theme 4: Secrecy and Self-Silencing

Another important theme that was evident in this study was secrecy and self-silencing, or remaining 'in the closet' during adolescence. All the participants made the complex decisions to hide their same-sex desire from other people, in order to avoid stigma and rejection. In several of the participants' families, there was silence around sex in general, and no positive discussions about the topic of same-sex desire occurred. There were no affirming depictions of homosexuality in the schools these women attended, nor within their cultural and religious institutions. Hence, many of the participants learned early on that same-sex desire was taboo, a subject not to be discussed. As a result, they kept their same-sex feelings a secret.

Karen, for example, told only one person about her same-sex desire during her teenage years, a relative whom she knew to be open-minded. Gretchen told a select group of friends, some of whom were queer. The other women in this study kept their feelings a secret from everyone in their social environment. Amy, for example, attended a high school in which disclosing her same-sex desire would have been devastating. She describes her school as an "unhealthy environment for any queer kids...full of bitches...I was not in a high school where people would accept that in *any* way. Like you'd be...*destroyed*. Completely." Likewise, Mary Beth could not tell anyone in her family and religious community about her same-sex desire.

From an early age, Suzy's Catholic family and community made it clear that sexuality was taboo, and that homosexuality was a sin. As a result, Suzy also learned to keep her feelings hidden, and remained in the closet even after she accepted her same-sex feelings at age 17. She did not disclose her same-sex desire to her family until she was 20, when her mother confronted her about it and Suzy decided to tell the truth.

Similarly, Gretchen figured out that her same-sex feelings were not something she was free to talk about. She recalls, "I had no idea what a queer girl was but I realized that this same-sex attraction was definitely a negative thing. It was definitely something that I probably shouldn't act on, talk about or let anybody else know about it." Even though she was able to tell a few of her friends, for many years she believed that she would have to hide her feelings from the world forever.

Somewhere along the way, these women learned that their same-sex feelings were unacceptable, and that if people found out, they would face stigma and rejection. To survive their adolescence, they remained silent about their same-sex desire.

The consequences of keeping feelings inside and remaining 'in the closet.' The harmful consequences of self-silencing were clear in this study. The participants described feelings of loneliness, isolation, and frustration during their adolescence. They also remember being extremely careful and selective about whom to tell what, learning to tell lies, and living a double life. Several of the participants spoke about having feelings of depression, and two of the women in the study reported having suicidal thoughts during their adolescence.

Gretchen recalls leading a double life during her teens, and keeping her parents in the dark about the fact that she was sexually attracted to women:

My parents are very traditional and they spent a lot of time waiting around for this boy to come around so they could give me the talk and all of this. And in the meantime my personal life like, just took off and C [friend] and I were leading this whole other life...

Amy remembers her high school years as a time of loneliness and depression. Although she desperately wanted to share her feelings with her family and friends, she held back. When people asked her about boys, she would lie about her feelings or simply avoid answering the question. "...I wanted to tell people... it took a lot of energy honestly to keep everything secret, to not talk about what was going on...I was close a few times to telling friends, and very depressed at times from not doing so ... I always felt that if I told one person I would kinda have to tell everyone." The fear of everyone finding out, and the rejection that was certain to follow, prevented Amy from disclosing her sexual orientation to anyone. Amy's self-enforced silencing caused her to feel isolated, frustrated, and depressed.

Suzy's feelings of depression were so powerful and the pressure to be heterosexual so great that she contemplated suicide. Suzy explained:

I didn't fit in. It was quite depressing. I think I probably *was* depressed, really, because I would write these weird diary entries...and I remember there being a thing that I wrote. I think I was probably *really* depressed that evening. I was like, "If I don't get a boyfriend by the time I'm 18, I'm going to kill myself."

Fortunately, Suzy accepted her same-sex feelings before her 18th birthday. By the time she was 18, she was meeting other queer people, she did not feel as isolated and depressed as she had a couple of years earlier, and she had hope for the future.

All the women in this study kept their feelings hidden for at least part of their adolescence. This secrecy had a negative impact on their sexuality, and was detrimental to their general well being. The consequences of secrecy and self-silencing ranged from

feelings of isolation and loneliness, confusion, guilt, shame, depression, and suicidal thoughts.

Theme 5: Reaching Self-Acceptance - A Critical Turning Point

The final theme is self-acceptance, and it represents a turning point in each participant's life where she was able to accept her same-sex feelings and herself as a worthy individual. In many cases, this turning point was preceded and followed by major changes in the participants' lives. Each woman told the story of how, often after many years of repression and denial, secrecy, and unexpressed desire, she was finally able to accept her same-sex feelings. The stories are as varied as the women's unique experiences and backgrounds, yet all share the common theme of resistance to homophobia and heterosexism, and the strength to risk sharing with others something personal about themselves that they knew might be rejected.

All the women, at the time of this study, indicated that they felt comfortable with their same-sex desire. Three of the participants accepted their same-sex desire at or before age 13, and the other four women reached self-acceptance around ages 17-19. It took several of the participants many years of struggle, inner conflict, and self-reflection before they were able to accept their same-sex feelings.

Roya, for example, remembers feeling comfortable with all aspects of her sexuality from a relatively young age. By grade 7, Karen became aware of and accepted her same-sex desire as part of who she was. Gretchen, after two years of struggling to rid herself of same-sex desire, realized at the age of 13 that her feelings were not going to disappear, and with this recognition came partial self-acceptance. She continued to

engage in heterosexual dating during her teenage years, but she did not attempt to deny or struggle with her attraction to girls.

Suzy, Mary Beth, Amy, and Kase came to accept their same-sex desire toward the end of their adolescent years. Amy, for example, knew that she was “at least bisexual” by the age of 15, but she felt that she needed to prove she was gay before she could fully accept her same-sex desire and come out to others. The evidence she required included one sexual experience each with a man and a woman. She was 19 when she finally had the evidence she needed. This was the point at which she admitted that she was gay, and accepted her same-sex desire.

