

SPEAKING UP AND SPEAKING OUT: FACTORS THAT FACILITATE THE
DISCLOSURE OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION

by

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the things that helped and hindered 12 gay men and lesbians when they disclosed their sexual orientation to others. The goal of this study was to develop a reasonably comprehensive categorical system that described these facilitating and hindering factors from the perspective of the gay men and lesbians participating in this study.

The research method involved interviews with six gay men and six lesbians in Vancouver, British Columbia who were in a position to observe what things facilitated their own disclosure process. An expanded version of the Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954) was utilized to elicit 417 critical incidents from the 12 co-researchers. Thirty-three helping categories and 17 hindering categories emerged from an analysis of the reported incidents. The validity and reliability of all of the categories were backed up by several means including: (a) the use of an independent checker, (b) co-researcher's checking, (c) the existence of complementary helping and hindering categories, (d) theoretical agreement in the research literature, and (e) participation rate.

The helping categories that emerged were as follows: (1) acceptance of the authentic self, (2) positive qualities of the disclosee or the relationship, (3) existence of a support network, (4) prediction of a supportive response, (5) conducive environment, (6) assumption that the disclosee already knew, (7) relationship status, (8) desire for more intimacy, (9) spirituality, (10) need to tell, (11) therapy, (12) previous positive disclosures, (13) seizing the moment, (14) access to information, (15) teachable moment, (16) geographical distance, (17) no big deal, (18) sexual deterrent, (19) disclosing by letter or phone, (20) alcohol, (21) other people already know, (22) third party influence, (23)

feminist politics, (24) career identity and clout, (25) desire to help others, (26) humour, (27) testing the waters, (28) financial independence, (29) safety and comfort, (30) rehearsal, (31) leaving the church, (32) assumption of confidentiality, and (33) romantic intentions.

This thesis also found a strong link between the helping categories elicited in this research study and the domains and thematic components of Ishiyama's (1989) Self-Validation Model.

The findings of this study contribute to the field of counselling psychology by providing a list of things that facilitated and hindered the disclosure of 12 gay men's and lesbian's sexual orientation to others. This list could then be shared with clients who are dealing with this issue. The findings also suggest that Ishiyama's (1995) Validationgram might be a useful intervention for this clientele. Results of this study also support the existence of a gay and lesbian positive identity development process.

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FOREWORD

This thesis has been in the making for three years. As I pondered why it has taken me so long to complete, I realized that it is because this thesis is my life story and the act of disclosure has been my nemesis.

When I was 13, I disclosed for the first time. I told my mother that I was a homosexual. I did not use the word "lesbian" because my stomach turned whenever the "zzzzz" sound of that word slithered from my lips. I remember I shook uncontrollably for the entire conversation. And I will never forget her response. She said that, "homosexuals are black, slimy creatures that come out from under wet rocks late at night." She told me I wasn't like that and that I didn't come from that kind of family. I was relieved. And yet, I knew. For the next five years, I desperately tried to convince myself that she was right. I got the idea in my head that, when I turned 18, I would be "better." On the morning of my 18th birthday, I awoke with great expectation. Within seconds, grim reality had sunk in. I still felt the same way. I was one of "them."

For weeks after that morning, I thought of only one thing --whether to live or to die. Finally, I decided that I had nothing to lose. If my life went belly up and God forbid someone should find out who I really was, then, I could just kill myself. Strangely enough, it was the decision of using suicide as a backup plan that gave me the courage to live. I chose to confront my authentic self and begin the journey towards self acceptance and healing. Along the way, there were various pitfalls. Usually, these moments occurred when I was choosing whether or not to disclose my sexual orientation to someone else.

When I disclosed to my mother for a second time, at the age of 18, she burst into tears and said she thought I was going to tell her I was pregnant. "I could have handled that," she moaned. I felt like I had destroyed her life. The next morning, she placed a carefully written letter under my door. In it, she said she felt that I could have a wonderful life and career if only I did not jeopardize my chances by getting involved with a woman. I took that letter downstairs and ripped it into little pieces in front of her.

She demanded that I see a psychiatrist. I did. I disclosed to the psychiatrist and she said that I had a choice in the matter. No matter how hard I argued with her, she discounted my feelings. After three sessions, I walked out and never went back. Later, I found out that she actively practised conversion therapy with her clients and used shock therapy as part of that treatment.

My first lover grew up in a Roman Catholic household. Her brother is a priest and she spent two years pursuing a religious vocation. We did not actually disclose to her mother because she figured things out on her own. However, when she asked, we felt obliged to tell her the truth about our relationship. She told her daughter that she was shocked. She swung her finger under my nose and hissed, "You're going to hell and you're taking my daughter with you."

Decades passed and I continued my journey of self healing. I became a gay activist marching in parades, working with AIDS patients, doing public talks and advocating for gay rights. I hardly ever thought about the difficulties of disclosing any more as most people seemed to know already or were just extremely accepting people.

In 1993, I started to volunteer for the Gay Helpline in Vancouver. Once again, I came face to face with the disclosure issue. A 14-year-old called the line saying his parents had him under lock and key because he had disclosed to them that he was gay. A 15-year-old showed up on my doorstep in tears. His father had thrown him out on the street because he had told him that he was gay. The papers were full of triumphs for the gay cause but, hidden on the back pages or not even making it into the papers, were stories of beatings, murders, hatred.

I decided that it was time to take action. I would write my thesis on this topic. When I first began to screen possible participants for this study, I was shocked to discover how much internalized shame I still carried with me. I wrote the proposal in 1996 and chose to research how gays and lesbians cope with the aftermath of a “negative” disclosure. Most of the people I screened or interviewed told me that their disclosures had resulted in a positive aftermath. I obviously had a bias based on my own experience that most people would have had negative reactions when they disclosed. Of course, the results of a qualitative study cannot necessarily be generalized, but after talking to several people, I realized that it was an important enough theme that I might want to rethink my research question. I did. Since seven of the original people whom I talked with felt that the biggest obstacle was their own internalized fear of disclosing, I focused on that issue. I think the end result is a thesis that is more useful and relevant as it deals with the things that help one overcome these internalized fears before a disclosure is made.

As I began to write this paper, I stumbled across a copy of a speech that my mother made several years after I had disclosed to her, entitled “Whether To Tell Or Not?” She

addressed a branch of Dignity in Ottawa which is a gay group that is associated with the Roman Catholic Church. In it, she wrote of her first reaction to my disclosure. She said she was shocked, disbelieving, and filled with sorrow. Eventually, she said she did accept my lesbianism. But then I already knew this because, when she was dying, she begged my forgiveness and told me how proud she was of me.

My first disclosure was to my mother. As is the case of some other peoples' stories in this thesis, it was both painful and healing. I hope that by sharing this tale and the results of this research study that others can have a more gentle journey.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The taboo around homosexuality and lesbianism has lessened somewhat in the last two decades (Modrcin & Wyers, 1990, p. 89). But that does not mean that the stigma associated with being gay or lesbian has gone away. As this paper will demonstrate, there is still evidence that gays and lesbians are being oppressed by society. And the sad fact is that gays and lesbians still tend to internalize this oppression and experience deep shame and guilt about their sexual orientation (Lapierre, 1990).

The act of disclosing one's sexual orientation to others can be a significant tool that helps gays and lesbians overcome their sense of shame in order to heal themselves. As Jack (1991) said, "speaking one's feelings and thoughts is part of creating, maintaining, and recreating one's authentic self" (p. 32). In fact, most experts and counsellors would agree that disclosing is a necessary step in the development of a gay/lesbian positive identity (Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1989). But disclosing can be a very scary thing for people who are not yet ready. Also, it is not always prudent to disclose as examples of discrimination and harassment of gays and lesbians continue to be documented by the media. That being said, it is important that people feel they have a choice. Thus, according to the literature, the problem is that, while gays and lesbians can facilitate the development of their gay/lesbian positive identity by disclosing their sexual orientation to others, they are hindered in this process by their own fears, shame, and societal stigmatization.

Aim

The aim of this study is to discover what things helped and hindered 12 gay men and lesbians when they chose to disclose their sexual orientation to others. Counsellors working with gays and lesbians could then share this information with clients who are struggling with this issue to help them determine when a disclosure is appropriate and strategies that might facilitate the disclosure process.

Clarification of Terms

In this study, I have not equated the process of interpersonal disclosure of one's homosexuality to others with the process of "coming out" because that latter term appears to mean quite different things to different people (Harry, 1993, p. 26). For example, Troiden (1989) defined coming out as a complex process of "identity disclosure" (p. 59) while DeMonteflores and Schultz (as cited in Browning, Reynolds, & Dworkin, 1991, p. 178) suggested that coming out involves restructuring one's self-concept, reorganizing one's personal sense of history, and altering one's relations with others and society. In the context of this study, disclosure has been defined as the actual act or process of telling someone else about one's sexual orientation. Some of the co-researchers, however, do use the two terms interchangeably.

The participants in this study have been called "co-researchers" because they have been asked to reflect on their own disclosure process and report observations about facilitating and hindering factors. As well, they re-checked the data and initial categories thus assisting in the validation process.

The individuals to whom the co-researchers disclosed their sexual orientation will be referred to as “disclosees” in this study.

Methodological Approach to the Study

The Critical Incident Technique was used as a basis for this study as it provided the most reasonable approach to addressing the research question which is: What things help and hinder gays and lesbians to disclose their sexual orientation to others? Most importantly, this technique affords gays and lesbians a voice in identifying what things help them to disclose their sexual orientation to others while providing a comprehensive structure in which to conduct the research study.

I chose to depart from the Critical Incident Technique in different ways. A detailed explanation of the deviations and rationale for these departures will be provided in Chapters 3 and 4.

Limitations

I have purposefully chosen to exclude bisexuals and transgendered people from this study as I feel that the inclusion of these populations might confound the findings of this particular study. Both groups have specific characteristics which set them apart from the gay and lesbian population. This exclusion should in no way be interpreted as a bias against these two groups or undermine the difficulty of disclosure for members of these groups.

It should be noted that the results of this research study will not necessarily be generalizable but could be an important counselling tool that helps gays and lesbians in their journey towards self acceptance.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In 1997, television star Ellen DeGeneres made the ultimate disclosure. Her on-screen character Ellen announced that she was a lesbian and, shortly afterwards, Ellen disclosed her own real life sexual orientation to the world. A storm of controversy preceded and persisted after the broadcast and Ellen suffered the ultimate price. Her television program was canceled.

Not everyone would have made the same decision as Ellen to disclose. As this chapter will point out, there are a number of things that could have hindered this process for Ellen and others. There are also a number of things that probably facilitated the disclosure. This chapter will review literature associated with the disclosure process for gays and lesbians and things that help and hinder this process. In order to do this, the chapter will tackle issues surrounding growing up gay, oppression, internalized homophobia, heterosexism, and gay identity development. Then it will discuss how disclosure is a necessary part of that development process. Finally, the chapter will outline a rationale for the research questions which will be detailed at the end of the chapter.

Statistics

It is difficult to pinpoint the number of gays and lesbians that exist in the population because it is a hidden population that must self report in order to be counted. Fassinger (1991) suggested that between 10% and 15% of the population is gay or lesbian. Singer and Deschamps (1994) examined data from 19 studies which indicated that Fassinger's numbers may be high. However, they pointed out that comparing different survey results is not easy

since some document the number of same-sex experiences while others document the number of people who identify themselves as gay or lesbian. Furthermore, some of these studies were random samples of self-selected groups and, therefore, the results may be invalid. Another factor is that the stigma attached to this population often keeps people from self reporting. Thus, once again, the statistics may be in question (Durby, 1994). For the sake of this paper, I think it will suffice to say that gays and lesbians do represent a small but significant fraction of the population.

Difficulties of Youthful Disclosure

As a youth, disclosing one's sexual orientation to family members can be a painful and devastating experience (Fassinger, 1991; Hetrick & Martin, 1987). Their reaction can be brutal. As one youth said, "I can also remember my mother saying she felt she would be far more comfortable dealing with the fact that I was terminally ill with cancer" (Muller, 1987, p. 36). In fact, there is a well documented body of research that suggests gay and lesbian youths usually suffer negative responses when they disclose their sexual identity to their parents (Cramer & Roach, 1988; Liederman, 1991; Muller, 1987). A 1984 study by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force in the United States (as cited in Blumenfeld, 1992) found that approximately 1 in 15 of the respondents was physically abused by members of their own family (p. 4). Of the 500 youths who used the services of the Hetrick-Martin Institute of New York City in 1988, 40% had experienced violent attacks. Almost half of these adolescents said the abuse came from family members (Martin & Hetrick, 1988). Both of these studies said the abuse was linked to sexual orientation.

For gay and lesbian youths, disclosing their sexual orientation to their parents can be even more difficult if their parents uphold strict religious beliefs. Miller and Romanelli

(1991) stated that religious conviction has often perpetuated “thunderstorms of intolerance” (p. 49) while Clark, Brown and Hochstein (1989) said that institutionalized religion has consistently failed to accept or support openly gay individuals or their relationships.

Disclosing to friends can be equally problematic especially since heterosexual teenagers are already involved in a struggle to understand and incorporate their own sexual identity and may be less tolerant of their gay/lesbian friend’s orientation (Browning, 1987).

Disclosing to teachers can be risky since some teachers become “silent conspirators in sexual oppression” (Sears, 1992, p. 74). Thus, many gay and lesbian youths live in fear of being found out at school according to the Gay and Lesbian Educators of British Columbia (1995).

Martin and Hetrick (1988) concluded that gay and lesbian youths end up feeling stigmatized because of the way they are treated and because of the covert messages they receive which convince them that they are immature, predatory, or sexually disordered.

Negative Coping Strategies

Given these messages, it is no wonder that many gay and lesbian youths have a hard time coping. Some resort to self destructive behaviours such as alcohol abuse (Kus, 1988), promiscuity (Uribe & Harbeck, 1992), or running away from home (Liederman, 1991). It is widely stated in the literature that there is a link between sexual orientation and suicide (Remafedi, 1994; Rofes, 1990; Singer & Deschamps, 1994). Many just plain hide.

Hetrick and Martin (1987) suggested these youths become experts at monitoring themselves so they will not be found out. Since adolescence is the time most teenagers expand their activities and relationships, this deception and silence can be particularly detrimental to their intrapsychic and social development. They often suffer feelings of shame and

worthlessness very much like sexual abuse survivors (Neisen, 1993). Their very personhood can be at stake (Sophie, 1987).

When people feel that they have shameful secrets, their worst fear is that no one could view them as anything but contemptible (Courtois, 1988). They are effectively silenced. Summit (1983) said that, if this secret then takes on monstrous proportions, the youth can spend a lifetime involved in a "self-imposed exile from intimacy, trust and self-validation" (pp. 181-182). Since this childhood injunction of silence can live on into adulthood (Simonds, 1994), the adult gay man and lesbian may also have a difficult time disclosing to others.

Internalized Homophobia

Many gays and lesbians choose not to reveal their sexual orientation to others because of their fear of others' reactions. Weinberg (1972) and Gonsiorek (1988) have defined the fear and hatred that characterizes reactions to gay people by family, friends, and society at large as "homophobia." This homophobia can impair the identity of gays and lesbians who consciously or unconsciously incorporate these views into their own belief system and develop internalized homophobia (Margolies, Becker & Jackson-Brewer, 1987). People who suffer from internalized homophobia feel stigmatized. This stigma threatens their self-esteem and sense of identity by "denying the social and emotional validation upon which those constructs are built" (Hammersmith, 1988, p. 176). It can also cause individuals to place an exaggerated importance on their sexual orientation rather than just viewing it as only one facet of their lives.

Heterosexism and Oppression

Gays and lesbians are not just hindered in disclosing because of their own inner fears. These fears are often based on an awareness of oppression. According to Webster's Dictionary, one is oppressed when one is subjected to "an unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power" (Mish, 1983, p. 828). There is good reason to believe gays and lesbians are oppressed (Blumenfeld, 1992; DeCrescenzo, 1994; Morrow, 1993). Unlike any other minority group, gays and lesbians cannot legally marry their same-sex partners; they are not eligible for immigration rights extended to heterosexual couples; they often do not have access to spousal benefits; they can still lose child custody cases because of their sexual orientation. Although a number of cases are before the courts which challenge these situations, many are still unresolved. Ottawa keeps promising to enshrine same-sex rights but has not done so.