Another poignant example is Mary Beth’s account of her process of reaching self-acceptance. At age 18, she changed schools and began to spend a great deal of time in a different part of the city. Here she met a group of friends who were open-minded and supportive of diverse sexualities. In this environment of understanding and acceptance, Mary Beth began to feel more comfortable with the idea of homosexuality, and this enabled her to acknowledge her same-sex desire. When she was 19, after a year of struggling to work through the inner conflict between what she felt was right and the antigay beliefs she had been exposed to all her life, Mary Beth was able to accept her same-sex desire and come out to her friends.

Suzy also offered an important example of this theme in her compelling account of how she came to accept her same-sex desire at the age of 17, after she nearly killed herself with a BB gun. Coming close to death made her realize that her same-sex attractions were an acceptable part of herself, and that God had made her this way. Therefore, what she felt must be acceptable, and there was no point in trying to change

who she was. A year later, Suzy discovered the Internet where she began to meet other queer people in queer-friendly chatrooms. This was her first contact with the queer community, and the beginning of an era in her life marked by self-discovery and self-acceptance.

The dominant discourse that was used in this study, that of growing up in a homophobic and heterosexist environment, and the four themes it encompassed, illuminate the role of socio-cultural contexts, including social structures, relationships, and social practices, in the participants' experience of same-sex desire during adolescence. There are two layers of experience that need to be considered here: The first is the influence of socio-cultural factors on the experience of same-sex sexual desire during adolescence. The second is the impact of the social context in which these women find themselves today on the stories they tell about those experiences. Further, these findings raise questions about the role of knowledge and language in the experience of same-sex sexual desire during adolescence and in the kinds of stories participants were able and willing to tell. These issues will be further discussed in the next chapter

CHAPTER V

Discussion

Introduction

This research sought to gain an understanding of adolescent girls' lived experience of same-sex desire through the retrospective narratives told by young women aged 19-25. The discussion consists of two parts: In the first section, the five themes that were identified will be examined together with the literature. In the second part the implications for research and counselling will be discussed.

Significant Findings

Five significant themes were identified from the analysis of the narratives. They were: Growing up in a homophobic and heterosexist environment, repression and denial of same-sex desire in adolescence, unfulfilled desire, secrecy and self-silencing, and reaching self-acceptance. These themes will be discussed in terms of how they support, qualify, and extend the literature presented in Chapter II.

The first theme, growing up in a cultural context of homophobia and heterosexism, is well supported in the literature about queer youth. Numerous studies have addressed the homophobic and heterosexist environments queer youth live in and the impact on their lives (D'Augelli, 1998; Friend, 1993; Jordan, Vaughan, & Woodworth, 1997; Malinsky, 1997; Martin & Hetrick, 1988; O'Connor, 1994; Russell, Driscoll, & Truong, 2002; Safren & Heimberg, 1999; & Savin-Williams, 1994, 1995). The effects of homophobia and heterosexism include feelings of invisibility, disempowerment, isolation, difficult peer and family relationships, anger, depression, suicidal thoughts, suicidal attempts, high dropout rates, and substance use.

Many of the women in this study reported feeling isolated and depressed as a result of repressing, denying, or hiding their same-sex feelings. One participant whose religion condemned homosexuality spoke about the adverse effects of her anger on her academic performance and her relationships, and two of the participants felt so depressed that they contemplated suicide because of their knowledge that same-sex desire was stigmatized in their social environments. Several participants alluded to the oppressive environments in their schools, a fact that made it virtually impossible to voice their experiences during their high school years.

In contrast to previous findings about the impact of homophobia and heterosexism on the lives of queer youth, none of the women in the current study recounted incidents of verbal threats, physical violence or bullying, substance use, or dropping out of high school as a result of homophobia. This difference may be attributed to the small size of the sample in this study, and to the fact that most of the participants did not publicly come out during their high school years. Coming out at school and at home can lead to bullying and physical violence, dropping out, and substance use.

Denial and repression of same-sex sexual desire is the second theme that the majority of participants reported. This theme is supported by the literature on queer youth (Quinlivan & Town, 1999; Rotheram-Borus & Fernandez, 1995; Troiden, 1989) and on adolescent girls' same-sex desire (Tolman, 1994, 1999; Ussher & Mooney-Somers, 2000). It has been noted that although some adolescents are able to accept their same-sex desire despite living in antigay contexts, many others deny their same-sex attractions, or acknowledge that they have these feelings but attempt to suppress them.

In this study, denial and repression of same-sex desire may have been the result of participants' own struggle with internalized homophobia. Many of the women in this study realized or at least suspected that their feelings for women were sexual. They also knew their feelings were socially unacceptable. For example, having same-sex desire was inconsistent with Mary Beth's religious beliefs, which viewed homosexuality as a sin. As a result, she denied her same-sex feelings. For others, denial and repression may have been based on a lack of knowledge. Not knowing that sexual desire between two women was possible or about the existence of queer sexual identities, some of these women were unable to interpret their feelings as sexual, thereby denying their experience of same-sex desire. Related to this lack of knowledge was not having the language necessary to describe, interpret and make meaning of their same-sex desire.

The participants in Tolman's (1994, 1999) research struggled with the dilemma of how to remain and be seen as normal and respectable while acknowledging and acting on their sexual desire, which they knew was considered unacceptable for girls. Some of these young women responded to this dilemma by not feeling their desire, while others resisted the strict social rules and expectations around girls' sexual desire by making a claim to their feelings. The one bisexual woman in Tolman's (1994) study reported feeling pressure to silence her body and disconnect from her same-sex sexual desire to protect herself from homophobia in her social environment. As a result, she felt confused about her feelings for girls and denied the possibility of a sexual dimension to her same-sex attractions.

Some of the participants in Ussher and Mooney-Somers' (2000) study of same-sex desire among lesbians aged 17-24 reported that the initial discovery of their same-sex

desire led to anxiety and fear, and resistance to or rejection of these feelings, which they perceived as threatening. Consistent with the findings of these studies, most of the women in the current study denied or repressed their same-sex feelings during their adolescence. However, a few were able to resist or ignore the heterosexist norms and antigay attitudes of their cultural contexts, and allowed themselves to experience their desire.