In employment situations, there is anecdotal evidence that suggests gays and lesbians are oppressed (Morgan & Brown, 1991). Croteau and Hedstrom (1993) and Rasi and Rodriguez-Nogues (1995) advised gays and lesbians to consider the possibility of negative consequences if they disclose in a work setting. In their book entitled Out in the Workplace, Rasi and Rodriguez-Nogues stated that disclosure can result in discriminatory employment decisions.

In politics, there is oppression. For example, former Liberal Member of Parliament Roseanne Skoke said in the House of Commons that gays and lesbians are immoral, unnatural deviants (O'Neil, 1994, p. A4).

There is physical oppression. Matt Shephard was murdered in Wyoming last year merely because he was gay. As he lay dying in his hospital bed, his mother said she could

still see the dried tears on his cheeks from where he had cried alone tied to a fence post after two men had battered and brutalized him. The 1984 National Gay and Lesbian Task Force study (as cited in Blumenfeld, 1992) found that over 33% of their respondents had been threatened directly with violence. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, homosexuals are probably the most frequent victims of hate violence today (Singer & Deschamps, 1994). There is no reason to believe that things are any different in Canada.

There is cultural oppression. Gays and lesbians who are from ethnic minorities may feel doubly oppressed. They can experience discrimination from their own culture due to their sexual orientation as well as face racial discrimination from everyone else (Tremble, Schneider & Appathurai, 1989).

Perhaps one of the worst types of oppression is silent oppression. For example, gays and lesbians rarely see themselves reflected in the mainstream media (Neisen, 1993). As is the case for other minority groups, this can result in two things (Elliott & Fleras, 1992, p. 297). First, the informational needs of the group are ignored. Second, it is as if the gay and lesbian community does not exist or, at best, is of less significance than the heterosexual population.

Some of the literature prefers to use the term "heterosexism" to explain this oppression. Iasenza (1989) defines heterosexism as an ideology that sanctifies nongay norms and devalues gay experience as inferior or insignificant.

As yet, there has been no definitive answer in the literature about what plays more of a hindering role in the disclosure and coming out process for gay men and lesbians: heterosexism and homophobia or internalized homophobia. This debate may be a moot point because these things are so intertwined.

Gay Positive Identity Development

So far, this paper has examined reasons why many gays and lesbians may choose not to disclose their sexual orientation. And yet, many individuals do choose to disclose. There are many reasons for this. First, there have been many positive steps forward in the battle for gay rights over the last decade. As Vargo (1998) pointed out, "times have changed" (p. xvi). Second, many gays and lesbians believe that the walls of silence need to be torn down in order to combat societal ignorance. Disclosure and enhanced visibility offer an opportunity for dialogue, an occasion to educate, and a prospect for societal progress. Third, individuals argue that disclosing can yield personal benefits such as enhanced self-respect and spiritual well-being (Vargo, p. xvi). This third reason is closely associated with the theory of gay and lesbian positive identity development.

Several theories of gay identity development have been proposed including those of Cass (1979), Coleman (1982), Morris (1997), Sophie (1985/86), and Troiden (1989). In this research study, I will be following Troiden's model because it appears to be well accepted in the field and encompasses stages and concepts espoused by other well researched models.

Troiden suggested there are four stages in the development of a healthy gay/lesbian identity. In the first stage, he said gay and lesbian individuals often feel marginalized. They see themselves as being heterosexual while still perceiving some kind of difference between themselves and other same sex peers. In the second stage, they begin to reflect upon the idea that their feelings and behaviours could be regarded as homosexual and this creates inner turmoil. Their sexual identities are in limbo. They no longer take their heterosexual identities as a given but they have yet to develop perceptions of themselves as homosexual.

In the third stage, they now define themselves as homosexual. They regularly associate with other homosexuals and experiment with sexual activities to explore the homosexual and lesbian subculture. Finally, in the fourth stage, Troiden posited that they commit to a homosexual and lesbian way of life and are now self-accepting of their gay/lesbian identity and role. According to Troiden and others, one of the key indicators that individuals have negotiated this stage is their ability to disclose their sexual identity to non-homosexual audiences. As is the case with all models, Troiden postulated these stages are not linear and can continue well into adulthood.

What Troiden and other theorists are suggesting is that the act of disclosure goes hand-in-hand with the gay/lesbian person's level of sexual self acceptance and typically happens in stages. One first discloses to oneself, then to other like-minded individuals, and finally to society at large. Kahn (1991) said that in the final stages of most of the models, people are left to disclose or not as they see fit. In other words, they have overcome enough of their feelings of internalized homophobia to perceive that they do have a choice and will disclose if they have a reason to do so.

In their analysis of a number of these models, Radonsky and Borders (1995) pinpointed the inherent conflict around the disclosure issue. On one hand, self-disclosure of one's sexual orientation is necessary for emotional health and can provide an opportunity to develop more honest relationships. It is an important step in the process of claiming a positive sense of identity, developing self esteem, and accepting oneself. The same action, however, can negatively affect relationships (pp. 18-19). Thus, gay men and lesbians constantly have to weigh the advantages of disclosing against the disadvantages.

Fassinger and Miller (1996) thought that these gay identity development models may not be valid for people from different ethnic groups partly because they use disclosure behaviours as evidence of developmental progression. Thus, they created a new model that they felt was more inclusive. As this model is still fairly new and has not been validated by other studies, I will not be using it as the basis for this research study.

The Research Question

Disclosing one's sexual orientation to others is one of the key tools to help gays and lesbians develop a positive sense of identity. The literature also suggests that disclosing can be a difficult and tricky process. Therefore, the following research question is asked for this study: What things help and hinder gays and lesbians to disclose their sexual orientation to others?

In this thesis, I am using the word "things" to include strategies or psychological processes as well as internal and external sources of support that a person draws on to help them with the disclosure process.

Rationale For the Main Research Question

There are two compelling reasons why I think this question should be asked. First there is a paucity of formal research in this area. Most of the literature that is available tends to be based on opinion and conjecture.

Second, the results of this study may provide some valuable and empowering information for gays and lesbians who are concerned about their ability to disclose to someone else or for therapists who are working with these clients.

Things That Facilitate the Act of Disclosure

As I just mentioned, there is very little formal research available that outlines the things that help gays and lesbians with the disclosure process. However, a sizable body of literature discusses the importance of having support systems in one's life. Brammer (1991) noted that these networks are extremely useful in helping people cope with transitions in their lives. They might want to turn to a number of people for assistance including their partners (Shannon & Woods, 1991), straight friends (Ponse, 1978), gay and lesbian friends (Hunnisett, 1986; Berger, 1992; Tessina, 1989), professional helpers (Modrcin & Wyers, 1990), lawyers and feminists who are "ideologically encouraged or constrained not to stigmatize lesbians" (Ponse, p. 80). They might turn to their family for support (Cramer & Roach, 1988) depending on how accepting and supportive they perceive their family to be. They might join various gay and lesbian groups including professional associations such as the Gay Airline Pilots Association, the Association of Gay Social Workers (Shannon & Woods) or self-help groups (Ponse). They might turn to help from different environments in their own community including gay and lesbian bookstores, bars, coffeehouses, or churches (Hunnisett). Tessina also suggested going to gay and lesbian community centres or relying on gay and lesbian businesses such as medical, dental, legal, real estate and insurance offices. They might rely on their church or their own religious beliefs that would question the church's "religious prescriptions against homosexuality" (Tully, 1989, p. 96). There are also gay churches that run numerous activities including counselling services (Tessina). Most likely, they would turn inwards and rely on internal resources as suggested by the various gay identity development models. Wheelless and Grotz (as cited in Radonsky & Borders, 1995) stated that trust in others is related strongly to the act of disclosure.

Radonsky and Borders argued that there is a significant association between levels of internalized homophobia and the number of groups to whom one discloses. Ponce (1978) also suggested that a desire for increased intimacy often facilitates the act of disclosure.

Things That Hinder the Act of Disclosure

The main hindering factors, as described in the literature, have already been discussed in this chapter. They are related to homophobia, heterosexism and internalized homophobia.

Question Two: Gender Differences

Some experts dispute that gay identity development models apply equally to men and women (Boxer & Cohler, 1989; Faderman, 1984; Zensky, 1991). Whether or not these models are gender-biased does not necessarily have a direct bearing on the disclosure issue. However, it might imply that there are differences in how men and women choose to deal with the disclosure issue.

There are other factors which suggest there may be differences between the two sexes with respect to this issue. First, there is the overall issue of gender role conditioning. Men and women are brought up differently often having different goals, values, and expectations with women being forced to play a back seat gender-appropriate role (Burch, 1993; Vargo, 1987). Consequently, men are left feeling that they have more power (Unger & Crawford, 1992). If lesbians feel less powerful, then, they may experience more difficulties about disclosing especially in the workplace.

Second, it may be harder to define precisely who is a lesbian because women often prefer more flexibility or fluidity in their sexual choices (Burch, 1993; Penelope, 1990; Sang, 1989). This aspect of fluidity might lead some lesbians to keep silent because they

might be confused about their sexual identity. Conversely, it could work the other way. Women might be more willing to disclose as they may feel more validated by society for their non-lesbian activities.

Third, some authors suggest that lesbians are more dependent on each other in relationships than gay men (Bell & Weinberg, 1978; Smalley, 1987). This could cause them to discuss matters within the context of their relationship rather than disclosing externally to others. They might also be more apt to influence each others' decisions around disclosing.

Fourth, there are also some aspects of lesbian relationships that are rarely talked about such as lesbian partner battering (Card, 1995; Farley, 1992; Lobel, 1986). Lesbians in these situations may be extremely wary of disclosing any information to others.

Fifth, it is estimated that lesbian households are far more likely to contain children than gay households (Baptiste Jr., 1987; Day, 1990). Since gay parenting is a controversial subject and lesbian couples may fear losing their children in custody battles (Day, 1990; Strommen, 1989), these parents may hide their sexual orientation from their children, friends and family.

Sixth, lesbians seem to have less economic security than gay men (Blumenfeld & Raymond, 1988). Seventy-five percent of 1,000 lesbians who were surveyed by the Research Committee of Southern California Women for Understanding reported relatively low levels of annual income despite high levels of education (Saunders, Tupac & MacCulloch, 1988). Interestingly, the authors said they had a hard time getting female participants to disclose to them. Perhaps, lesbians are more careful about disclosing in the

workplace because they feel they don't have the financial resources to cope in case of negative consequences.

Finally, many lesbians take a feminist approach to political issues such as sexism, racism, or classism. And some lesbians have declared that lesbianism is a political choice and the ultimate form of solidarity between women. These women may feel more supported in their choices and more confident about disclosing to others. They may also feel less of a need to disclose beyond their own community. On the other hand, some lesbians feel ostracized by their own community because they are not "politicized." Rainone (1987) said the expectation of similar values and politics within the community can lead to policing each other and lesbian oppression. These women may feel that they have a smaller support network on which to rely.

Since it appears that there are a number of differences between gays and lesbians, a relevant second question for this study is: Are there any perceived differences between the things that help and hinder gays and lesbians in disclosing their sexual orientation to others?

Question Three: Ishiyama's Self-Validation Model

The gay identity development models suggest that gays and lesbians develop gay/lesbian positive identities by going through a process of self-validation. In fact, it is noteworthy that the word "validation" actually appears in many articles about lesbians and gays (Browning, 1987; Crawford, 1988; DeCrescenzo, 1994; Durby, 1994; Fassinger, 1991; Harry, 1993; Hunnisett, 1986). According to most of these models, this self-validation process is integrally linked with the act of disclosure.

Thus, there may be a useful link between the gay identity development models and Ishiyama's (1995) Self-Validation Model since both posit that people are trying to achieve a

more integrated and authentic sense of self. And even more meaningful for this study, there may be a link between Ishiyama's model and the act of disclosure.

Ishiyama (1995) suggested that people are motivated to seek self-validation which he defined as the affirmation of one's sense of self and positive valuing of one's unique and meaningful personal existence. In order to seek sources of self-validation, Ishiyama (1987) said they would need to go through a "process of restoring and reinforcing the sense of self-worth, meaning in life, and personal identity and competence through a variety of activities and interactions with the natural and social environments, and transcending these qualities to a spiritual level" (p. 7). He proposed that people could find self-validation in any or all of five domains: relationships, things, places, and activities as well as, internally, in the self. His model also contains five major thematic components which could be considered as being goals of the psychotherapeutic process. These themes are:

- security, comfort, and support
- self-worth and self-acceptance
- competence and autonomy
- identity and belonging
- love, fulfillment and meaning in life

Since there appears to be a link between Ishiyama's (1995) model and the gay/lesbian positive identity development, this thesis proposes one final research question: Is there a relationship between the list of helping categories that will be obtained from the co-researchers and the domains and themes proposed by Ishiyama's Self-Validation Model?

Summary

In summary, this thesis will attempt to answer the following research question: What things help and hinder gays and lesbians when disclosing their sexual orientation to others? This study will also examine if there are any perceived differences in this list of things between gay men and lesbians. As well, this thesis will research whether or not there is a link between the domains and themes proposed by Ishiyama's (1995) Self-Validation Model and the list of helping things that will be elicited during this study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In trying to operationalize the research questions, I had four major considerations in selecting a research design.

First, I wanted to compile a reasonably comprehensive picture of the things that helped and hindered gays and lesbians in this study to disclose their sexual orientation to others since this act appears to be a necessary step in the road towards self acceptance.

Second, I wanted to use a methodology that would allow gay and lesbian people to have their own voice especially since one of the premises of this paper is that gays and lesbians often feel silenced.

Third, as I mentioned in the foreword, I did have some assumptions and biases at the outset of this study which concerned my own internalized homophobia. Since I would be doing research in my own backyard (Hauser, 1993), I wanted to find an approach that enabled me to research in this area without knowingly biasing the results.

Fourth, since a number of lesbians (including myself) are self-reported feminists, it was important for me to choose an approach that is compatible with feminist research methodology.

As the Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954) answered all of these considerations, I chose this technique as a basis for my study. I am aware of other methods that can be employed in qualitative research but these approaches did not incorporate all of the considerations nor facilitate the purpose of this study as effectively as the Critical Incident Technique. For example, phenomenology stresses the meaning of the lived

experience of several individuals about a particular concept or phenomenon and utilizes an unstructured approach (Creswell, 1998). The emphasis in this study was not on meaning-making but on creating a list of facilitating factors. I felt that the most efficient way of eliciting this data would be to use a methodology that utilizes a semi-structured approach. The intent of grounded theory is to generate or discover a new theory. That was not the intent of this study. Case studies provide in depth analyses of a few peoples' lives (Creswell, 1998). Again, this did not match the aim of this study. Life history methodology gives researchers a tool with which to "access the sense of reality that people have about their own world" and also attempts to give these people a voice about that reality (Musson, 1998, p.11). Had I decided to focus on the process of self acceptance and the development of a gay/lesbian positive identity, then, this is the methodology that I would have chosen. However, since I was focusing on a list of helping and hindering factors, I felt that this methodology would have provided a more obtuse approach than the Critical Incident Technique.

In this chapter, the general nature of the Critical Incident Technique will be presented first along with a discussion about the validity and reliability of the technique followed by a description of the sample, interview procedures, and methods used to analyze the collected data. Since I chose to depart from the formal method at certain points, this chapter will also document when and why these departures occurred.

Critical Incident Technique

The Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954) is a form of interview research designed to elicit narrative accounts from participants who were directly involved in or

observed an event. These accounts are descriptions of events that facilitated or hindered a particular aim. In other words, they are behaviours that are deemed to be critical in the sense that they are necessary requirements for the successful achievement of any given task (Burns, 1956).

Once these accounts have been documented, critical incidents are extracted. Flanagan (1954) defined a critical incident as:

Any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act. To be critical, an incident must occur in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer and where its consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects. (p. 327)

The critical incidents are then grouped to form similar categories that encompass the event. The category system thus provides a map or comprehensive picture of what facilitates or hinders the aim of a study or research question.

Further to my own desire to use this study to assist other therapists in counselling their gay and lesbian clients, several researchers have also used this methodology to examine issues that are of interest in the field of counselling psychology. Among others, Cohen and Smith (1976) used it to analyze how group leaders' interventions could affect the group process. Flanagan (1978), himself, used it to assist the American Institute for Research to develop a simulation model to be used in designing and evaluating programs to improve the quality of Americans' lives. Boychuk (1985) performed a critical incident study on the self-esteem of gay men. Easton (1986) examined critical incidents that widows used to help them with their grieving process. Borgen and Amundsen (1987) chose to incorporate some

aspects of the Critical Incident Technique in their study of the experience of unemployed people. Roehkle (1988) described critical incidents in counsellor development. Proulx (1991) used this methodology to examine the decision-making process involved in divorce. Novotny (1993) conducted a critical incident study to examine the process of differentiation of self. McCormick (1994) used this technique to examine healing strategies for First Nations people in British Columbia. Alfonso (1997) used Flanagan's approach to analyze the strategies that her co-researchers had used to help them come to terms with their depressive moods following an HIV positive diagnosis. And Baum (1998) used this technique to examine the things that had helped her participants, who were Holocaust survivors, cope over a lifetime.