The third theme, unfulfilled desire, is another consequence of growing up in a heterosexist and homophobic society. It too, is documented in some of the literature on LGB youth and adolescent women's sexual desire. During their adolescence, many of the women in this study were fairly certain their attraction to girls involved a sexual dimension. However, the negative messages they received about homosexuality, the "missing discourse of desire" (Fine, 1988, p. 33) in their homes, schools, workplace, and religious institutions, and the privileging of sex within heterosexual marriage over other sexual practices, taught these young women to fear and repress their desires, and discouraged them from exploring their same-sex feelings. As a result, the majority of the participants did not endeavour to seek pleasure through sexual activity with other girls. Instead, they admired girls from a distance and kept their feelings to themselves.

The lesbian participants in Quinlivan and Town's (1999) study on queer youth in New Zealand secondary schools expressed their sexual feelings primarily through crushes and infatuations with teachers and peers. These women felt alienated from their bodies and were unable to explore the physical dimensions of their sexuality. Like the women in the current study, their tendency was to "worship from afar" (p. 517) rather than engage in sexual activity. In Ussher and Mooney-Somers' (2000) research, some of the

participants also reported having unrequited crushes on girls. Like the women in the current study, they were not always certain whether their feelings were sexual and did not act on their desire.

Other research on LGB youth has found that many adolescent women who experience same-sex sexual desire actually date and have same-sex experiences. For example, the lesbian participants in Thompson's (1990) study of sexual initiation among teenage girls were able to fulfill their same-sex desire through direct sexual activity with girls. They spoke about their first experience of sex with a girl in terms of pleasure and orgasm, and some of them reported being intensely aware of their sexual desire. Some of the participants in Ussher-Mooney's study also engaged in sexual activity, although not all of them felt sexual pleasure when they did so. In a study examining dating relationships among lesbian and bisexual adolescent women aged 13-18 (Elze, 2002), participants were found to actively date, in spite of potential obstacles to same-sex dating and relationships. The majority of the participants were involved in same-sex dating, with one-third reporting involvement in a serious same-sex relationship. D'Augelli and Herschberger (1993) also discussed the existence of same-sex romantic relationships among adolescent lesbian and bisexual women. It would be interesting to know what factors made it possible for the women in these studies, but not the women in the current study, to act on their same-sex desire in adolescence.

The fourth theme, secrecy and self-silencing, or remaining in the closet, is closely related to the theme of growing up in a homophobic and heterosexist environment. It is the inevitable product of societal prejudice against same-sex sexual desire, and of a cultural story of women's sexuality that is silent about adolescent girls' heterosexual and

same-sex desires (Tolman, 1994). Not telling anyone about one's same-sex feelings acts as a safeguard against the dangers that are present in a culture that at best tolerates young women's same-sex desire, and at worst, threatens those who experience it with harassment, rejection, or violence. All the women in this study made use of the protective strategy of secrecy and self-silencing.

The theme of secrecy and self-silencing is consistent with the literature on adolescent girls' sexual development (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995) and sexual desire (Fine, 1988; Tolman, 1994, 1999; Ussher & Mooney-Somers, 2000) and with literature on queer youth (D'Augelli, 1998; Quinlivan & Town, 1999; Savin-Williams, 1995, 1998). In their research on adolescent girls, Brown and Gilligan (1992) found that when girls entered adolescence, they began to doubt their feelings, to discount the value of their experiences, and to conceal their true thoughts and feelings from others. Brown and Gilligan viewed this tendency as an attempt by adolescent girls to preserve important relationships, and attributed it to patriarchal values, which impose rules and expectations of femininity that render certain experiences improper and unacceptable. Similarly, Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan (1995) found that adolescent girls lost their voice in some of their relationships, which led to isolation. Like the girls in these studies, many of the women in the current research also doubted and devalued their experiences during their adolescence, and concealed their same-sex feelings from others in order to preserve their relationships.

In Tolman's (1994) research, the lesbian and bisexual participants (n=2) voiced fear and a sense of vulnerability that they linked to the homophobia present in their social context. They were well aware of cultural norms and images that demand heterosexuality

and denounce same-sex sexual desire. To protect themselves, they kept their sexual feelings from being known. Usher and Mooney-Somers (2000) also found that staying in the closet and maintaining privacy was one strategy the women in their study used to protect themselves from stigmatization in their social environments. For many of the girls in Fine's research (1988) on adolescent sexuality, home was not a safe space for exploring sexuality or discussions about sexual desire. These girls therefore kept their feelings and their sexual experiences hidden from their families. Similarly, the majority of the male and female LGB adolescents in Quinlivan and Town's (1999) study reported hiding their same-sex desire at school and at home in order to avoid endangering their physical and emotional well-being.

In the current study, the participants' knowledge that same-sex sexual desire was socially unacceptable also led to secrecy about their thoughts and feelings, and a loss of voice in their relationships with others. These women knew that were they to let their secret out, they could face harsh criticism, rejection, and abandonment by their families, peers, and others in their relational world. To preserve their reputations and their relationships with family and friends, to avoid rejection, and to protect their physical and emotional safety, the majority of the women in this study resorted to hiding their truth from others. This led to isolation, loneliness, and depression, feelings that were made worse by the fact that for many of the participants, their initial awareness of same-sex desire occurred within close friendships with girls, which would ideally be a place of support and understanding.

The final theme, reaching self-acceptance, is well supported in the literature on LGB identity development. A number of theories and models have examined the

processes by which individuals discover their same-sex sexual desire and progress toward self-acceptance and the adoption of a sexual identity label on the basis of their sexual orientation. (Cass, 1979; Chapman & Brannock, 1987; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Ponce, 1978; Rotheram-Borus & Fernandez, 1995; Troiden, 1989). It is important to note, however, that the focus of the current research was on same-sex desire and not sexual identity. Although some of the women in the current study adopted a lesbian or queer sexual identity label once they accepted their same-sex desire, many have chosen not to do so, or are in the process of negotiating the relationship between their desire and their total identity. The decision not to label oneself may be developmental, with greater clarity and consolidation of sexual orientation and identity occurring over time. It may also be more typical for this generation of adolescents, who live in an era of greater flexibility of gender/sexual boundaries and identities, to avoid or postpone adopting a sexual identity label on the basis of their same-sex attractions. It would be interesting, in future research, to examine adolescent girls' negotiation of their gender and sexual identities in relation to their experience of same-sex sexual desire.

The theme of reaching self-acceptance is also supported in the literature on queer adolescents. It has been shown that, although denial and repression are a common and understandable initial reaction to the discovery of same-sex desire in adolescence, many individuals eventually come to accept their feelings, either in adolescence or in early adulthood (Herdt, 1988; Hetrick & Martin, 1987; Savin-Williams 1990b, 1995, 1998).

Reaching self-acceptance is often accompanied by a dramatic shift in the self and in how individuals see the world (Ussher & Mooney-Somers, 2000). Several of the women in the current study reported feelings of happiness and relief once they accepted

their same-sex desire, the shedding of guilt and shame, and a new sense of freedom to pursue their desires. This turning point in the participants' lives, whereby they were able to accept their same-sex attractions and themselves, was made possible by a number of factors. Some of these included completing high school and moving into adulthood, becoming more independent from family, feeling more secure with their feelings, finding supportive friends and in some cases family members, obtaining information about queer issues, and undergoing a shift in consciousness regarding the sense of self in relation to others.

The Struggle to Articulate Embodied Desire

One notable finding in the current study that warrants discussion was the participants' struggle to articulate the physical dimension of their sexual desire during the research interviews. As young adults who have accepted their same-sex desire, they seem to have the knowledge that would enable them to talk about their embodied desire. Yet they hesitated and were reluctant to speak directly about their bodies' involvement in desire. Instead, most of the women focused on other aspects of their experience of same-sex desire in adolescence, such as their past and current social relationships. They discussed family, friendships, relationships with peers, crushes on female friends, queer politics, the impact of religion and culture, coming out to self and others, and the impact of heterosexism and homophobia.

In Holland and Ramazanoglu's (1994) research on young people's sexuality, the participants appeared not to have the language with which to talk about sexual matters. Holland and Ramazanoglu assert that, "beyond the limitations of the descriptive vocabulary for bodily parts and sexual acts lies the absence of a language to describe the

ambiguities and uncertainties about sexuality and sexual behaviour which many of them [the participants] felt, and particularly to describe female sexuality and desire in positive terms" (p. 138). This observation echoes the struggles of the young women in the current study, who also found it difficult to speak about the physical dimensions of their same-sex desire. It is possible that they do not possess the language to talk about embodied desire, or perhaps they are simply cautious about using language that the researcher and other readers might find offensive.

The idea that young women struggle to describe the physical dimension of their sexual feelings is also noted in some of the literature on adolescent women's sexual desire. Tolman (1994) identified what she called "a voice of the body," which represents the participants' descriptions of their bodily sensations or parts of their bodies as aspects of their sexual desire. Only a few of the women in Tolman's study were able to name the sexual parts of their body directly when speaking of desire. Most described their bodily feelings indirectly, using subtle references and describing the sensations they felt in 'safe' body parts, such as the neck, shoulders, and legs. They seemed reticent about making reference to their bodies, particularly connecting their desire to their vagina. Tolman concludes that it is not easy for adolescent girls to voice their bodies.

Fine (1988) concluded from her interviews with adolescent girls that girls know of and speak about their sexual desire. She provides an example of how adolescent girls talk about their desire. One woman in her study used the phrase, "I wanted to spend the night with him" (p. 33) to demonstrate the presence of sexual desire. While this participant made it clear that she 'felt' desire, she made no direct reference to what went on in her body to let her know that she was experiencing desire. This is consistent with

the findings in the current study. Although the participants now recognize that they felt sexual desire in adolescence, and are able to speak about it in a general way, most of them only alluded to the involvement of their bodies. The majority of the women in this study avoided any discussion of the physical dimension of their desire.

The finding that young women struggle to articulate embodied desire conflicts with Ussher and Mooney-Somers' (2000) research, in which the lesbian participants recounted their same-sex sexual encounters by making direct references to orgasm, clitoral stimulation, digital penetration, and oral sex. Although women have been socialized to dismiss and remain silent about their sexual desire, particularly same-sex desire, and while the language available to offer descriptions of bodily sensations and sexual acts is either clinical or seen as 'dirty', Ussher and Mooney-Somers' research suggests that it is possible for women to articulate the physical dimensions of their desire without resorting to metaphors or subtle references.

Several factors may account for these differences in findings. All the women in Ussher and Mooney-Somers' (2000) study identified as lesbians and belonged to a lesbian political group that was closely linked to their sexual identity. Perhaps their experience with queer activism and ongoing contact with other lesbian women made it easier to speak openly about sexual desire. Many of the women in the current study did not identify as lesbian or queer, and most did not report affiliations with queer social or political groups. Further, several of the participants in this study were raised in conservative secular or Christian environments, in which they were taught to remain silent about their sexuality. It is possible that these young women continue to find it difficult to speak openly about their sexual experiences, even when they have accepted

their same-sex desire. The differences in these findings may also be related to cultural context: Ussher and Mooney-Somers' study took place in a different country, where it may be more acceptable for girls, particularly queer women, to discuss their sexual feelings and experiences. Further, variations in researchers' interviewing styles and the skills used to elicit information about participants' sexual feelings and experiences may have contributed to the differences found in discussions of same-sex desire. Finally, the researchers' personal characteristics may have influenced participants' willingness to speak about their embodied desire. Finding a way to encourage open dialogue about young women's sexual desire will undoubtedly be one of the many challenges for future research on this topic.