I felt that the Critical Incident Technique would enable me to create a comprehensive map of the things that helped and hindered the 12 gays and lesbians in this study with their disclosure process. I recognized that this list of things would probably move beyond a strict interpretation of Flanagan's (1954) technique because it would incorporate psychological constructs as well as observable human activities. However, others such as Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (1959), Alfonso (1997) and Baum (1998), have already set a precedent in using Flanagan's technique to elicit activities that have more of a psychological base. This form of departure from Flanagan's (1954) original technique will be discussed later on in this chapter. In fact, it suggests that this methodology is evolving.

Further to my desire to choose a methodology that is congruent with my own feminist ideology, it appears that the Critical Incident Technique is compatible with feminist research methodology. Feminist researchers often prefer a qualitative approach that elicits

narrative accounts from the participants, gives them a voice, and relies on a dialogue between the researcher and the researched (Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1991; Gluck & Patai, 1991; Oakley, 1981; Reinharz, 1992). For these reasons, some feminist researchers are suspicious of quantitative data (Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991). The Critical Incident Technique utilizes qualitative data and allows for a spontaneous, receptive relationship between the co-researchers in the study and the researcher. Therefore, it appears to be compatible with a feminist approach but should not be considered a feminist methodology as it does not meet all the criteria for this designation.

Finally, because the Critical Incident Technique utilizes a somewhat structured approach, I felt that this framework would improve the quality of this study by keeping my personal biases in check.

Validity And Reliability of the Critical Incident Technique

Flanagan's (1954) rigorous Critical Incident Technique provides evidence for construct validity. The method consists of five strict procedures:

1. Determination of the general aim of this activity. Flanagan said the aim should be a brief statement which expresses the objectives of the activity.

2. Development of plans and specifications for collecting factual incidents regarding the activity. Flanagan said the instructions to the respondents need to be as specific as possible with respect to the standards to be used in evaluating and classifying the incidents. Either questionnaires or interviews can be used to collect the data.

3. Collection of the data. It is essential that the reporting be objective and be evaluated, classified, and recorded immediately. Flanagan argued as follows: "Evidence regarding the

accuracy of reporting is usually contained in the incidents themselves. If full and precise details are given, it can usually be assumed that this information is accurate” (p. 340).

Flanagan also cautioned against using any leading questions.

4. Analysis of the data. The data are then classified according to series of categories, subcategories, and eventually broad headings. Flanagan acknowledged it is not possible to obtain as much objectivity in this stage as the previous one. However, he provided a series of cautionary steps to help create as much objectivity as possible (pp. 344-345).

5. Interpreting and reporting. Flanagan stated that the biases surrounding any of the steps must be “clearly reported” (p. 345) and the limitations imposed by the group must be brought into focus.

In 1964, Andersson and Nilsson concluded that the Critical Incident Technique is both reliable and valid. They extrapolated over 1800 critical incidents related to the behaviour of store managers from branch offices of a Swedish grocery store. Seventeen categories and 86 subcategories were eventually grouped and classified under three separate headings. The researchers found that 95% of the categories emerged before two-thirds of the incidents had been classified. Thus, they concluded: “The material collected seems to represent very well the behaviour units that the method may be expected to provide” (p. 402). They found that the number and structure of the incidents were affected only slightly by different interviewers and the method of collection although fewer incidents were obtained with a questionnaire as compared to personal interviews. When students tried to re-categorize the incidents, the stability of the subcategory system appeared to be rather high. The researchers concluded this was sufficient evidence for proof of reliability and validity of the

technique (p. 402). However, the study did not give any details about the participants such as how many people were interviewed, their gender, or culture. Nor did the study reveal any information about the conditions under which the interviews were conducted or the questionnaires were disseminated. These are all factors that could confound the results.

Burns (1956) critiqued the Critical Incident Technique. He argued that, whereas the technique can be used to record objective behaviours, it cannot describe or reveal internal behaviour. Thus, observers can only make inferences about these behaviours on the basis of the external phenomena. He said this course is “dubious and subject to all weaknesses of inferential reasoning especially in that such inferences by their very nature cannot be empirically verified” (p. 74). This same argument could be leveled against all qualitative studies.

As Miles (1983) pointed out, there is the possibility in any qualitative study that the researcher has “very few guidelines for protection against self-delusion, let alone the presentation of ‘unreliable’ or ‘invalid’ conclusions” (p. 118). On the other hand, “Too frequently, qualitative research is evaluated against criteria appropriate to quantitative research and is found to be lacking” (Krefting, 1991, p. 214). If the Critical Incident Technique is judged by the criteria of comparability, translatability, and trustworthiness, it appears to make the grade. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) said comparability refers to the degree to which components of a study are sufficiently well described and defined so that other researchers can use the results of the study as a basis for comparison. They said these components include the units of analysis, concepts generated, population characteristics,

and settings (p. 22). The Critical Incident Technique calls for a clear description of all of these things.

Translatability refers to a clear description of one's theoretical stance and research techniques (Schofield, 1993). Flanagan (1954) said these kinds of detailed descriptions should be done as a matter of course.

According to Krefting (1991), a major component of whether data are considered trustworthy is whether or not they are credible. A number of other researchers have used the Critical Incident Technique and concluded that their categories are trustworthy and sound.

Thus, I felt that the Critical Incident Technique was the best methodology to choose for this thesis because it answered my concerns and, therefore, seemed to be the most compatible choice for the proposed research questions. As well, it is both valid and reliable.

Co-researchers: Criteria for Participation

Co-researchers in this study had to be English-speaking gays and lesbians living in the lower mainland of British Columbia who were over the age of 21. Donovan (1992) described the difficulty in trying to determine who is gay or lesbian since these terms hold different meanings for different people. Plus, as has already been pointed out earlier in this paper, women's sexuality may be quite fluid and many self reported gays and lesbians go through periods of describing themselves as straight or bisexual. For the sake of expediency, the co-researchers in this study had to be self-confessed gays and lesbians. They had to identify themselves this way on a questionnaire. All co-researchers had to have resided in British Columbia for at least six months. Part of the rationale for choosing

purposeful or snowball sampling was to try and find non-Caucasian participants. However, due to the hiddenness and vulnerability of this population (Tremble, Schneider, & Appathurai, 1989), it was noted in the proposal for this thesis that this might not be an easy task. Other criteria for participation involved finding an equal number of men and women and people who differed due to their relationship status, age, political stance and socio-economic status. Each co-researcher had to sign a consent form and participate in up to three interviews. Each co-researcher had to remember at least two to six events involving disclosure of their sexual orientation to someone else. It had been agreed that the researcher would interview ten co-researchers. If the themes or categories derived from the research data had not started repeating, two more co-researchers would be added (one male, one female) and so on until a maximum of 20 people had been interviewed.

Finding Co-researchers

I used various techniques to find the co-researchers including advertising twice in "Angles", the gay and lesbian newspaper (Appendix A), designing flyers and distributing them to Vancouver bookstores, clubs, colleges, groups and agencies. Appendix B contains a copy of this flyer and a list of the places it was distributed or displayed. I targeted gay and lesbian groups who cater to people who are non-Caucasian and repeatedly left phone messages for members of these groups. I talked with members of two of these groups to explain the purpose of my study and to reassure them of the confidential nature of this study. As the gay and lesbian population can be somewhat hidden (Fassinger, 1991) and the goal of this study is not to find a random sample, I also used a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling to find co-researchers.

Description of the Co-researchers

I prescreened 22 people and eventually selected 10 co-researchers who met the above criteria. Although many of the categories derived from the first ten co-researchers' interviews did repeat, my supervisor suggested that I conduct two more interviews to ensure that saturation had been achieved. This was done and I selected two more co-researchers who also met the criteria. All of the co-researchers were English-speaking self-reported gays and lesbians between the ages of 24 and 43 who had lived in the lower mainland longer than six months. Six men and six women participated in the study. Four of these were single and eight were in relationships. All provided informed consent, participated in at least three interviews and remembered between three to six disclosure events. Despite my extensive marketing efforts, only one non-Caucasian person responded but she was unavailable to participate. However, I did find co-researchers who varied because of their gender, relationship status, age, feminist political stance, and socio-economic status. Here is a short synopsis outlining the backgrounds of each of the co-researchers.

Co-researcher 1. She called herself a 43-year-old "Irish Catholic" musician. She referred to herself as a lesbian but admitted that this is a very new idea for her as she was afraid of being rejected by others for this reason. She has been single for three years after breaking up with a woman she had known for 20 years. Before that, she had a two year relationship with a French Canadian woman in Quebec. She lived with both of these people. She was originally from Newfoundland but now lives in Vancouver. She makes less than 10 thousand dollars a year and describes herself as living in poverty. She said she is not "exactly" political but does have a lot of gay and lesbian as well as heterosexual friends.

She does not belong to any specific gay and lesbian groups and does not spend most of her time in a gay or lesbian environment. She said she is not out to the general public but is out to her family and friends.

Co-researcher 2. She said she is a 43-year-old file clerk who calls herself a lesbian and sometimes uses the word “gay” to describe herself. She mentioned that her ethnic background is French-Canadian. She is single having just left a nine year relationship. She said she has had several relationships that have lasted between three to five years. She described herself as being middle class earning an average income. She has been involved with a gay Alcoholics Anonymous group and spends 90% of her time with gay people. She said she is “pretty much out” as she can be who she is without having to live a lie.

Co-researcher 3. She described herself as a 40-year-old mental health worker and writer who, as a lesbian, has a primary sexual, spiritual, and emotional attraction to women. She also uses the words “queer” and “dyke” to describe herself. She said her ethnic background is Jewish. She said she has a “long history of abusive, coercive, or confusing straight relationships”, one brief but “very destructive relationship” with a woman when she was coming out and is now in a new but casual relationship with another woman. She said she is from a working class background being the daughter of a small struggling businessman and that she herself is making a current salary of 15 thousand dollars a year. She mentioned that she has had a series of health problems and, along with her age, these factors have kept her from being more actively involved in the lesbian community. She described herself as being out “which means I have the same rights as straight people and do not keep secrets.”

Co-researcher 4. She described herself as a 40-year-old “British W.A.S.P.” and elementary school teacher (since 1977). She referred to herself as a lesbian but has also called herself gay in the past. She has been in a long term relationship with her partner for “many” years. This is her first relationship. She described herself as middle class making about 60 thousand dollars a year. She said her friends are mainly lesbian or heterosexual and she does not spend most of her time in a gay or lesbian environment. She attended two coming out groups and has been involved in some gay/lesbian activities such as a lesbian volleyball team.

Co-researcher 5. She said she is a 35-year-old “English-born, Anglophone-Canadian lesbian immigrant” who is also a graduate student (Ph.D.) and former physical education teacher. She identified herself as being a lesbian but also uses words such as “dyke”, “queer” or “gay” to describe herself. She is in a six year committed monogamous relationship after experiencing a “series of approximately five relationships with other women” beginning at age 19. She described herself as being middle-class (“but poorer than I expected to be as a kid.”) She has had a long involvement with lesbian sports especially field hockey and rugby and spends much of her leisure time in lesbian company. She said she is “out” to everyone.

Co-researcher 6. She is a 24-year-old psychology student who called herself a lesbian and a dyke. She said she is a “W.A.S.P.” She has been in a relationship with an older woman for two years. She was involved with one other woman and briefly dated two other women. She said she is temporarily poor because she is a student but hopes to become middle class. She said she has mostly lesbian friends and a couple of close straight friends.

She does not spend time in the lesbian community. She is out to her family and friends but says she is not “in your face” about it.

Co-researcher 7. He is a 39-year-old project consultant who described himself as being gay. He said he is Caucasian with an Irish and French ethnic background. He is single. He has had a series of relationships with men and said that he feels he gets more involved in these relationships than the other person and that all of his partners have become interested in other people. He said he is middle class and lives comfortably. He has many gay friends and a few lesbian friends. He said that he spends about half of his time with these friends and half of his time with straight friends. He is out to all of his friends meaning that he does not hide the fact that he is gay nor is he fearful of people finding out.

Co-researcher 8. He is a 37-year-old elementary school teacher who said he has always been exclusively interested in men. He described his ethnic background as being white Anglo-Canadian and Catholic. He has been in the same relationship for 14 years although he admitted that he and his partner have had hard times but have worked through their problems using problem solving and communication skills. He said he is middle class making between 40 to 65 thousand dollars a year. He said his main support system is heterosexual women although he does spend time peer counselling clients from the gay, lesbian and bisexual community. He said he is out to his family, friends, coworkers and students.

Co-researcher 9. He is the 37-year-old partner of co-researcher number 8. He said he is gay although he sometimes uses the word “homosexual” to describe himself. He said his ethnic background is German and Ukrainian. He is a lawyer who makes about 94 thousand

a year. He said he has a “passing involvement” in the gay community and spends most of his time with gay men and heterosexual women. He said he is out to everyone.

Co-researcher 10. He is a 35-year-old student who is studying to become a high school social studies and theater teacher. He described himself as being a gay man whose sexual orientation is toward men although he pointed out that being gay, for him, does not mean that his lifestyle is part of his gayness. He described his ethnic background as “very white.” He said he has had only one significant relationship and that has been with his present partner of 14 years. He said he has had “much casual sex.” At this time, he said he is a poor student but is from an upper middle class background (30 to 50 thousand dollars a year). About half of his friends are gay. He is out to his immediate family only and says that he doesn’t usually disclose to people unless he feels there is a reason to do so.

Co-researcher 11. He is a 31-year-old high school teacher who called himself a gay man. He described his background as Irish/English. He has lived with the same man for five and a half years. Both are teachers and are “secured financially.” They own a condo together. He said half of his friends are straight while the other half are gay and lesbian. He said he is out everywhere except at work.

Co-researcher 12. He is a 26-year-old student, community activist and holistic bodyworker who defines his gayness in the following way: “To me, this term alludes to the greater freedom of expressing my feminine side and also not having the same responsibilities as a straight family man.” He also calls himself “queer, faerie and androgynous.” He said he is Caucasian. His mother’s family is Mennonite and his father’s is Catholic. He has been in a committed “mainly monogamous” relationship for two and a

half years. He said he has had three unrequited love affairs with male friends his own age and has lived with two significantly older gay men. His current partner is eight years older. He said he is in the lower economic class but his parents are upper middle class and help him out financially. He volunteers for a number of gay organizations and his friends typically have "at least a hint of bisexual orientation." He said he is out and engages in public displays of affection with his lover.

Interview Procedures

Here is a synopsis of the procedures used in the interview process:

1. Question Clarification
2. Initial telephone screening interview
3. Pilot Interview
4. Formal Interviews
5. Interview Transcriptions

Question Clarification

Before I interviewed the co-researchers, I conducted prescreening interviews with seven co-researchers who had responded to the newspaper advertisement or flyers. Two things became blatantly clear. First, my assumption that many disclosures would have negative outcomes, even though based on an extensive literature search, appeared to be untrue. I began to wonder if this assumption had been shaped by my own biases, age, and experience. I also wondered if the literature about this topic had focused more on individuals who had experienced negative outcomes. Second, it appeared that the co-researchers were much more interested in discussing factors that helped in advance of the disclosure rather than afterwards. They also suggested that therapists would find a list of these things more useful in their work. After a conversation with my supervisor, we both decided that the original

research question should be altered if the other two committee members agreed. Both did agree and so the original question was altered from:

What things help and hinder gays and lesbians to deal with any adverse effects when they disclose their sexual orientation to someone else?

to read:

What things help and hinder gays and lesbians to disclose their sexual orientation to someone else?

Initial Telephone Screening Interview

During the initial telephone screening interview, I ensured that each potential co-researcher met the original selection criteria. Further to Flanagan's (1954) methodology, I discussed the general aim of the research study which was to explore what things helped and hindered the gays and lesbians in this study when they disclosed their sexual orientation to someone else. I also discussed the rationale of the study which was threefold:

- to compile a number of helpful things that gays and lesbians can do when they choose to disclose their sexual orientation to someone else.
- to differentiate between things that help gay men versus lesbians so this list of helpful things will be gender specific.
- to share this list of helpful things with therapists who work with gay and lesbian clients and gay men and lesbians themselves.