Possibly connected to the silencing around embodied desire is the finding that only one out of the seven participants in this study even mentioned her first sexual experience with a woman. The rest of the women were elusive and spoke only in vague terms about their sexual encounters with other women. This may be related to the fact that only one participant reported having a same-sex sexual encounter during her adolescent years. However, several of the participants began to explore their same-sex sexual desire around age 18-19, yet most of them seemed reluctant to discuss their sexual experiences. It is possible that a few of the women have not yet had sexual encounters, or may feel uncomfortable speaking to a stranger about their sexual behaviors. One participant, when asked a question about the physical experience of sexual desire, hesitated and blushed before admitting that it is embarrassing to discuss her sexuality in a research setting. She went on to explain that she is able to articulate her sexuality more openly with friends.

Another factor to be noted is that the research interview is often an unfamiliar context for participants. If they are unclear about their role or what is required of them, they may attempt to accommodate the researcher by trying to provide the "right" answers (Cotterill, 1992, p. 595). They may conceal views they believe the researcher might find offensive, or personal feelings and experiences they feel uncomfortable revealing, such as their embodied desire.

The Impact of Culture and Social Attitudes

The women who participated in this study were adolescents during the 1990's, a decade of greater visibility for lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals and groups, growing acceptance of homosexuality in Canadian society, and an expansion of human rights and freedoms for LGB individuals. Culturally, the participants' narratives are situated in an era of increasing openness and acceptance of same-sex desire. Yet it appears that these shifts in attitude have yet to filter through to the social environments of adolescents who experience same-sex sexual desire. Instead, homophobia and heterosexism continue to influence their experience of their sexuality.

One possible explanation for this is that it is common for progressive social and legal policy changes to be met with opposition from conservative segments of society. When a society begins to move in the direction of greater human rights and freedoms, some groups, particularly the religious right, will resist these changes and continue to press for more traditionalist policies, no matter how harmful these may be. Further, centuries of homophobic attitudes cannot be eliminated by a mere decade of change. Finally, some of the women in this study are first or second generation Canadian, and

their lives have been influenced by the culture of their families, which may not endorse the shift toward openness and acceptance of homosexuality.

Differences in Experience of Same-Sex Sexual Desire in Adolescence

Clearly, in this study there were many similarities in the narratives women told about their experience of same-sex sexual desire, which have been previously described. It is important, also, to address the diversity of participants' experiences. There were differences on the basis of religion, culture, race, and the extent of homophobia in the women's social environments.

Differences in social context, particularly the extent of homophobia, may have influenced participants' experience of same-sex sexual desire in adolescence. Two of the participants in this study grew up in strict religious environments in which homosexuality was openly condemned. There appears to be a relationship between the negative messages these women received and their experience of same-sex desire in adolescence. They reported repressing and denying their feelings, and feeling angry and depressed throughout their high school years. It also took them longer to accept their same-sex desire. The two women who were most accepting of their same-sex desire in adolescence come from less religious or conservative families, and report having had more freedom to express who they were, even in the absence of explicit discussions in their homes about issues of sexual orientation. One of the participants grew up in a socially progressive family, but attended a conservative high school where homophobia was rife and it was unsafe to express her sexuality. She too, struggled to accept her same-sex desire and felt extremely depressed during her high school years.

Differences were also noted in how women understand or define sexual desire, and in how they described their experience of same-sex desire in adolescence. Three participants alluded to the importance of physical characteristics for attraction, and the centrality of the physical expression of desire. Two of these women were able to openly describe their embodied desire in the follow-up interviews. Three women spoke about the importance of the “mental” aspect of desire, for example, the intellect being a greater source of sexual attraction than the physical characteristics of an individual. Two of these women spoke about their bodies’ involvement in sexual desire in a general way, without connecting their desire to their vagina or other erogenous zones. The third participant made no references to her body.

Two participants stated that the physical act of sex was less important than sensuality, connectedness, and mutual understanding. These women were reluctant to speak about their bodies, although they talked about crushes, intimacy and romance. Finally, there was one participant who found it difficult to speak in any way about her sexual desire. She did not mention any sexual or romantic fantasies or encounters, and she made only one vague reference to her body, a feeling she gets in her throat when she experiences sexual desire. She stated that she did not know how to describe her desire, and indicated that she had not considered what it means to her.

Another important difference in the experience of same-sex desire in adolescence is related to belonging to a racial minority group in a white-dominated, racist society. In this study, the women of colour discussed their experiences of racism in the predominantly white queer community, in which they reported feeling uncomfortable and alone. Likewise, they spoke about their experience of homophobia within their cultural

and racial groups, and within society at large. Clearly, these women have had to confront multiple levels of oppression as they navigate between several worlds, which include their race and culture, the queer community, and the dominant culture. This adds a layer of complexity to their experience of same-sex sexual desire that the white participants have not had to contend with.

Implications for Counselling

From the results of this research, we have seen that adolescent girls grow up in heterosexist and homophobic social environments. As a result, they may deny and repress their same-sex desire during adolescence, hide their sexual feelings from others to protect themselves from discrimination and rejection, and they may lack opportunities to express their same-sex desire through sexual activity. In spite of all this, the women in this study came to accept their same-sex desire.

These findings have a number of important implications for counselling. Counsellors who work with adolescent girls would benefit greatly from gaining knowledge in the area of girls' sexuality and sexual desire in general, and same-sex sexual desire in particular. The results of this study suggest that sexual desire is a significant dimension of adolescent girls' developing sexuality, and that girls may feel sexual desire for boys, girls, or both genders. This means being careful not to make assumptions about sexual orientation when working with adolescent girls.

Counsellors also need to consider sociocultural factors that influence the experience of same-sex sexual desire, including culture, race, social class, and the prevailing social attitudes toward homosexuality during the historical era in which adolescent girls grow up (Broido, 2000; Browning, Reynolds, & Dworkin, 1991;

Fukuyama & Ferguson, 2000). Counsellors who work with adolescent women belonging to ethnic or racial minority groups need to become aware of the multiple layers of oppression that operate in society, including racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia, and the ways in which these factors overlap to shape young women's experiences of same-sex sexual desire. Adolescent women of colour, for example, may face both a lack of acceptance from their racial/ethnic community and racism within the LGBT community (Morrison & L'Heureux, 2001; Savin-Williams & Rodriguez, 1993). Counsellors also need to be aware that for many people of colour, collective identities may describe their experiences more accurately than an individualistic identity (Fukuyama & Ferguson, 2000). It may therefore be useful to examine the dynamics and interactions of multiple identities related to group membership (e.g., family, ethnic, and religious or spiritual community), as well as the visibility or invisibility of identity. Counsellors may want to explore with young women how they negotiate their multiple group memberships and identities (Fukuyama & Ferguson, 2000), and the ways in which these issues are connected to their experience of same-sex sexual desire.

A related finding of this study is that starting in childhood, girls may receive negative messages about homosexuality from their family, school, peers, religious institutions, and society. As a result, their initial awareness of same-sex desire may be accompanied by feelings of fear, shame, guilt, and confusion. In response, they may repress or deny their same-sex desire, that is, if they even know their feelings are sexual. Counsellors working with adolescent girls need to be aware of these issues, so that they may help girls to express and sort out their feelings, and to begin to feel more comfortable with their sexuality. A person-centered approach that includes empathy,

unconditional positive regard, and a nonjudgmental attitude can go a long way toward helping girls move from guilt and denial toward self-acceptance.

Homophobia and heterosexism are tied to living in a male-dominated society that constructs women's sexuality as existing for the purposes of procreation, and pleasuring and servicing men's needs (Choi & Nicolson, 1994; Erikson, 1968). This view of women's sexuality leaves no room for sexual desire, let alone same-sex sexual desire. From an early age, girls are socialized to fulfill their prescribed social and sexual roles. For example, the current study suggests that as girls reach adolescence, there is pressure to like boys but little information or discussion about their own sexual pleasure. These factors act together to impinge on the lived experience of same-sex desire in adolescent girls. Not only is it improper to feel sexual desire but it is totally unacceptable to have 'homosexual' thoughts and feelings. An important goal for counsellors is to normalize same-sex desire, and empower young women to acknowledge and accept their feelings (Hershberger & D'Augelli, 2000). A narrative approach to therapy might be helpful in encouraging young women to construct self-narratives that position them as agents of their own sexuality and sexual desires.

Another important consideration from this study is that adolescent girls who experience same-sex desire may have fewer opportunities than heterosexual girls to express their desire through actual sexual activity. This study suggests that same-sex desire is still virtually invisible in adolescents' social environments. Either it is not discussed or it is portrayed in a negative light. Many adolescents who experience same-sex desire remain 'in the closet,' hiding their feelings from others, and their sexual desires may go unfulfilled for years (D'Augelli, 1998; Quinlivan & Town, 1999). The

effects of keeping feelings inside and unfulfilled desire can include isolation, depression, loneliness, anger, poor academic performance, feelings of suicide, and difficulties in relationships with family and friends. Another consequence is missing out on dating and sexual exploration, which are important behavioural dimensions of adolescents' sexual and social development. Counsellors working with adolescent girls who experience same-sex desire need to be aware of these factors and validate their clients' feelings, keeping in mind that it may be unsafe for many adolescents to disclose their same-sex desire within their social environments. Counsellors may help adolescent girls learn about same-sex sexuality by providing information, including media that represent queer desire and culture in positive ways (e.g., books, film, television, and music) and assisting them in accessing community resources for queer youth (Browning, Reynolds, & Dworkin, 1991). For girls who have had same-sex relationships or come out publicly, a counsellor can help them deal with challenges they may face in their social environments, for example, by encouraging them to develop support systems in their lives.

This research has further demonstrated that, despite growing up in homophobic and heterosexist environments, and the repression and denial of same-sex feelings, the women in this study eventually came to accept their same-sex desire. Counsellors ought to be aware that at some point, adolescent girls are likely to question sexist and heterosexist notions about women's sexuality, a process that is related to the realization that their feelings are not evil or abnormal. They may also resist and perhaps reject social attitudes and beliefs that discredit their experiences. Once this happens, adolescent girls are more likely to accept their same-sex desire. It is the job of counsellors to support clients in exploring their own internalized homophobia as well as coping with societal

homophobia (Kottman, Lingg, & Tisdell, 1995), accepting their feelings, and perceiving their sexuality in more positive ways. Some girls may also wish to adopt a label to reflect their same-sex desire and sexual identity (e.g., lesbian, bisexual, dyke, queer, pansexual, etc.). The counsellor can support girls in this process, helping them to explore their same-sex orientation and sexual identity in a safe and healthy manner (Hershberger & D'Augelli, 2000).

Some adolescent girls who experience same-sex sexual desire may wish to explore ways of dealing with family issues (Sanders & Kroll, 2000). Counsellors can help girls explore family-related concerns in a number of ways. For girls who are considering disclosing their same-sex desire to their family, it is important to discuss both the risks and benefits of coming out (Hershberger & D'Augelli, 2000; Matthews & Lease, 2000; Morrow, 1993). Coming out to homophobic family members can result in hostility, rejection, and physical and verbal attacks (Matthews & Lease, 2000; Pilkington & D'Augelli, 1995; Strommen, 1989). Decisions to come out therefore need to be made carefully. It may be useful to examine multigenerational family dynamics in order to assess ongoing family interactions as a way of anticipating possible reactions to the adolescent's coming out to the family of origin (Iasenza, Colucci, & Rothberg, 1996).

For adolescent girls who have already come out, family therapy may be helpful if family members are willing to work through their feelings and reactions, examine their attitudes and beliefs about same-sex desire, and begin to move toward recognition and acceptance of their LGBT child. Parents can be invited to become involved with a support group such as Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), which provides a resource for understanding the confusion that may arise when a family

member comes out as LGBT, and serves to help reduce the shame and isolation that families may experience (Matthews & Lease, 2000). Accessing such resources may be beneficial to both parents and their LGBT child.