I also described the procedures the co-researchers would need to follow in order to participate in the study. At this time, I used a standard spiel that described the following procedures:

- they would have to do some paperwork including signing a consent form and filling in a

demographic questionnaire.

- they would have to discuss between two to six disclosure events and then relate what things they thought helped and hindered for each event and why.
- they would have to agree to let me tape, transcribe, and analyze this interview.
- they would need to choose a pseudonym for their interview. Identifying details would be omitted from the transcriptions.

I then reviewed some of their disclosure events with them and asked them to think about things that helped or hindered them with these disclosures. I suggested that some co-researchers preferred to write down some of these events or helping and hindering things in advance of the taped interview.

Pilot Interview

I conducted one formal interview first to pilot the study and try out the new research question. I also asked that co-researcher to discuss helping factors after the disclosure had been made in order to compare the richness of the data. The revised interview guide worked and so did the new question. The data compiled before the disclosure appeared to offer more depth and insights regarding the disclosure process. But in order to be sure that I had not changed the research question too quickly, I conducted two more interviews which explored the beginning and the aftermath of the disclosure process. In all three cases, the data was richer before the disclosure was made.

All three of these original interviews were used in the study but the information about coping with the aftermath of the disclosures was deleted as it had no more significance for this particular study.

Formal Interviews

I used the same process leading up to the formal interview with all of the co-researchers including the original three people. This process included the following steps:

- re-visiting the aim and rationale of the study.
- mentioning that they would be referred to by a pseudonym.
- explaining the protection of their rights and confidentiality including the fact that their participation is voluntary and they could withdraw at any point in the study.
- giving them a sheet of instructions that explained all of the above information (Appendix C).
- discussing the possibility that this process could raise difficult emotional issues for them.
- explaining that, in that case, they could call on the list of resources (contained in Appendix D of this thesis).
- reviewing the taping procedure with them.
- having them sign an informed consent form (Appendix E).
- having them fill in a demographic questionnaire (Appendix F).

As was mentioned, I had already reworked the interview guide to incorporate the new research question. Key questions contained in the revised guide are as follows while the complete guide is described in Appendix G.

Before we start the interview, I want to make sure that you are feeling comfortable. [Co-researcher shifted position and removed shoes in some cases]. Next, I want to make sure that the tape recorder is working properly. Can you please tell me a little bit about yourself. [Tape

recorder levels are checked]. Now, I want you to relax and, as you relax, I want you to think about some significant times when you disclosed your sexual orientation to someone else. Now, select one of these incidents and tell me about it.

As in all cases in this guide, co-researchers were given a chance to respond before the next question was asked. Sometimes, I asked the co-researcher to clarify various points before moving to one of the following questions:

1. Can you give me more details about what led up to this disclosure?
2. Can you tell me more about what happened at the actual moment of disclosure?
3. Can you tell me more about what happened after you disclosed to [person]?
4. Were there any long term effects or legacy from that disclosure?
5. How is your relationship with that person today?
6. I want to take you back to the beginning of that event, the moment before you told [person] that you were gay or lesbian. What things do you think helped you in making that disclosure?
7. How do you think that thing helped you in making that disclosure?
8. How do you know if that thing was helpful or not?
9. Okay, now tell me what things you think hindered you in making that disclosure?
10. How do you think that thing hindered you?
11. You had another story to tell me about a second/third/fourth/fifth disclosure incident. Can you tell me that story?

I did use some clarifying questions during the interview. However, further to Flanagan's (1954) warning, I was careful not to ask what I considered to be "leading" questions. During the piloting process, I needed clarification about the definition of a

“leading question” versus a “clarification question” and discussed this area with two members of my thesis advisory committee. According to these committee members, I was asking “clarification” questions.

Each of the formal interviews took approximately one and a half to two hours to tape. The entire first session lasted between two to three hours depending on how much time the co-researcher required to fill in the demographic questionnaire.

These interviews were conducted either in my home office, at a small office in the Scarfe Building at the University of British Columbia or at the co-researcher’s home. They were done privately although, in one case, the co-researcher’s partner attended for the first five minutes of the interview. Obvious environmental distractions such as music, television or radio broadcasts or noisy appliances were eliminated.

By the time all 12 interviews had been conducted, the co-researchers had discussed a total of 56 different disclosure events.

Interview Transcriptions

I enlisted the help of an assistant to help type the transcripts. This person was sworn to confidentiality and did not remove the tapes or transcripts from my home office. This typist has a Master’s degree in Counselling Psychology from the University of Toronto. The interviews were typed word-for-word. However, in the three instances in which I had done further exploration by asking the co-researchers to describe helping and hindering factors after a disclosure had been made, these segments of the transcript were deleted.

Confidentiality of the co-researchers was also respected as the tapes and transcripts were

identified only by pseudonym. Thus, the typist did not have access to the actual names of the co-researchers.

Data Analysis Procedures

Here is a synopsis of the steps used to analyze and check the data in this research study:

1. Incident extraction
2. Initial creation of categories
3. Second interview
4. Formal creation of categories
5. Validity and reliability checks:
 - Comparability, translatability and trustworthiness
 - Researcher role
 - Informant selection
 - Context
 - Independent judge or checker
 - Participation rate
 - Opposition of the hindering categories

Incident Extraction

The next step was to isolate the critical incidents. In order to be considered critical, the incidents had to meet five criteria (Flanagan, 1954).

First, Flanagan (1954) said that an incident must occur in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear (p. 327). In this study, the purpose was deemed to be successfully disclosing one's sexual orientation to others. In order to meet this criterion, I ensured that each critical incident was tied to a specific disclosure story. I regarded this story as a precipitating event for the various critical incidents. I asked the co-researchers to relate a beginning to this precipitating event (setup to the act of disclosing), a middle (what the person did during the actual moment of disclosure) and an end (a self reported outcome). I also asked the co-researchers to expand on the long term legacy of the

disclosure to see if there were any longer term consequences. A list of all these precipitating events or disclosure stories is included in Table 1 of Chapter 4. Thus, each critical incident was linked to a situation in which the purpose or intent of the act was clear.

Second, in Flanagan's (1954) original treatise on the Critical Incident Technique, he said that the situation had to be clear "to the observer" (p. 327). He said that these observers should be "independent" and undergo training that would ensure that they all used the same set of rules or guidelines to elicit the data (p. 340). By 1978, however, Flanagan had relented on the sole use of independent observers and was relying on self-reports from the people directly involved in the precipitating event. He said that, with only a few minor exceptions, the general findings from these subjective reports tended to be in substantial agreement (p. 144). I also relied on these kind of self-reports in my study. Thus, I have deemed these people to be co-researchers because they are observing and researching their own behaviours.

Third, Flanagan (1954) said that the critical incidents must have been sufficiently complete so the observer could discern that the "consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects" (p. 327). In order to meet this criterion, I asked the co-researchers to name a helping or hindering factor and describe what impact or relationship that thing had on the act of disclosure. In some cases, the co-researchers did not tie the helping factor back to the act of disclosure. In that case, unless the co-researcher clarified the impact during the second interview, this factor was ignored. For example, one co-researcher said that "journal writing" helped him to disclose but he never explained how. Thus, that thing was not included in the study.

A fourth criterion was that the observer was supposed to determine the extent of the effect on the general aim (Flanagan, 1954, p. 338). The general aim of this study was to elicit a list of things that the co-researchers felt would help facilitate or hinder the act of disclosure. The general effect would be to help the co-researchers feel comfortable or safe enough that they could overcome their internalized homophobia to go ahead and make the disclosure. In their self-reports, when asked how they knew that a particular thing had helped them with the disclosure, the co-researchers used general come-back lines such as, "It just made it easier." Often they responded that they knew that a particular thing had helped them because, without it, they would not have been able to disclose. Therefore, it was not so much about the level of internalized homophobia but the very existence of these feelings that mattered and whether or not the disclosure was actually made.

Fifth, Flanagan (1954) said that, in order to be critical, an incident must have involved "observable" human activities (p. 327). In some cases, the incidents fit this criterion because the co-researchers directly referred to an overt physical activity that others, including themselves, could see. For example, many co-researchers said that going for therapy or drinking alcohol facilitated the act of disclosure. However, in some cases, the co-researchers described activities that were internal processes. As has already been mentioned, other researchers have also included these kind of psychological processes or constructs in their critical incident studies.

Five years after Flanagan (1954) developed the Critical Incident Technique, Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman (1959) studied attitudes of people about their work. They said that Flanagan's critical incidents resembled the kinds of accounts they were seeking with one

exception. "The choice of incidents is based on the respondent's judgment of his psychological state during the events, an internal criterion" (p. 12). They developed a different set of criteria to define critical incidents.

They said that the first-level component was the inclusion of an objective occurrence during the sequence of events with especial emphasis on those identified by the respondent as being related to his attitudes (p. 28). This could be equated to the description of the precipitating event that was regarded as an essential element of Flanagan's (1954) definition.

Next, they described second-level factors which categorized the reasons given by the respondents for their feelings. They said that these "may be used as a basis for inferences about the drives or needs which are met or which fail to be met during the sequence of events" (p. 28). Thus, they departed from Flanagan's (1954) definition and included incidents that had a psychological base.

The third component involved looking into the attitudinal effects, beyond the behavioural level, that emerged after the occurrence had taken place. Again, this is similar to one of Flanagan's (1954) criteria which demanded that there be some kind of consequences or effects that the observer could report.

In 1978, Flanagan used his own technique to examine how Americans could improve the quality of their life. Using an inductive process, he formulated 15 categories that included some data that appeared to rely on psychological processes. For example, one category involved the quality of the relationship the respondents had with their partner.

Flanagan said, "The relationship involves love, companionship, sexual satisfaction, understanding, communication, appreciation, devotion, and contentment" (p. 139).

Thus, there are precedents for including psychological processes or constructs in a critical incident study. But it should be noted that this is a departure from the guidelines originally laid out by Flanagan in 1954. I certainly included this kind of data in this study as the literature seemed to suggest that internal rather than external activities are at the root of internalized homophobia and are one of the greatest hindrances to the act of disclosing. Furthermore, it seemed remiss not to include psychological actions as these are often regarded as being a core part of the discipline of counselling psychology.

In order to clarify the process of incident extraction, here is a typical example of an incident involving a straightforward observable human activity. One co-researcher said it helped her to disclose to her mother by phoning her.

That was on the phone. It was way easier because seeing her crying would have made me feel way worse whereas over the phone, I didn't have to see her even though I heard it. It was a lot easier to take. I didn't have to visually see her. You always hate to see your mother upset. She was one to always use tears. "How could you hurt me?" Sometimes she didn't even have to say it. Just the look on her face. With not having to see that, then, I could sit there and deal with both.

In this example, the intent or purpose is clear because the co-researcher described an entire story about disclosing to her mother including the outcome of that disclosure. In the above quote, she identified an observable activity which was phoning her mother rather than disclosing in person. She explained the outcome that directly related to the aim of the study

which was that she didn't have to see her mother in person and, therefore, was able to disclose to her more easily. Eventually she said that:

Gradually Mom got to accept it more and she would be friendly to anyone who was with me. And it's not that either of them [both parents] weren't friendly. It was just that mother was more friendly like who are you seeing or still seeing? She'd ask those kind of questions.....27 years later, they'll acknowledge if someone's with me and send them a card or something like that.

Here is a second example that demonstrates how critical incidents involving psychological processes were extracted. A co-researcher told a former student that he was gay. He identified that one of the things that facilitated the process for him was the quality of his relationship and closeness he felt with that person .

This student I was working with was having a serious drinking problem at a very young age. While she disclosed to me about this, she was still on guard, didn't trust me. I then talked about my family being alcoholic. That made her feel closer to me and we began disclosing more with one another. Then we got to a point where she was no longer my student and was at another school. She was now knowing me on a personal level. It just felt like she let me into her soul so I was going to let her into mine. So I then told her I was gay. We were definitely resonating with one another. I was identifying the discrimination and the alcoholism relating to my own story because it linked to my own personal story, helped me to feel closer to her. And her and I just went through a process of getting to the point where I'm like, "Well if she's going to know who I am, she needs to know that I'm also gay." Hearing her saying statements that were very positive, because of her own story, it made it feel safe to tell her.

The co-researcher described the precipitating event in detail including the outcome which was that his student appeared to be stunned but eventually told him that she was “fine with it.” Thus, the purpose or intent of the act appears to be clear. The co-researcher implied that he trusted this student because he felt close to her and she appeared to be quite open. In fact, this category has a similar base to the one already described in Flanagan’s 1978 study that talked about the quality of the relationship the respondents had with their partners. Both are based on the psychological construct of trust. Finally, this incident is deemed critical because the outcome of the action relates back to the aim of the study in that the co-researcher was able to disclose because he wanted to let the student into his soul because she had let him into her soul and he felt safe in telling her.

Initially, 350 critical incidents dealing with helping factors had been isolated and highlighted in yellow in the transcripts. Some of these required some clarification during a second interview with the co-researcher in order to ensure that all the criteria were met and to clarify the true intent or meaning of the helping factor.

As well, a total of 93 incidents dealing with hindering factors were also isolated and highlighted.

Initial Creation of Categories

At this point, I also grouped like-minded helping themes together into similar categories that, to me, best described the intent of what the co-researcher had been trying to say. For example, with the above two examples, I created categories called: “Disclosing by Phone” and “Closeness to the Disclosee.” In other words, I reviewed the transcripts and,

based on the actual words and intent of the co-researchers' comments, I highlighted what appeared to be similar themes or patterns using a yellow pen. I gave these initial categories a tentative name and wrote that name in the margin so I could review the tentative category name with each of the co-researchers. The process of creating these categories will be reviewed later on in this chapter. A similar process was used with the hindering themes.

Second Interview

A second interview was conducted within six months of the first interview. As has already been stated, the data had been partly analyzed by this time and initial categories had been created. Alfonso (1997) also used a second interview in her study. I found that this second interview allowed me: (a) to verify the overall transcript, (b) to clarify responses, and (c) to check initial category names and tentative categorizations with the co-researchers.

Most of the 12 co-researchers were given their transcripts in advance of this interview. In all cases, the co-researchers approved the accuracy of the transcript with the exception of a few typing errors or grammatical corrections.

If a particular incident required additional clarification, I used the second interview to ask the following question: In the original interview, you said that “(identified thing)” helped you. Can you explain in more detail how that helped you with this particular disclosure? In the case of seven co-researchers, these comments were recorded, transcribed, and inserted in the transcripts in italics (in order to isolate them from the original research interview). In the other five interviews, these comments were recorded by hand and inserted into the original transcript either in italics or in handwriting.

Several critical incidents were deleted during this member-checking process as the co-researchers clarified the meaning of the incident and that incident could then be folded into another incident that had already been recorded. This eventually left a total of 324 incidents. The 93 critical incidents dealing with hindering factors appeared to stand.

When I checked the tentative category names and initial categorization of the incidents with the co-researchers, they quibbled about words but, ultimately, agreed with almost all of my choices and asked for only minor changes. This procedure worked for both the helping and hindering categories.

Formal Creation of Categories

As I have already mentioned, from the list of helping and hindering incidents, I created initial category headings for the incidents. This was done using the following procedures. I divided the critical incidents into three component parts: (a) the source which I defined as the “thing” that had helped or hindered, (b) the action taken (e.g. psychological process or external activity), and (c) the outcome. For the purposes of this study, I selected the segment of the critical incident that contained the source rather than the action taken or outcome as it contained the richest research data and most useful therapeutic information. I then visually scanned this data and identified salient themes or patterns and recurring ideas of language (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). These themes became the basis for my evolving category system. Sometimes, the co-researchers used words to describe the “thing” that emphasized more of an activity. This was the case with the co-researcher who said that the thing that helped was “disclosing by phone.” Other times, the co-researchers preferred to focus on certain words or phrases. Since my intent was to remain as true as possible to the

co-researchers' words, I used these themes as the basis for my category names. For example, in the other example cited earlier, it was the closeness of the relationship that the co-researcher identified as helping him the most. The activity involved trusting the disclosee and the outcome was that he was able to disclose to his student.

Next, I typed up edited versions of the helping and hindering incidents which highlighted the source of the incidents and then placed these things on separate cards. I did an initial sort of these cards by category. The clearest incidents were categorized first and were used as prototypes for that category. Novotny (1993) said that borderline incidents could be classified according to the prototype of a particular category (p. 54). These borderline incidents were used as discussion points with my thesis supervisor.

As Alfonso (1997) pointed out, this is an inductive process and it would therefore be expected to make corrections at a later date (p. 68). I met with my supervisor five times to discuss and hone these categories. During this time, some categories were folded into others while other categories were renamed to provide a more suitable label. Still others required the author to check the original transcript and, in one case, phone a co-researcher once again to clarify the meaning of a specific incident.

Once the researcher and her supervisor had agreed on the categorization of the edited incidents, the categories were prioritized by placing the ones with the most incidents at the front of a filing box and those with the least numbers at the back of the box. These cards were then numbered from the front to the back of the box starting with the number one. Next, a list of all the category names was created. This list included a brief definition and examples of edited incidents that would fall into each category (Appendix H).

The same methodology was followed with the hindering factors. A copy of the list of hindering things has been included in Appendix I.

Validity and Reliability Checks

As has already been discussed, there are three appropriate criteria to judge the validity and reliability of qualitative studies: comparability, translatability, and trustworthiness. To determine if the results of this study were comparable and translatable, I referred to the criteria laid out earlier in this chapter. These results will be discussed in the next chapter. In order to determine the trustworthiness of the data, I utilized several techniques. First, I used three strategies laid out by Schumacher and McMillan (1993, pp. 385-397):

1. Researcher role. I selected co-researchers who had little or no previous affiliation with me. In the four cases in which I did have a superficial previous affiliation, this was limited to the following: Two were friends of friends whom I had met on approximately two occasions but had had nothing more than just minimal contact, one was in the same program as I in the Department of Counselling Psychology, and one worked for the same company as myself. In both cases, I had no personal dealings with these people in advance of the study except in the context of school or work.

2. Informant selection. Schumacher and McMillan (1993) said researchers use purposeful sampling in order to find information-rich key informants. They said this technique is appropriate when the researcher does not have access to a whole group from which they wish to sample and when generalizability of the findings is not the purpose of the study. That is the case with my study. I used purposeful and snowball sampling to select all of my co-researchers.

3. Context. I incorporated the physical, social, and interpersonal aspects of the co-researchers' stories in order to help explain their individual actions. In other cases, I allowed the co-researchers to explain the circumstances of their disclosure stories in great detail in order to provide more context. Each co-researcher filled in a demographic questionnaire before the interview began.

To further ensure the soundness and trustworthiness of the categories, I utilized three other procedures:

1. Independent judge or checker. As I mentioned, I had already checked with the co-researchers to see if they approved of the initial categories. We had a high rate of agreement.

My supervisor then acted as a preliminary checker. We met five times to discuss and hone the list of helping categories that I had created. During one session, an outside person also assisted with this task. At that point, we agreed that the categorical system was solid and trustworthy.

Finally, I hired an independent checker. This person had nothing to do with the creation or generation of the categories. She holds a Master's Degree in Social Work and a Diploma in Guidance Counselling from the University of British Columbia. She was familiar with qualitative research having done a qualitative paper, herself, for her Master's Degree. She was given a brief description of the categories (Appendix H) and, after a test run, was asked to place 100 incidents under appropriate categories. By comparing her placement with my own, I was then able to calculate a percentage of agreement between the two of us. For example, if she had placed all 100 incidents in the identical categories as I

had, then, we would have achieved a 100% rate of agreement. As McCormick (1994) stated, a high level of agreement would indicate that different people could use the categories to categorize incidents in a consistent and reliable way. We eventually achieved a 100% rate of agreement.

At a later date, the checker was given half of the hindering categories to check. Initially, four of our placements did not match. However, after I clarified the meaning and context of the four hindering factors by referring to the actual transcripts, she agreed with all of my placements. Thus, we achieved a 100% agreement rate.

2. Participation rate. If several people report the same kind of event, then, this is evidence of soundness for that particular category. On the other hand, if only a couple of people report an event, then, that category may be suspect. McCormick (1994) suggested this rate could be calculated by dividing the number of participants reporting incidents under a particular category by the total number of participants. Using this assumption, it would appear that some categories elicited in this study are suspect as they contained only one or a couple of incidents. I used a different theoretical assumption. The premise I chose for this thesis is that a category that contains one item is still a legitimate category as the data obtained may be quite meaningful for gays and lesbians not included in this study.

3. Opposition of the hindering categories. If the helping categories are sound, it is expected as a logical extension that the list of hindering categories gathered from the same co-researchers should mirror the helping categories. Once I had created the hindering categories, I created a chart of polar opposites to see if this was the case. In fact, when I

compared my final list of 17 hindering categories with the list of 33 helping categories, 14 of the hindering categories were in direct opposition to 14 of the helping categories.

It could be argued that the process I used to create the hindering categories was coloured by the fact that I had originally created the helping categories. However, this argument can be disputed by the fact that the co-researchers clearly agreed with my choices during the checking process.

Gender Differences

My second research question concerned whether or not there were substantial gender differences in the pattern of helping factors. To determine whether or not a difference had occurred, I counted the number of helping incidents for men and women in each category to see if any kind of pattern emerged. Overall, there were 158 incidents from women and 166 incidents from men. Using the eight categories that had a 75% participation rate or higher, a Spearman rank order correlation was calculated to be .74 at $p = .05$. Thus, there was a high correlation between the two gender groups in the categories with the highest participation rate. However, when I visually scrutinized all 33 categories, there appeared to be some minor differences in the way men and women had responded. These will be described in the next chapter.

Link with Ishiyama's Self-Validation Model

My final research question concerned the possibility of a link between the helping categories and the five domains and themes posited by Ishiyama (1995) in his Self-Validation Model. In order to see if there was any correlation, I took the list of 33 categories and attempted to classify these categories under Ishiyama's five domains of self-

validation: relationships, things, places, activities and self. Although Ishiyama described five different aspects of self, I did not attempt to categorize using these sub-categories as the intent of this exercise was to examine the links with the overall themes and domains.

Once again, I re-hired the original checker and asked her to sort the 33 helping categories under the five headings of Ishiyama's Model. I gave her a revised definition sheet (Appendix J) plus an additional sheet of information (Appendix K). Our results were a perfect match.

I also examined meaningful connections between the five thematic components of self-validation contained in Ishiyama's model and the 33 helping categories elicited in this thesis. In fact, by eyeballing the data, it was easy to see that there were intriguing links between these two things. The meaningfulness of these findings will be discussed in the discussion chapter.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Twelve gay and lesbian adults (six men, six women) shared 56 stories about disclosing their sexual orientation to others. From these stories, 324 critical incidents were isolated that appeared to facilitate this process. Co-researchers also reported 93 critical incidents that hindered the disclosure process. The 324 helping incidents were organized into 33 categories while the 93 hindering incidents were organized into 17 hindering categories.

In this chapter, a table of disclosure events is outlined and three narrative themes pertaining to these stories are noted. Next the helping and hindering categories are described. Examples from each category are provided for clarification purposes. Next, this chapter outlines three different criteria that were utilized to check the validity and the reliability of the categories. Then, the chapter details the results of a comparison of data by gender. Finally, this chapter describes the fit between the helping categories and Ishiyama's (1995) five domains of self-validation.

Description of Disclosure Events

Twelve co-researchers related a total of 56 stories about disclosing their sexual orientation to others. These stories then acted as precipitating events for the critical incidents that were elicited during this study. Table 1 contains a list of these disclosure stories.

Table 1

Disclosure Events

Co-researcher	Disclosee
Co-researcher 1	Mother Assistant Manager of the hotel where she was performing Female yoga instructor
Co-researcher 2	Female friend (former college buddy) Female coworker at Alberta Government Telephone Mother Brother Female friend and former high school buddy
Co-researcher 3	Mother Married couple who were also her employers Female coworker Female psychiatrist Female friend
Co-researcher 4	Female therapist Mother Female coworker (another teacher) Female friend
Co-researcher 5	High school class in northern Canada Sister Male friend and university research associate Mother Green College student residents
Co-researcher 6	Mother Boyfriend Female friend Father Stepfather

(table continues)

Table 1 (continued)

Co-researcher	Disclosee
Co-researcher 7	Parents Sister Male friend whom he was attracted to Male friend Female cousin Former male student male
Co-researcher 8	Female coworker and fellow teacher Best female friend Female friend University class
Co-researcher 9	Mother Female friend Sister Male coworker and his wife Male cousin who was visiting from Germany
Co-researcher 10	Mother University class of aspiring teachers Two male coworkers Girlfriend
Co-researcher 11	Mother 15-year-old female student Twin sisters Female friend Male principal who was his supervisor
Co-researcher 12	Male teenage friend Mother Male classmate and friend Male friend Male classmate Female friend

Common Narrative Themes Contained in the Disclosure Events

Three narrative themes became evident to me when the co-researchers described their significant disclosure stories. These themes involved: (a) disclosing to mothers, (b) disclosing to women, and (c) coming to terms with oneself.

Mother stories. Every co-researcher with one exception discussed disclosing to their mother. Although each person was asked to share up to six significant stories in no particular order, seven of the co-researchers chose to discuss the disclosure to their mother first, two chose to discuss this disclosure second while two others chose to relate the story as their third and fourth disclosure event. Equally significant is the lack of disclosures to the co-researchers' fathers. Only two co-researchers mentioned disclosing to their fathers. One made a point of stating that he told his mother first. The other described this disclosure as her fourth story. One person did mention disclosing to both parents at the same time while another inadvertently talked about disclosing to her father. The emphasis on disclosure stories to mothers has important implications that will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Disclosing to women. It is also significant that, of the 56 disclosure stories, 35 were to women, 10 of which were to female friends. Fifteen disclosures were made to men. Only two male co-researchers noted disclosing to male friends and they revealed that they disclosed because they had romantic aspirations regarding the disclosees. There were also four disclosures to classes and three to couples. Therefore, the co-researchers disclosed more to women than to men. One co-researcher noted that he felt safer disclosing to women because he was more comfortable with them. Although it is outside the scope of

this study, the topic of whether people feel safer disclosing to women than men might prove to be an interesting area for future research.

Coming to terms with oneself. One other theme that arose in the telling of the disclosure stories was that all of the co-researchers related stories that spanned a period of several years. Over time, it appeared that the disclosure process became easier for them. Almost all of the co-researchers commented on the connection between their growing sense of self-acceptance over the years and their ability to disclose without experiencing feelings of shame and guilt. When the co-researchers shared their stories about disclosing at a younger age or when they were feeling less secure about their sexual identity, these stories usually contained more emotional turmoil, more internalized homophobia, and elicited more hindering categories. This idea fits with the concept of gay/lesbian positive identity development and will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Description of the Helping Categories

This section will present each of the 33 categories by providing a brief description of the category, examples or prototypes of the source segment of one or more critical incidents in each category, and an indication of the variation within each category. All of these edited incidents describe what things facilitated the co-researchers to disclose their sexual orientation to someone else. The categories are described in descending order i.e. the categories with the most edited incidents are described first while the categories with the smallest number of edited incidents are described last.

Category One: Acceptance of the Authentic Self (48 Incidents)

This category contains the following four subcategories: (a) self-acceptance, (b) desire to be authentic with others, (c) obligation to be authentic with others, and (d) conviction to be authentic with others. All are based on psychological constructs which involve aspects of coming to terms with one's gayness or lesbianism and then wanting to share this information with others.

Subcategory one: self-acceptance (15 incidents). This subcategory involves incidents that describe the co-researchers' feelings of comfortability or level of acceptance about their gayness or lesbianism which, in turn, helped them to feel more comfortable in disclosing their sexual orientation to others. As one co-researcher said, she finally "felt strong enough" to disclose.

Examples

I've been denying who I am. It's time that I tell people who I really am. I don't believe I really accepted myself until a couple of years ago. I knew I was gay but do we ever really accept it? Now admitting you're gay and living a gay life are two different things. I had to be true to myself. This is what am. And I like it. I felt it was time, if I was to be honest with myself, and shed that whole thing of being in the closet. That it was necessary to come out and face what I thought was the biggest stumbling block to coming out and that was telling the parents.

I was becoming more secure with who I was. In order to become a counsellor at G.A.T.E. we had to go through a training program and there was lots of exploration of who you were, and assertiveness training, and that really had an impact on me. I believe you have to know who you are before you can accept who you are and tell others. So to

go to the next level in my journey, I needed to start accepting myself.

Subcategory two: desire to be authentic with others (28 incidents). This category often followed subcategory number one in that, once the co-researchers felt comfortable about their sexual orientation and had achieved a sense of self acceptance, then, they felt ready to disclose to others. They now felt that they did not want to lie about or hide their sexual orientation and therefore disclosed so that the other person would know the truth. This subcategory also includes the idea that some co-researchers wanted to lay a foundation for a more authentic relationship in the future by helping others, especially parents, let go of unrealistic expectations.

Examples

I remember the slogan "Silence Equals Death". If I kept silent it would be like dying inside, and I actually felt like I was dying inside on that level. I'm like I'm not going to have superficial conversations with her. I need to let her know who I am. If she can't handle it, she can then make the choice if she doesn't want to be with me. But at least it's a choice as opposed to it not being talked about which was very painful to me. I just found it very difficult to interact with her since the way my personal stories were edited so I felt I had to disclose my sexual orientation. If she could accept it, I could tell more of my stories to her. Maybe it is honesty. I was motivated to not have superficial conversations with her any more to get out of that which is honesty I guess.

We're talking early '70s. In those years, I was constantly having to live a lie. All day long, going to work, going to school, being this "straight" woman, and, at night, I could go out to the clubs and be who I was. I hated living the two things and the constant lies cause my parents didn't know then either. So it was constantly living a lie, and having to change stories a little bit so they would fit. I found I was doing that with her and I didn't want to do that. I had to say something because

I didn't want to lie. I wanted to tell the truth about who I was and that was a big part of me.....cause I wasn't comfortable with the lies and I was tired of having to lie. You have to keep track of everything so much, to whom you told what to, about how you said it, and I just didn't want to do it.

There was somebody I was interested in at that time. To me, if you're involved with somebody, I think the family should know. If I was dating a girl, I would want them to know. So if I was dating a guy, I would definitely want them to know. And I would want to bring him home. I guess I was setting the groundwork to expose them to me and eventually bring someone home.

I wanted her to let go of her expectations because, on some level, she did expect me to get married. I'm the only girl so I'm the only one who would perhaps carry on the legacy about her name. My brothers have had children but they've divorced so those kids are not the same as if I had a child. So I just wanted her to know that that was probably not going to happen. To be fair. I just wanted to be very open about something that was very important to me...I think it was a desire to be honest from that place. I mean I'm pretty honest with her about everything that's important because I spent a lot of my life lying to her.

Subcategory three: obligation to be authentic with others (three incidents). In this subcategory, the co-researchers went beyond the feelings of honesty that motivated them to disclose in subcategory two to a deeper place of obligation and respect for the disclosee. They said that they revealed their sexual orientation because they felt that the disclosees had a right to know and deserved to hear the truth.

Example

I told him [boyfriend] because I had to. We were breaking up and he had the right to know. I couldn't lie. There was no way

that I would not tell him. I didn't come home one night so it was pretty obvious that something was going on. There was no way to keep it from him because it was basically right under his nose. I didn't really feel that I had a choice. I couldn't keep it from him. It was obvious. And he deserved the truth. I could have lied but I couldn't have pulled it off. It was very painful.

Subcategory four: conviction to be authentic with others (two incidents). In this subcategory, two co-researchers were absolutely convinced that the disclosee's views were wrong and, thus, the disclosees needed to be challenged and their views taken to task.

Example

[In answer to the question: What things helped you disclose?] It was being so secure in seeing this situation was wrong. I wasn't ambivalent about it. I wasn't doubtful. I know this is wrong for me to be in this situation. I know her views are wrong. I'm usually seeing all around the issues and just let people be where they are. But not on this. If I was less certain of my own position and thought well maybe she's got a good point, and some really good reasons, I would be less inclined to upset her. But because I felt so strongly about her views, I was prepared to take the risk, the emotional downside and hurt that would result. For me, it was more about the certainty rather than about being right or wrong.

Category Two: Positive Qualities of the Disclosee or the Relationship (38 Incidents)

In this category, the co-researchers referred to the open and supportive qualities of the disclosee or the relationship with that person as being the thing that helped them feel comfortable enough to disclose. They often described past positive connections they had had with the disclosee which had resulted in a close, quality relationship. Thus, the co-

researchers felt they could trust the disclosee enough to reveal their sexual orientation. This category does not include the factor of being able to predict whether the disclosee would react in a positive fashion once the disclosure had been made as many co-researchers rated this as a separate helping factor but, obviously, there is a relationship between these two things.