Counsellors can benefit from the knowledge that some adolescent girls may be reluctant to speak about their sexual desire, particularly with an adult and a stranger. Adolescent girls have been found to keep their true thoughts and feelings hidden from others (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995). This tendency may be even more pronounced in young women who experience same-sex sexual desire, which is still considered unacceptable by many segments of society. The young women in this study were hesitant about discussing the physical dimensions of their sexual desire, citing discomfort and embarrassment as the main reasons for keeping such personal information to themselves. A related issue is that girls entering adolescence may know very little about same-sex desire and may therefore be missing the language needed to perceive and describe their feelings and sensations. In counselling, it is important to develop rapport and create safety by taking time to build a solid relationship with adolescent girls, so that they may feel more at ease about expressing their thoughts and feelings. Counsellors can also normalize same-sex desire and demonstrate their knowledge and support of queer individuals and issues. Further, it is important to assist young women in learning the language they need to be able to describe their thoughts and feelings. Finally, counsellors can benefit from examining their own comfort levels with sexual topics, and receive training in how to talk openly about sex.

Some final considerations: It is vitally important for counsellors who work with adolescent girls to engage in ongoing self-reflection. Counsellors need to examine their

own values, biases, prejudices, and attitudes about women's sexuality and homosexuality in general, and about girls' same-sex sexual desire in particular. Providing non-judgmental support rests on the ability to feel at ease and to know where one stands on these issues.

It is equally important for counsellors who work with youth to educate themselves about adolescent girls' sexuality, queer issues, and the intersection of oppressions that influence young women's experience of same-sex desire, such as sexism, racism, classism, and homophobia. Awareness and knowledge are needed if counsellors are to build trust with adolescent girls who experience same-sex desire. Education needs to start (but not end) in graduate training programs for counsellors. An effective approach to education would be to offer an entire section devoted to LGBT issues in counselling, or to offer a course devoted to diversity issues, of which LGBT topics are a vital component.

Implications for Research

The results of this study present a number of implications for future research. First, there needs to be further research that explores adolescent girls' sexual desire in general, and same-sex desire in particular, in order to redress the 'missing discourse of desire', and what I would further describe as the 'missing discourse of same-sex desire' on adolescent girls' sexuality. Young women's experience of same-sex desire could be investigated using various research designs and theoretical approaches. Feminist approaches and methods are particularly suitable for generating knowledge from the perspectives of those whose experiences we wish to learn about.

This study sought to find participants of all sexual orientations. However, none of the women who chose to participate identifies as heterosexual. Hey's (1997) research on adolescent girls' friendships suggests that girls who identify as heterosexual or are negotiating heterosexual identities may experience sexual desire within their same-sex friendships. Therefore, future research could invite women who identify as heterosexual to talk about their experience of same-sex desire in adolescence.

All the participants in the current study were raised by heterosexual parents. Five participants were raised in two-parent households, and two women grew up in single-parent households. It would be interesting to conduct research with adolescent women who were raised in same-sex households, that is, with lesbian, gay, or bisexual parents, and compare their experience of same-sex sexual desire to those of adolescents raised in heterosexual families.

Previous research suggests that female and male adolescents who are raised in same-sex households and experience same-sex sexual desire are more likely to accept their same-sex feelings and to pursue same-sex relationships. For example, one British study of 27 lesbian mothers, 27 single heterosexual mothers, and their children, found that adolescent children, particularly girls, who experience same-gender sexual interests and have a lesbian mother are more likely to develop a positive attitude toward their sexual desire and become involved in same-sex relationships during adolescence and early adulthood. This is especially likely when the adolescent's lesbian mother speaks openly about sexual topics, provides positive role modeling in the area of lesbian relationships, and holds a feminist political analysis of gender relationships in society (Tasker & Golombok, 1997). A same-sex household may provide children with an

immediate reference group, making it possible for them to interpret their same-sex attractions as sexual. LGB parents are also more likely to offer recognition and support if their children disclose their same-sex attractions.

It would be useful to extend the findings of this research to young men, and hear the stories of male adolescents' experiences of same-sex desire. The narrative method of this study could also be used to learn about adolescent girls' and boys' experience of same-sex desire in different cultural and socio-historical contexts. Women and men in their 50s or 60s could be asked to speak about their experiences in an era when antigay prejudice was far more widespread and socially acceptable than it is today, in order to illuminate the cultural factors at work in different periods of the 20th century. Women and men living in rural areas of Canada, and in other cultures, for example, Asia, South America, the Middle East, or Eastern Europe, could also tell their stories about the experience of same-sex sexual desire in adolescence. To capture the diverse complexities of adolescent girls' lives, in this study and in future research, feminist analyses of race, class, and culture, will need to be conducted in order to learn more about how these factors (and potential sources of oppression) intersect with young women's experiences of same-sex sexual desire.

Given the rapid rate of technological change and the powerful influence of the media in North American culture, future research could further investigate the role of the media and technology in young women's experiences of same-sex sexual desire. It is important to know more about the ways that books, girls' magazines, film, television, music, and the Internet can act to both inhibit and facilitate self-understanding and self-acceptance.

The findings of this study suggest that adolescent girls have fewer opportunities to express their same-sex sexual desire than their heterosexual counterparts, and that their desire is frequently expressed through unrequited crushes. It would be interesting to interview young women who have had same-sex encounters and same-sex relationships to learn more about how these experiences come about in heterosexist social contexts, and what it is like to have them.

Future research could examine the kinds of positive coping skills adolescent girls use to manage their heterosexist and homophobic social environments. What strengths and resources, both internal and external, do young women make use of as they negotiate their developing sexuality? Further, information is needed about the process of coming to accept one's same-sex desire. For instance, how do women get from a place of denial, repression, and internalized homophobia to a place of self-acceptance? What has to happen for young women to reach this turning point, particularly if they are alone and feeling depressed?

Finally, in this study, it was apparent in the interviews that the participants were reluctant to articulate the physical dimension of their sexual desire. These women are all 'out' to themselves and to others. They know that they are sexually attracted to women, they all report having had sex with women, and they were all able to speak about broader personal and social implications of having same-sex desire. Yet the majority of the participants did not speak about their embodied desire. Future studies could be designed to facilitate descriptions of sexual desire, perhaps by asking more direct questions in semi-structured interviews, or administering anonymous questionnaires that ask about various aspects of desire. The use of a longitudinal design may provide opportunities for

researchers and participants to develop rapport over time, which can facilitate more open discussions about sexual desire.