Example

[In response to the question: Who did you disclose to next?] Someone that I worked with at Alberta Government Telephones. We were operators. We had met there so we started going out and drinking together. We used to smoke dope together. We got real close. Got to know each other quite well and this went on for a few months. She kept telling me about going to gay bars in Montreal where she's from. She said she had a great time. She made it easy cause she was one of those kind of people who didn't care if you were white, black, blue, whatever. If you liked to party, smoke dope, and have fun, were open to people, you were buddies. Made a big difference that she was so open to people. I didn't have to go through this whole "is she going to reject me" kind of thing. She was pretty loose and easy as far as accepting of people. Not a whole lot phased her. Plus, again, she had some history with me. She knew a part of me, not all of me, but she obviously liked me or we wouldn't have been friends. So that made it easier.

Category Three: Existence of a Support Network (32 Incidents)

This category contains the following three subcategories which all mention some kind of network or support system: (a) existence of a non-gay support network, (b) existence of a gay support network, and (c) existence of supportive role models.

Subcategory one: existence of a non-gay support network (15 incidents). In this category, the co-researchers said that the existence of some kind of community or support system helped them to make the disclosure. This category is different than category two because it is a third party, not the co-researcher (as was the case in category two), that provided support and allowed the co-researcher to feel safe enough to make the disclosure.

Examples

One big thing would be knowing I had a lot of personal support at home. Whether it was from friends or family or A.A., that if I had a bad experience, I knew that I had available a lot of resources that would be supportive. I might have to go through a bad hour but I had plenty of ways to deal with that.

My other sister, who's a twin, is straight but very supportive. I was very fortunate in that when I actually did tell my Mom that the straight sister was the one who actually did a lot of talking with my Mom. So J [sister] is the one who did the bridge. If it wasn't for her, I don't think my mother and I would have a relationship today....I knew I had to have certain support systems set up. I didn't realize what I was doing at the time but, looking back, I told a series of friends first that were safe to tell. So I felt that if I went to my Mom and it turned into a big mess, I can go to them and process my feelings with them. I made sure I had a strong support system.

Subcategory two: existence of a gay support network (nine incidents). In this subcategory, the co-researchers specifically mentioned that their support systems were either lesbian or gay.

Examples

[In answer to the question: Is there anything else that helped you?] My growing inner strength from being

around other lesbians. I realized I could have a full life and a good life and have some wonderful people who are lesbians around me and it made me feel there is no reason to hide this. I was branching out more, involved in other lesbians' lives, and there was one really important woman whom I'm still friends with whom I met in Al-Anon and I was really afraid about coming out and I was waivering back and forth and she was a lesbian therapist and we went camping with a whole group of people...and she listened to all my fears and my wondering. Because yes, I'm coming out as a lesbian. It helped me disclose in a general way. It gave me more inner strength.

[In answer to the question: What else helped you disclose?] Talking to other lesbians. And I was working at a Rape Crisis Centre. There were lots of lesbians there. Going to lesbian dances. Virtually living as a lesbian...and going to lesbian environments. I knew when I came out that I wasn't the only one, that I wasn't alone, that there was a whole world out there for me. It helped having other lesbians to talk to. There was support there.

Subcategory three: existence of supportive role models (eight incidents). In this subcategory, the co-researchers looked to other people as solid role models and felt supported by the fact that these people exist. In some cases, these role models had disclosed their sexual orientation and received a positive response thus leaving the co-researchers with the hope that they too might receive a positive response. In one case, a co-researcher revealed that he disclosed because someone else whom he had regarded as being a positive role model did not disclose their secrets and consequently lived in despair. It was this negative role modeling that led to his disclosure. These role models were all people that the co-researchers had met personally rather than famous people they had never met.

Examples

I had a really good friend who was really brilliant. I remember around that time she had a huge party and we all went. And in the middle of the party,

she left and went into her bedroom. And I found out the next day it was her going away party. She was going to commit suicide. Fortunately she didn't take enough pills or something and she was saved. But something clicked inside for me and I realized thatit's very exhausting to put up a facade, to appear to be so together and to realize behind that mask I could be just as insecure and unstable as the next person. So to go to the next level in my journey, I needed to start accepting myself. So that really impacted on me a lot that S [the friend] could be so unhappy...cause I could see myself going that way. I could see the fact that outwardly I could appear to be put together and articulate and happy. And I was feeling pain inside. I was still feeling guilty. I was still feeling exhausted with having to live a lie. To realize that someone that I really respected-cause I really put her up on a pedestal...and to see that she was so unhappy in so much despair, it was overwhelming to me. It really hit home and made me realize that I need to be truthful cause I could end up going that same way.

I had this inkling that my Dad's sister D was a lesbian because for years, she came up in her old Volkswagen from Boston with the same woman all the time. She never married and fit the profile. The funny thing about it was that I always had a deep connection to my Aunt D even though I hardly ever saw her. It was a soul connection and I loved her independence, fire, or whatever so I really related to her. In the back of my mind, I knew she was a lesbian and I kept her as my role model. I remember I had a picture of her. When I knew in my head she was a lesbian, I kept a picture of her on my bureau even though she had been dead for a number of years. I brought that out and I really think it was important to me. She was an inspiration for me to be true to myself and to be honest with everyone else.

Category Four: Prediction of a Supportive Response (27 Incidents)

The key point in this category is that the co-researchers were anticipating a future positive or, at least, non-negative reaction from the disclosee. The co-researcher often related that this prediction was based on the premise that he/she had a strong supportive

relationship with the disclosee but that was not always the case. In some cases, this premise was based on the fact that the co-researcher knew the disclosee had already reacted positively to other gays and lesbians.

Example

She was the very first family member that I told. See I never thought I would get any rejection from my family. That was never an issue. I knew I never would because they brought us up saying how much they cared for us and it was always very much they loved us. They thought very highly of us. They wanted us to do our best. They wanted us to go to school. They wanted us to have what they never had. When we were growing up, they'd say, "Oh my God, I can't believe this one threw out her daughter because she became pregnant. It's their daughter for God sake. We'd never do anything like that." So I knew they wouldn't reject me. We were so close and I knew I could get support from her. I knew she wouldn't say, "Oh my God, I'm out of the room repulsed." I knew the support was there. I felt safe in telling her.

Category Five: Conducive Environment (21 Incidents)

This category contains the following three subcategories: (a) supportive environment, (b) private one-on-one environment, and (c) social/political/legal environment. Each has to do with some kind of environment that helped the co-researcher to disclose.

Subcategory one: supportive environment (six incidents). In this subcategory, the co-researchers described a particular kind of environment which made them feel safe and supported and thus able to make the disclosure.

Examples

And I wasn't so worried about rejection because you were on my turf so you can go ahead and reject me all you want. You won't last here. It wasn't really a gay bar but there were enough gays that attended there

in those days. If she was comfortable and didn't care, then, this kind of place wouldn't bother her because anybody and everybody was there. There were drag queens in this place. And there were a lot of straight people in there. Who cared? I wouldn't have taken her to a complete gay bar to tell her. There's no way. But walking into this place, she could get the idea that hey I'm trying to tell you something.

[In response to the question: What things helped you disclose?] In a more practical sense, certainly being in a comfortable environment, the kitchen, where I had sat and talked to her a bunch of times. I just think that when you're doing something like this [disclosing], being in an environment that's familiar and comfortable and low stress and even neutral territory just relieves one more obstacle. I don't think being in the kitchen suddenly made me turn around and suddenly say, "Oh gee Mom, I'm gay." But I think given the fact that I was getting close to having that conversation, I think it was really important that it be in a space that was going to make me feel maximum comfort. I don't think I would have felt comfortable in my room which was my space or in her space like her room or even the living room. It was sort of a neutral family space which was neither one of our territory.

Subcategory two: private one-on-one environment (nine incidents). In this subcategory, the co-researchers said they felt safer making the disclosure to one person at a time. In many cases, the co-researchers carefully chose a private environment where they wouldn't be interrupted. In other situations in this category, such as with the following example, the co-researcher focused on the privacy and intimacy of being able to disclose to only one person.

Examples

It made it easier to do one at a time [her parents]. Plus, I figured she was the easier one. It would have been harder to do two at once because you would have had two bombarding questions whereas, one, I could

answer what she had to ask me and fix her pain. Whereas when you get two of them, there's no way to deal with both of them. And sometimes, if you're dealing with two people, their pain reacts together too. So you're dealing with almost three times as much.

My sister and I went for a long walk and we were just totally isolated. I see a lot of patterns of the privacy and making sure that no one could interrupt. When I told my first friend, we were at a house and we knew nobody was coming for a whole weekend. So just setting that up and making sure it's in a place is very important. Like I told you before, the privacy makes you feel less vulnerable.

Subcategory three: social/political/legal environment (six incidents). In this subcategory, the co-researchers referred to the overall accepting nature of the times as compared to a less accepting environment several years before as being the thing that helped. The co-researcher sometimes referred to specific changes in legislation, legal contracts, or other rights that he/she felt protected by. It is this supportive context that allowed the co-researcher to feel more safe and comfortable which then facilitated the disclosure.

Examples

Being a member of G.A.L.E. [Gay And Lesbian Educators] has allowed me to see that there is protection, that it isn't such a big risk as I might have initially thought it was. Being more secure with who I am, having tenure, all these factors come into play. In B.C., we do have legislation. There really is an entitlement. So it's legal. My job is not tenuous any more. I have more tenure. It would be very difficult for someone to fire me in my profession because I'm gay. We have protection in our contract. Also I'm more secure in my abilities and know if someone tried to fire me because of the fact that they didn't like me or that they didn't like that I'm a gay individual, they would have a harder time doing it.

I think knowing that homosexuality is no longer a disease and they can't get me for it. You know, having that knowledge base and knowing my human rights because I know how to correct it. I expected she [psychiatrist] wouldn't be able to make a disease of it because of textbook stage in 1976. I know that psychiatrists think they are impartial. I know they are not supposed to think homosexuality is a disease. To me, the main thing is having some history and knowing that homosexuality stopped being a disease in 1976 or something like that and if they're not okay about it, I know they don't have a right not to be okay.

[The co-researcher is disclosing to his cousin who is visiting from Germany.] I think another helpful thing was that.....times have changed in those 10 years and maybe my relatives have received the education. I mean in terms of social acceptance of homosexuality as indicated by changes in legislation. In 1969, it was illegal. They just amended the Criminal Code. In 1974 or 1976, they amended the Immigration Act so that gay people were no longer barred from entering Canada. Now finally they have amended the Human Rights Act to include sexual orientation as a prohibited ground of discrimination. So we can see that gradually it goes from a criminal offense to something now that you shouldn't be discriminated against. Now there's protection. So the law goes from punitive to protection of gay people. That's a big step. In other western countries, similar changes have occurred even in Germany. It's easier now to tell someone you're gay than ten years ago because times have changed and, if you react negatively, I think you are in the minority now. Most people, the majority of Canadians, don't see being gay in and of itself is a reason to persecute somebody.

Category Six: Assumption that the Disclosee Already Knew (13 Incidents)

In this category, the co-researchers assumed that the disclosee already knew that they were gay or lesbian and, therefore, the disclosure was not as much of a personal risk.

Examples

They [coworkers] knew. They'd have to have been stupid

not to because I hinted enough. At the time, I was 33, and I never talked about women with them. I was not going to pretend to them that I was straight so I didn't tell them anything really. They knew there was an absence of women and, if a homophobic remark came up at work, I would say, "That's inappropriate." As soon as you say that to anybody, they assume they know that you are gay. By the time I told them, I thought they'd react in a positive way because I had laid the foundation...dropping hints. I figured they had to know.

And she's one of those mothers who is totally psychic so she's known what's been going on anyway when it comes to other parts of my life especially I have other problems. So I had this feeling that she probably knew because I'd had a lot of friendships throughout my adolescence with women. Mind you I had never said anything about women but I just thought that she would have been able to conclude that. I was feeling confident that she already knew anyway. I thought it would be more of a confirmation for her doubts than anything else. So probably if I thought she didn't know, I might have put it off for another period of time.

Category Seven: Relationship Status (13 Incidents)

The co-researchers said that having a partner and being in a good relationship provided support and made it easier to disclose.

Examples

[In answer to the question: What things helped you disclose?] Being in a long term relationship in which my partner is getting involved with the family, coming home with me, coming on family visits. I think if it was a less secure, short term relationship, I might have put it [the disclosure] off for a little while. But I feel that this may be a life partner. Therefore, they're [parents] going to have to deal with it sooner or later.

D started to be in the picture. I might have mentioned about D in the letter. This gave me more motivation cause I felt my mother might want to talk to my sister

about it. It's like if somebody gets married, you talk about the spouse. It's only natural. A partner is always helpful in every disclosure because you can draw strength from them.

Category Eight: Desire For More Intimacy (12 Incidents)

In this category, the co-researchers disclosed in order to develop a closer, more intimate relationship with the disclosee and to maintain the closeness that was already there.

Example

I also felt like I was growing apart from her because I wasn't sharing part of my life. She came over to my place one day by herself and I remember we talked about everything under the sun except that. And I couldn't seem to spit it out. It was a release for both of us to know what was going on. I got to the point where I felt that I had to [disclose]. That pushed me or it would have cost me the friendship or the closeness, the intimacy in the friendship. I could have still had a friendship but it would have been a loss. It would have been half my life not being shown. The desire to keep my friendship with W and to keep the intimacy in my friendship with her is what really pushed me to disclose.

Category Nine: Spirituality (10 Incidents)

The co-researchers referred to meditation, spirituality and/or religion as being the thing that helped them to disclose. Often, the co-researchers would talk about these beliefs as being a core comfort that could be relied on if the disclosure went sour.

Examples

When I started meditating, I got back on track with all of that and generally things improved a great deal in my relationships at home and school. So meditation helped me to accept and understand myself and, to that extent, it helped me to also be more open about myself and my sexuality. Knowing the spiritual aspects of many gay peoples' lives has always been a major issue for me since I've discovered

more queer positive kinds of spirituality. That's been very helpful to me. Both [also mentioned contact with the Queer community] of these things helped me with all four of the disclosures that I have told you about here. Spirituality is very very important to me. It's made it easier to disclose because of what I told you.

I would say that one thing which was probably in that case [of disclosure] was a spiritual base in my life. My spirituality now is much different than it was at that age. But, at both periods, I had a fairly significant spiritual component in my life. I think that for me has been highly significant because it gives me a feeling that no matter what happens, I will be okay deep down even though sometimes consciously I may not think that. I think that probably is one of the huge factors. I grew up in a religious family. My father had been a minister. It was not a negative experience for me. It was a fairly open minded, liberal, intellectual church with not a lot of dogmatic stuff attached to it. And even really for a long period as a gay man, I didn't feel totally rejected. I had some spiritual support and more prone to free thinking. I think that provided me with an idea of that despite the fact that I had concerns over my homosexuality and my religion, that I wasn't turning my back on that. I had a fairly strong sense that my life was more than merely the physical plane. So that put less importance on what happened on the physical plane. Worst case scenario: If everyone [in the family] went, "Oh My God, I hate you," and threw me out of the house, that I had somewhere in me...if something like that happened. So I think a kind of reassurance, and to a certain extent, a feeling that God made me and I felt like this way so it [being gay] couldn't be wrong.

Category Ten: Need To Tell (10 Incidents)

In this category, the co-researchers needed to tell their story to someone else because the very act of telling then allowed them to process this issue and stop it from festering inside. It also helped to tell because the co-researcher often got feedback from the person he/she was disclosing to. The act of disclosure thus facilitated and became part of the

coming out process. In a way, this category is a bookend to the one entitled “self-acceptance” because, according to what various co-researchers stated here, it is the act of telling that enabled the co-researcher eventually to accept him/herself.

Examples

I think on the one hand that I was not comfortable with my sexual orientation. So part of it may have been an attempt at getting some outside feedback or help on dealing with this problem. Maybe part of it was just trying to open up a channel to help deal with that. I work through stuff by working through it with other people. It's very difficult for me to work through stuff in my own head. So the fact that I was trying to work through that made it almost imperative that I speak to someone. And I guess the question was: Who would I speak to? I think the fact that I was trying to deal with it and wrestle with it made it inevitable that I was going to talk to somebody about it.

Category Eleven: Therapy (10 Incidents)

The co-researchers said that going for therapy, attending a therapeutic group or seeing a therapist helped them to disclose. Often they said that the therapist helped them deal with a specific aspect of a particular disclosure by discussing related problems in advance of the disclosure.