Reflections on the Research Process

I would like to say a few words about my experiences, my struggles, and my learnings throughout the research process. First of all, this has been the most interesting, challenging, and rewarding project that I have ever undertaken in a program of study. It has taught me innumerable lessons about myself, about the research process, and about the research topic.

I will begin by discussing my experience of the research interviews. First of all, it was a tremendous honour to have this group of young women talk to me about their experiences of same-sex sexual desire, to explore and share their thoughts and feelings through the stories they told. It was exciting for me to hear these women's stories as told by them, rather than read *about* them. I am thinking specifically about traditional assumptions that objectify women, and theorize about women's 'nature' or come to conclusions about women's experiences without actually taking the time to listen to what women have to say.

One of the challenges I discovered during the interviews was finding a balance between wanting what might be considered a 'conventional' answer to the research question, and allowing the stories to unfold naturally. As a narrative researcher it was important to stand back and let the participants tell their stories with minimal interference, asking only for explanations, clarification, elaboration, etc. At the same time, I found myself feeling frustrated and worried when I thought participants were digressing too far from the research question, for example, providing detailed

descriptions of the ins and outs of friendships that seemed to bear no relationship to the experience of same-sex sexual desire. When this happened, I felt the need to make a decision about whether and when to pull them back. Whenever I steered someone 'back on track,' I often wondered if I was making the right choice, whether there was perhaps a link that the participants could see that I was unaware of. Even if there was no obvious link, were these wanderings somehow relevant? After all, they were, for some reason, included as part of the story. In the end, I followed my intuition in these situations and over time, grew to trust my choices. I decided that I would simply need to consider the decisions I made as part of the research process and integral to my role in the co-construction of the findings.

I would also like to share my feelings of surprise and disappointment that no heterosexual women responded to my invitation to participate in the study. None of the women who participated identifies as heterosexual. I wondered if women who saw the recruitment poster assumed they had to be lesbian or bisexual to participate, even though sexual orientation was not specified. If I had known this would happen, I would have considered wording the poster differently to highlight the fact that I was inviting women of all sexual orientations to participate in the study. It would have been interesting to interview heterosexual women, and see how their stories compared to those of queer-identified women.

Finally, I would like to share some of my hopes related to this study and future research on this topic. I hope to see more attention paid to adolescent women's sexual desire and same-sex sexual desire in future research and theory. It is imperative to replace the current discourse on women's sexuality, which is male-centered, sexist, classist,

racist, and heterosexist, with an alternative, more affirming discourse in which young women have the freedom to express their feelings, thoughts, and experiences, including the physical dimension of their desires. My hope is that sometime in the not-too-distant future, adolescent women will have the opportunity to develop more healthy perceptions of themselves and their emerging sexuality. This can only happen if we understand adolescent women's experiences from their perspective, if we listen to their stories and make an attempt to represent them as closely as possible.

I had been hopeful that life would be easier for this generation of young women who experience same-sex sexual desire, and was disappointed that there continues to be silence around women's sexuality and same-sex sexual desire. It was frustrating to learn that heterosexism and homophobia still make it extremely difficult for adolescent girls to acknowledge and explore their same-sex attractions. I am also disappointed by the lack of information and resources available to adolescent women who experience same-sex sexual desire. I remain optimistic, however, that this will change. The media has already begun to portray queer individuals in more positive ways, a trend that will likely continue. Young women who have access to the Internet can readily find positive information about same-sex desire. Societal attitudes are changing rapidly, in spite of growing right-wing opposition to queer rights. Recently, the Vancouver School Board implemented a policy decision to work toward ending discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in schools. If this study were conducted again in 5 or 10 years, I expect that the results would be more encouraging. I hope that the positive social changes that are now taking place will have filtered through into the lives of adolescents of the next generation.

Conclusion

This study sought to learn more about adolescent girls' experience of same-sex desire in adolescence through the retrospective narratives told by young women aged 19-25. It is my hope that the knowledge gained from this study will enable counsellors, parents, teachers and others to develop a better understanding of the issues and concerns related to adolescent women's lived experience of same-sex desire. Psychological and educational interventions that can understand and take adolescent girls' sexuality and sexual desires into account may be able to help girls to develop healthier, happier and safer lives (Tolman, 1994).

It is imperative, too, that researchers also begin to pay more attention to the experiences of LGBT adolescents, particularly adolescent women, with the expectation that any knowledge gained can be carried over into the world of lived experience. It is without question that a more informed and less homophobic society would result in more positive experiences for all adolescents who experience same-sex sexual desire, and better adjustment to adult life.

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Contact for concerns about the rights of research participants: If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research participant, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598.

Consent: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. Should you have any questions about the research procedures, you may ask at any time. You will receive no financial compensation for your participation.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

Participant Signature

Date

Printed Name of Participant

Pseudonym Requested

Appendix D

Orienting Statement and Possible Prompts

Orienting Statement:

The principal question I want to ask you is: Can you tell me, in your own words, your story about your experience of same-sex sexual desire when you were an adolescent?

Possible Prompts if required to expand participants' narrative accounts:

(Please feel free not to answer any questions you're not comfortable with)

- When we say "sexual desire" what does that mean to you?
- When did you first become aware that you were sexually attracted to other girls?
- How did you express your attraction? Can you tell me what happened? How did you feel, and what did you think? Could you describe what you felt in your body?
- Was there anyone you could talk to about your feelings, thoughts, and actions? What was that like?
- What were some of the positive aspects of your experience of same-sex desire?
- (For women who identify as bisexual/lesbian/queer): How did your experience of same-sex desire change after you came out?
- How did your experience of same-sex desire change over time? What is your experience of same-sex desire now that you're a young adult (how is it different/the same)?
- Did you meet any other girls who felt the same way? How did this affect your experience of same-sex desire?
- What was the experience like in terms of social groups, friends, family relationships?
- Have I missed asking you any questions that could provide important information for this study?