Example

I talked about it [disclosing] in numerous sessions with my therapist and at group [therapy]. I had worked on a lot of issues around my mother in therapy and I had gotten much more honest about things in my life. My therapist talked about how my mother seemed ready and willing to listen and seems to be saying that she just wants you to be happy in your life etc. That made me feel that she would accept it.

Category Twelve: Previous Positive Disclosures (Eight Incidents)

The co-researchers said that because they were practised at disclosing and other disclosures had gone positively, then, this gave them more courage to take the risk and disclose again.

Examples

I was on a roll [re. making disclosures] because I told my mother. That was positive. And so it was like I was ready for the next step. So I told her [his friend]. If you don't have a good track record with disclosures, it can make it harder to tell other people.

Actually, I should say the factor working very much in favour of me telling this time was the fact that I've come out several times before. It's a huge significant factor because I do believe the more you do it, the easier it gets. That has been the case for me.

Category Thirteen: Seizing the Moment (Seven Incidents)

In this category, the co-researchers impulsively chose to seize the moment and disclose. Sometimes, this was due to being put on the spot by the disclosee. Other times, circumstances presented the co-researchers with a golden opportunity to disclose.

Example

Circumstances were definitely a big factor. She [her brother's wife] had already opened the door so all I had to deal with was the rebound of what was going to happen from him finding out because he's finding out that, one, I'm gay. Two, that his wife is also gay. And that we were lovers. There was a lot there for him to deal with. Not your usual everyday story. I don't know if I'd have told him if he hadn't confronted me because he was still married to her. Just cause of circumstances.

Category Fourteen: Access to Information (Seven Incidents)

In this category, the co-researchers referred to authors, books, resources or information that helped them feel more knowledgeable which then helped them to make the disclosure. In some cases, the co-researchers went on at great length about a particular author and said this person was a “role model” for them. The difference between this kind of role modeling and the role models mentioned in category three is that, here, the co-researchers did not know the role model and only read about that person in a book.

Examples

[In response to the question: What things helped you to make this disclosure?] Having access to information, living in an urban centre where there are resources. These were helpful in all the disclosures because if something went wrong, I had somewhere to go always. Having information on your rights is important. I think the year I had spent reading lesbian books [helped]. I remember reading a book of peoples’ coming out stories that was really helpful. That helped me because I think just having plain old information and knowing that there were lots of people in the world and they wrote books. There was a whole world out there for me. I felt very sure about my sexuality when I passed through the door. The sureness was the results of doing good research and finding out about this.

I was studying a couple of different authors who were both gay and both spiritually inspired people. One of them is Hakim Bey. I was reading his book that summer called “Temporary Autonomous Zone.” That’s a collection of poetic tracts and essays. He’s into child liberation and everything. The other person is Aleister Crowley. He was raised in a very strict fundamentalist sect and saw the hypocrisy of the people around him. He was a very intelligent man who, until very late in his development, sex was not even talked about at all. He didn’t know how to masturbate. He rebelled completely against his upbringing and identified himself with the great beast of Revelations. Being such

an eloquent writer and prolific as well, he's influenced a lot of people including me to speak up. He writes with a lot of authority. It helped me to know that this person existed, and that he had these experiences, and a lot of people admired him as a spiritual leader or prophet. It gave me hope for my own life.

Category Fifteen: Teachable Moment (Seven Incidents)

In this category, the co-researchers revealed that what helped them was their desire to use the disclosure as a teaching opportunity for the disclosee. The co-researchers often mentioned that they wanted to be a role model (as opposed to having a role model as discussed in categories three and 14). It is notable that six of the co-researchers had a background in teaching.

Examples

I'm studying to be a teacher. I had been wrestling in my mind with the issue of how I would deal with my sexual orientation once I was a teacher because part of why I would like to be a teacher is to be able to be a positive influence or role model which I didn't have. It's so hugely important for me that, if I teach, I teach as a gay man. And so coming out in the classroom was a step towards achieving the goal that I have for myself in the end. The goal being to be a positive role model. I think the question was basically dealing with how personal life experiences would affect the way we taught or how our personal life experiences shaped the way we viewed the role of the teacher. And part of what I see as the role of the teacher is being in my particular personal case is to be able to be a role model, a resource. It was something that I knew I wanted to be part of my teaching. I don't want to be a closeted high school teacher. This is back to the goal thing. If I wanted it to be part of my teaching then I had to overcome this obstacle of telling people in that kind of setting [the classroom]. And I knew if I was going to do what I said I wanted to do, I was going to have to at some point be comfortable saying it in front of peers.

[In answer to the question: What things helped you disclose to your sister?] I see them [her nieces] growing up as quite narrow minded and that includes being financially privileged, racist, and middle class without any awareness of that privilege. I don't think my sister is going to teach them how lucky they are and so I think that is part of my role because I can see it and I don't think she can. I see it as my role as a member of the family that I've got things in my life and that they're valuable and they're big life lessons. So I see I've got stuff for these kinds that may be valuable to them. I don't know. At one point I thought the middle boy might be gay. I thought it's crazy if he's going through a hellish time and he's got this aunt that could be a real support. Now, I'm not so sure. In the bigger picture, I just think that they will encounter difficult issues in their lives and I don't think they are being equipped to deal with it and there's a member of their family right there that could give them some support, lessons, open their eyes a little bit. Maybe that's one of the lessons I don't think they're learning from their Mom. That I can gently teach them that things don't have to be the same always. Things can change. And that includes social values.

Category Sixteen: Geographical Distance (Seven Incidents)

In this category, the co-researchers said that the geographical distance between them and the disclosee was a helping factor because they would not have had to see the disclosee if the disclosure went badly.

Examples

I think in this case being far away actually helped because, if he didn't like it, then I didn't have to deal with the fact, didn't have to see him. I didn't have to do that.

I was living in a different city so if they had reacted negatively, I wouldn't have bumped into them in shopping malls and it wouldn't have been so awkward.

Category Seventeen: "No Big Deal" (Six Incidents)

The co-researchers in this category said that they felt that the act of disclosing was no big deal and had no major consequences for them. Thus, they felt that they weren't taking any risk in disclosing because they had nothing to lose.

Examples

There's no need to hide it any more. I'm very open with it that I am. I am so what's the big deal [to disclose]? There's no big deal. I always thought it was a big thing being gay but it's not. It goes beyond self acceptance. It is different. There's just no big deal. Like I said earlier, who gives a shit in the long run?

I really didn't care how she [mother] reacted...because I was ambivalent about her response. It's easier to tell someone if you don't care how they react. You often weigh the consequences in advance to evaluate them. But, if there aren't any, then, why care?

Category Eighteen: Sexual Deterrent (Six Incidents)

In this category, the co-researchers said the thing that helped them disclose was that they wanted to use the disclosure to deter the disclosees from coming onto them sexually.

Example

We dated a couple of times and I realized this is just not working. I mean forget it. I don't want to go there. That was the last woman that I journeyed with in that way. So I let her down softly. She had become really attached to me. I had a boyfriend too. He was coming to see me from Europe, Amsterdam. So she needed to know because she was now involved in my life. She needs to know that I'm gay because I don't want her to think there's any romantic intentions on my part. So I disclosed to her. Also, I was moving to Europe and she was coming over to Europe to live too. I needed to tell her because we were going to be living together.

Category Nineteen: Disclosing By Letter Or Phone (Five Incidents)

The co-researchers who mentioned this helping factor said that choosing to disclose either in a letter or over the phone made them feel more safe and in control of the situation.

Examples

So I actually wrote her a long letter. She made it very clear that she didn't want to speak about it. So I thought a letter would be an easier way for her to read it without having to deal with me being in the same space with her.

So I phoned her up and told her that I wanted to tell her some things but wanted to send it in a letter. And she said, "Okay, that's fine." I definitely chose that [letter format] for a reason. I think because I could write down all I wanted to say uninterrupted and get out what I thought was a much more thoughtful and much more being able to tell where I'm going and what it means to me in written form would be easier than having to talk back and forth with her or see her.

Category Twenty: Alcohol (Five Incidents)

The co-researchers admitted that they were under the influence of alcohol which made them feel less inhibited. Thus, it was easier to disclose.

Examples

We were both half pissed so I could hope that maybe she'd have a memory lapse (laughs). That made a whole lot of difference because a lot of times when I drank, it was like, "I don't care if you don't like it cause this is how it is. So I'll just tell you." I got rather brave and bold when I was drinking. And I wasn't so worried about rejection.

Alcohol helped by making me braver and more intimate. You share more intimate things when you've had two or three beers.

Category Twenty-One: Other People Already Know (Five Incidents)

In this category, the co-researchers said that because other people in a particular group (usually family) already knew, then, it was easier and provided a motive for them to tell the final member of that group.

Examples

It [the fact her parents already knew] hindered in a way because they knew a secret and he did not. So that made me feel guilty that he didn't know. But it also helped in that I could deal with him and not have to worry about it [news about my sexual orientation] getting back to them and then have to deal with them too. Cause they already knew so that was finished.

[In answer to the question: What things helped you to make that disclosure?] Because my brother knew, my mother knew and I felt I wanted to close the circle. Everyone else already knew so I thought it would just make it easier on them if my sister knew too. I wasn't really doing it for my sister. I was doing it more for my mother to make it easier on her. It's not their responsibility. Right? How can my mother have a conversation with my sister about my life by excluding such a fundamental element. In fact, she couldn't really. I don't like people finding out that way [someone else telling] because the question that enters their mind is, "Why didn't he tell me?"

Category Twenty-Two: Third Party Influence (Five Incidents)

In this category, the co-researchers revealed that a third party had already informed the disclosee about their sexual orientation. Thus, they did not have to tell the disclosee themselves but did have to respond to the disclosee's question when asked. Also, in this category, the co-researchers might have stated that they felt pressured into the disclosure by a third party.

Examples

He [her brother] had figured out something from something she [her sister-in-law] had said before. I'm not sure what. Something hit him and he asked her. He might have been angry because I was sleeping with her but, excuse me. I was sleeping with her before you were. I should be the one who is pissed here. He was just so stunned by it all. My sister-in-law kind of outed me. People have done that to me. And that didn't give me time to prepare for this because, all of a sudden, these people are at my throat and "Whoa!". I had no time to react. It also helped because it took a lot of stress away from me having to tell him. How do you bring it up? "Hi. Guess what?" She [brother's wife] had already opened the door so all I had to deal with was the rebound of what was going to happen from him finding out.

I was going to tell you about my stepfather. But that's another case where somebody else did the dirty work for me. Having someone else tell makes it easier because I don't have to deal with it. I'm tired of coming out. It's just easier if someone else takes care of it. Then you don't have to deal with their reaction. They have time to digest it. And if it's a terrible thing, then, you don't see them. And it's final. He told me that my Mom had told him. Having my Mom tell it already and my brother bring up the subject -once it's out there I feel completely comfortable talking about it. There's a shyness that makes it difficult for me to bring it up.

This woman had only two months before disclosed to her family. And she was very adamant almost about me telling my mother. And to be honest, I felt quite a lot of pressure. She's actually quite radical. She's totally out to everyone. So the combination was just too much for me. I did feel that her disclosure [to her family] put a bit of a push for me to do the same thing. Her family had been totally supportive. And so I was riding a little bit on that hope [regarding disclosing to her own mother].

Category Twenty-Three: Feminist Politics (Four Incidents)

In this category, the co-researcher is always a woman who stated that the privilege and status she felt due to her education, ethnicity, or class allowed her to experience a sense of political power. The co-researchers revealed that they felt this power should be used to assist others who are not so fortunate and less powerful.

Examples

What helped me and what is probably helping me to do this [disclose] is because I'm articulate, have a certain amount of privilege because I don't have to worry about supporting kids or whatever. To me, it's one of my mission statements of life to talk about my differences and to tell. To me privileges mean that I think the world is set up to work for very few people who have a very defined set of characteristics: wealth, education, white skin, heterosexuality etc. I lose privilege points from being a woman of size, a lesbian. But the areas of privilege I do have is being articulate, having white skin, middle class, communication skills. If you're aware of your rights, you can vocalize what you need or want. You can stand up for yourself. And being in a position of knowing how to defend myself, not having children to support, so I can afford to lose a job. I feel since I have those advantages, it's important for them to hear what I have to say and to learn so it will help the next person who may not have my privileges.

In terms of who I am as a person, I wouldn't have done that [disclose] five years ago because I'm way more political about how I present myself. And it's important to do that because I have got enough privilege and education and self confidence and psychic armor. I've got all the privilege in the world being white and highly educated. But when I'm in a teaching situation like that, no harm's going to come to me. It's [disclosing] a political act. I can do it but a lot of other people can't. If I wasn't so sure of the need for people to do it politically, for

the need for people to be able to come out and if I wasn't so convinced of how heterosexism works, which I didn't used to be, I might have thought, "Well maybe I won't because it's going to make things difficult." But I refuse to accept the heterosexism around. It needs to be challenged and sometimes I'm the one who has to challenge it. It's taken me a long time to recognize what heterosexism is. For me, it means taking for granted assumptions that being straight or married is normal and being lesbian isn't. And I didn't used to be able to recognize that. Now I can. And I feel very strongly that it is morally wrong.

Category Twenty-Four: Career Identity and Clout (Four Incidents)

This category has the following two subcategories both of which contain career-related things that helped the co-researcher to disclose: (a) professional identity, and (b) academic authority and clout.

Subcategory one: professional identity (two incidents). In this subcategory, the co-researchers felt that their sexual orientation was part of their professional identity or career. Thus, in order to talk about their work, they had to talk about their sexual orientation.

Example

I'm sorry but I'm going to have a Ph.D. with the word lesbian in the title (laughs). I can't say the title of my thesis at the dinner table. And I can't say I teach gay and lesbian studies in front of the kids. So partly where my career is in dealing with this issue. That's a huge thing. My professional identity is increasingly tied into my sexual identity because I'm working in Queer Theory and Lesbian and Gay studies. It's made me bring it up. These are concrete things. It just strikes me as ludicrous the whole thing is, cause I can't put my thesis on the table, cause my sister can't deal with the word lesbian.

Subcategory two: academic authority and clout (two incidents). In this subcategory, two co-researchers said they felt that they were either in a power position to the disclosee or had some kind of academic clout. Thus, they felt safer in disclosing because of the authority and power afforded by this position.

Examples

It's a little bit of academic throwing your weight around. That lesbian and gay studies, queer theory, feminist theory can be used. You have a hard time in refuting that in academia now unless you are in the political science department. Those studies are now happening and, if you don't know that, you better sharpen up. And that's what makes an academic heavyweight game. It's turning the tables on the old camp. So there's all that authority which has been legitimated from how "queer" has gotten into the academy. It's authority. I've got the grants, the research funding. And I'm going to throw my weight around and I do it very deliberately. It gives me credibility on an academic level which is very important here. That is what people respect initially. So if they were slightly uncertain or homophobic, that sort of academic credibility makes it harder for them to be homophobic on the personal level.

[In answer to the question: What things helped you disclose?] The fact that I was in a power position. I was the one that was doing the hiring so if she [junior teacher] didn't like it, [my sexual orientation] she wasn't going to have the job. So I think that made a difference.

Category Twenty-Five: Desire To Help Others (Three Incidents)

In this category, the co-researchers said they wanted to disclose in order to keep the disclosee from getting hurt. In two of the three incidents, the co-researchers also noted that they were helped by the fact that they were trying to sexually deter the person. However, they pointed out that their need to help the disclosee was a separate facilitating factor.

Example

I didn't want her to think there was something about her personally that I didn't find attractive. I really didn't want her to feel bad about herself. That was my real motive. I didn't want her to come away with any kind of feeling that it was her fault. She has a huge ego. But I just didn't want her to think it was her problem. It was really my problem. My motivation was not to deter her sexually. My motivation was that I didn't want to reject her. I didn't want her to take it personally. That's the thing that helped me.... that I wanted to keep from hurting her.

Category Twenty-Six: Humour (Two Incidents)

Two co-researchers stated that humour helped them make the disclosure because it lightened up the situation and eased the tension of the moment.

Example

[In answer to the question: What things helped you to disclose?] A lot of humour. I had this very interesting relationship with her that was based hugely on humour and laughing. I have a really easy time dealing with difficult things with people who can laugh a lot because it tells me something about how they process stuff. Even now, if I have something difficult to do, I mean I give extra marks to kids at school if they make me laugh cause I think it's so important. It has to do with how people look at things and they don't take them so seriously. We [he and the disclosee] had dealt with so many serious things through humour and I find that a very healing and positive way to deal with difficult things. So I sort of felt that that was going to be a way to help deal with this. I think that [humour] was a major component of that one [disclosure] and none others.

Category Twenty-Seven: Testing the Waters (Two Incidents)

Two co-researchers said that the thing that helped them was their need to know how the disclosee would react to the disclosure because their future working relationship depended

on having a good rapport.

Example

I needed to know how she would react and take things because I wouldn't want to work with someone who wasn't supportive. I needed to know where I stood with her. As a new mother, with a young child, you never know. People can often become weird when they have children. I've found that with my heterosexual friends. They've been very accepting of me. Then, when they have children, their attitudes have changed. So I wanted to make sure. I wanted to check in.

Category Twenty-Eight: Financial Independence (Two Incidents)

One co-researcher cited two separate instances in which he felt that economic independence provided him with a security blanket so that he could make the disclosure.

Example

I think also the fact that I was economically independent helped. I was employed. I was doing the C.A. thing. I've always been economically independent since I was 18. Had the factors been different, I might have chosen the timing of the disclosure more carefully in the sense that, if I were dependent on my mother, then, I might have delayed in telling her. Low risk. No economic dependence. I had my own apartment. I didn't have to depend on her for anything so I didn't have to worry about how she responded.

Category Twenty-Nine: Safety & Comfort (One Incident)

One co-researcher said that he felt safe in disclosing to just women.

Example

I was raised by three sisters and a Mom. Plus, all my friends at that point were women. So my comfort zone was in that area. It was a case of feeling safer. [Pause] Yeah safety helped

because I was just more comfortable with them because they were women and I could tell them more easily.

Category Thirty: Rehearsal (One Incident)

One co-researcher said that by role playing and rehearsing the disclosure in advance in her mind, she felt more prepared to make the disclosure.

Example

I went through this whole thing in my head before I decided to say it. Then it was, "How do I say it?" Then, to hell with it, you just say it. I went through the things about what if she does reject me, what if she gets pissed off and talks to me like I'm a piece of shit, like some people did back in those days. I went through all the negative stuff. I didn't really think of her in any way being a positive reaction. I was trying to psyche myself up for a negative reaction. I hoped it wouldn't be and hoped that maybe it wouldn't be as negative because of who she was. But I was still expecting a negative reaction. It helped me to go over it in advance to check out my reactions and make sure I really wanted to do this [disclose to her].

Category Thirty-One: Leaving the Catholic Church (One Incident)

One co-researcher revealed that leaving the Roman Catholic Church had a huge impact on his life and freed him to experience more of the gay lifestyle which led to more self-acceptance and eventually more disclosures.

Example

[In answer to the question: What things helped you to disclose?] I think leaving the Catholic Church, becoming less guilt ridden, I started to get a sense of myself. It helped me that I had left the Catholic Church and I had decided that I no longer wanted to be a priest because, at one point, that was a way I was looking at hiding my sexuality.

Either you get married or you became a priest. I was starting to explore alternative beliefs beyond the Catholic Church. At that time I was really exploring a lot. And I think that really connects with wanting to come out. I looked at life really black and white then and I was letting go of them [the church] and seeing there was more of a gray area that I could be gay and a Christian if I wanted to be.

Category Thirty-Two: Assumption of Confidentiality (One Incident)

One co-researcher stated that he felt he could trust the disclosee not to gossip and therefore felt safer in disclosing to her.

Example

I was pretty sure that she could keep confidence. I don't think I would have told her if I didn't think she could. That was a helping factor because it wouldn't have been safe. She would have told other people. The remote chance that she could have broken confidence was a hindering factor.

Category Thirty-Three: Romantic Intentions (One Incident)

One co-researcher shared that he was attracted to another man and wanted to have a sexual relationship with him. This prompted him to reveal his sexual orientation to the person in question in the hopes that a relationship would transpire.

Example

[In answer to the question: What things helped you to disclose?] I guess being attracted to him too. I wanted him. That helped because whether or not he wants to admit it or not, there was a relationship there. It was not a sexual relationship. I would be

massaging him and I got to thinking well maybe he was really interested. I never came out and told him I liked him. I never did because of fear. I had real selfish reasons. I thought that by disclosing to him that he would want me. I wanted to get fucked.

Description of the Hindering Categories

Co-researchers reported 93 critical incidents that hindered their ability to disclose their sexual orientation to others. In some cases, these hindrances actually prevented the co-researcher from disclosing to a specific person until a later date. In other cases, the co-researcher revealed that these hindrances impeded the process but did not prevent the disclosure from taking place. Seventeen common themes or categories were elicited from these incidents.

This section will discuss each of the 17 hindering categories by providing a brief description of the category and at least one example of a typical incident in that category. Once again, these categories are prioritized in descending order by size.

These hindrances have also been included because they validate the soundness of the helping categories. As well, they support the rationale for changing the original research question. They demonstrate that the biggest hindrance to disclosing one's sexual orientation to others was the co-researcher's own fears or internalized homophobia.

Category One: Prediction or Fear of a Negative Response (21 Incidents)

In this category, the co-researchers revealed that they were afraid to disclose because they either feared that the disclosee would react in a negative way to the disclosure or were unsure of how the disclosee would react and therefore assumed the worst. The co-researchers often followed this admission by stating that their true fear was that this

rejection would impinge on the quality of their relationship and they would eventually get hurt.

Examples

I had a fear of getting hurt with her. What if she didn't know what to do with this but I'm the problem. Or what would this mean for our friendship? I thought if she has a bad reaction, I'm really going to feel hurt and upset.

[In answer to the question: What things hindered you in disclosing?] The not knowing how it's [the disclosure] going to be received. In that kind of situation where everything is medicalized, labeled, you just never know. I know that psychiatrists think they are impartial. I know they are not supposed to think that homosexuality is a disease. But I know they are humans and they have biases. To me, you can tell if somebody has a bias against it or is not comfortable by the way they react. I would say either she had a bias or she wasn't that comfortable. The not knowing of how she'd react.

Category Two: Lack of Acceptance of the Authentic Self (10 Incidents)

The co-researchers revealed that they had internal fear or shame of identifying themselves as gay or lesbian, or in some way experienced internal conflict or shyness about disclosing to others. This kind of internalized homophobia inhibited the disclosure process.

Example

I think what may have hindered and why I didn't tell her before is I didn't know where I was going. I knew I was gay. But I wasn't dealing with it. I never denied to myself that I was gay. I denied myself acting on it. That was the thing so fear hindered me. But not fear of what she was going to say or any repercussions or recriminations from her but my fear of going forward and saying okay now I'm going to take

the next step. Fear of going into the unknown. See I never thought I would get any rejection from my family. That was never an issue. I was more concerned about how they would feel. But maybe that was my own fear and way of making excuses not to come out.

Category Three: Negative Legal/Social/Political Environment (10 Incidents)

In this category, the co-researchers said that societal homophobia and heterosexism prevented them from disclosing. In some cases, a co-researcher related a specific event which had occurred in the community that caused societal disapproval and left a legacy of uncertainty and distrust for him/her.

Examples

The big thing that stands out is in the city where I lived, there was a fiasco where they raided a public washroom that men were using for sex. One of those men, who had a family, killed himself. And that was a big scandal that typically people in my community commented on in a derogatory way about the people involved in that. That was a pretty harsh factor in feeling uncomfortable about talking about my sexuality in that community.

AIDS wasn't even in the picture at that point. Thank God it wasn't because that would have made it ten times worse. That would have been it. She would have figured I had AIDS. That would have been the end of the world. That was the big thing that was in the news then. If you were gay, then, you had AIDS. They just automatically assumed because that's what the news was putting out then. Geez, it would have taken me fifteen doctors to convince them I don't have it.

Category Four: Lack of Positive Qualities of the Disclosee or Relationship (Eight Incidents)

The co-researchers said that the lack of closeness in the relationship with the disclosee or the lack of openness and even homophobia displayed or voiced by the disclosee inhibited the disclosure process. In some cases, the co-researchers related a particular event that had happened to the disclosee which created homophobic feelings for the disclosee. In other cases, the co-researchers said they just knew the disclosee had negative belief systems that could affect their reaction to the disclosure.

Examples

It's hard for me to bring it up and tell it. My stepfather's first marriage ended when he found his wife in bed with another woman. I felt that, with him, it wouldn't be about straight homophobia. It's a type of homophobia but it's experience-based. I felt that he might have had legitimate reasons for not liking lesbians. I thought that in some way if he had this negative view of lesbians that it would tarnish my image for him and affect the way he felt about me.

[In answer to the question: What things hindered you in making this disclosure?] That she might be dogmatic cause she was quite conservative, ultra conservative, and this homophobic attitude and belief system that I was unaware of could come to the table. She is quite confrontational as a person. She's quite egocentric as a person. Philosophically, we agreed but values, beliefs, I wasn't sure....She wasn't a major agent in my life. She was more of an acquaintance. I knew if she was a good friend, she would have already known because I'm very open with my friends but she didn't.

Category Five: Negative Third Party Influence (Six Incidents)

In this category, a third party attempted to influence the co-researchers not to disclose or inadvertently got in the way.

Example

At this point in history, my sister had come out to me before I told my Mom. And she had even told me not to tell my Mom. She hadn't yet come out with my Mom either. It wasn't until after I moved out to Vancouver that she had started to come out. She was very much giving messages like: "Don't hurt her. She's going to be very upset. She's not going to understand." Those kinds of things.

Category Six: Lack of Confidentiality (Six Incidents)

The co-researchers said they were afraid to disclose because the disclosees might gossip and tell others which they felt could lead to a loss of support.

Examples

B knows people that I know. If he reacted negatively, he could have influenced other people that we have in common. Kind of a nasty thing to think someone would do that but it's possible.

[In answer to the question: What things hindered you in disclosing?] In telling her, she could then go and tell all my heterosexual friends and that whole support network could have fallen apart. There was a little bit of fear. Ultimately, she didn't need to tell because I told all of them.

Category Seven: Lack of Career Clout (Six Incidents)

In this category, the co-researchers stated that they feared that the disclosure would have a negative impact on their work or future work. A number of the co-researchers were teachers and talked about the professional repercussions of disclosing in a teaching

environment. One co-researcher, however, was self employed as a contract entertainer playing different bars across Canada. She explained what hindered her in disclosing.

Example

Loss of job. Alienation from the staff. Work is really important to a self-employed person. And you get one stroke against you and it's a small country. It doesn't take much for that kind of thing to get around. And I do think it's really affected my success. I've had three jobs taken away from me because somebody told the person in charge that I was gay. And that's really been a big issue for me. They were three obvious incidents. But I've had at least a dozen other incidents where it wasn't clearly stated that that was the reason. But there would be no other reason.

Category Eight: Negative Legacy of the Church (Five Incidents)

Either the co-researcher or disclosee had been influenced by a church or religion that does not accept homosexuality or lesbianism. Therefore, the co-researchers felt timid about disclosing as they assumed the disclosees' reactions would not be favourable.

Example

I think sometimes when you are in the storm, it's hard to get perspective from what's going on. And I think especially when you're living in a very small community that's 90% Catholic and all you're hearing is negatively about gays. I was teaching a Catholic course that taught homosexuality is bad. So once you're in the thick of all that, it's hard to get any perspective. Growing up, you're always getting, even though you're resisting it, saying the Catholic Church says gays are bad. You're all going to Hell. You're worse than murderers. Right? And even though you don't agree with that because you know you're not, it's hard not to sometimes just let these little thoughts in. Maybe they

are all right. The biggest hindrance was the Catholic Church.

Category Nine: Lack of a Support Network (Five Incidents)

This category consists of the following two subcategories: (a) no support network, and (b) lack of role models.

Subcategory one: no support network (three incidents). The co-researchers stated that a major hindrance was a lack of any kind of support network in case the disclosure went sour.

Example

The fact that I didn't have any gay friends. I would have been screwed if she had reacted badly because I didn't have another support system.

Subcategory two: lack of role models (two incidents). In this subcategory, two co-researchers said that it hindered them not to have any role models in their lives.

Example

I didn't have any role models. So I had no idea that there were loving lesbian relationships or do you just slink around or don't tell anyone your identity and live that whatever life.

Category Ten: Desire Not to Hurt Others (Four Incidents)

In this category, the co-researchers revealed that they felt that the disclosees could be pained or hurt by the disclosure.

Example

It was quite a heavy thing to lay on somebody [her mother who was visiting her from out of town] going back to their own house, alone, with no partner to share. She never felt comfortable talking about it with her friends. She's not someone whose come

from a generation with counselling or she would go out and get help with it. So maybe I would have waited until it was more...maybe until I was in her environment and she wouldn't be so out there on a limb alone. I could have possibly waited. She had no support from family members or friends. She didn't have any counselling per say or support group in place because, especially in Newfoundland, that doesn't exist for older people and particularly for that generation of women. So that would have been out of consideration for her. That would have hindered.

Category Eleven: Geographical Proximity or Distance (Three Incidents)

The co-researchers said that either living a long distance away or living too close got in the way of the disclosure.

Examples

I think the fact that I was on the west coast and my Mom was on the east coast didn't help because she didn't get to see that I was still her daughter and nothing had changed. I think that made a big difference. I think it would have made a big difference if I had been in Quebec or she had been in Vancouver. I think if Mom had been able to see that I was happy that it would have made it easier for her. It would have made more sense to her.

The biggest [hindrance] was I was still living there and I would have to contend with them constantly staring at me first thing in the morning or not talking to me. I didn't even know how that was going to go. I felt that I needed to be on neutral ground or on my own turf so I had a place and they had theirs so that we had a place to go and sort of like a boxing match. You meet in the middle, hands punch together, and then you go in corners to rest. And that's what I felt I needed in order to deal with whatever they were going to throw because I wasn't sure what was going to come out.

Category Twelve: Uncertain Relationship Status (Two Incidents)

In this category, two co-researchers stated that the uncertain nature and lack of stability of the relationship with their respective partners inhibited the disclosure process. In one case, the co-researcher said the relationship was just too new to have any stability and, in the other case, the co-researcher said that the relationship was not secure.

Example

I felt twice about coming out to him [friend] because then I would have to talk about her [her partner] to him and tell him things weren't great and go into all of our problems right away. So I wanted to protect my privacy. I was just beginning to realize that my relationship with my partner wasn't a healthy one. The relationship would oscillate between fine and me just beginning to realize that things weren't good in it. I think if it had been six months later, the relationship was a lot worse for me. I knew it was. Therefore, I probably wouldn't want to be coming out with this person to him because it's more complicated and it's a function of whether you are coming out to somebody with a partner or just coming out as who you are. I think that changes it. Sometimes it's the partner that gives you some extra courage or legitimizes or is just a neat person that you have to include. Therefore, you want to come out. Then, if a relationship is not that great, you might not want to do that.

Category Thirteen: Cultural and Language Differences (Two Incidents)

In this category, two co-researchers stated that the fact that one discloser spoke a different language and the other was from a different culture had a hindering effect on the disclosure process.

Example

I was the only other white person. I'm having to

be aware of teaching as a white person with non-white students in that context. So it complicates it a little bit. My racism comes in that I try to work through but do keep hearing the stereotype that a lot of the First Nations, especially the more traditional ones, are homophobic. Then, for me to override that by coming out, I have to deal with it as a white person in that situation, upsetting people. How is it going to go across our different cultural understandings and balance that against, "No. For me, this is wrong."

Category Fourteen: Lack of Previous Disclosure Experience (Two Incidents)

In this category, two co-researchers referred to their lack of practice with regard to disclosing to other people as a hindering agent.

Example

And we [her partner and she] hadn't done it [disclosing] a lot. You get used to it. You just kind of slip it in. That's a hindering factor. Practice is useful.

Category Fifteen: Permanence (One Incident)

The co-researcher, in this category, said that what hindered him was the permanent nature of the disclosure. Once the deed is done, it cannot be undone. Underlying this hindrance was the fear that the disclosee might react in a negative fashion.

Example

Once it's out, it can never be un-out. It's like Ellen DeGeneres can never go back in the closet if she decides it was not a good idea to come out. It's kind of like 'oops', you've done it now so you've got to live with the consequences. So there's a fear that it might alter relationships in ways that I don't want it altered. Then, I can't take it back. For instance, there's a couple of people whom I know are uncomfortable with it. I can never un-say it. If they are uncomfortable

with it, there's virtually nothing I can really do to change that.

Category Sixteen: Complicating Factors (One Incident)

One co-researcher said that the disclosure process was hindered by another situation that occurred at the same time which could also have proved troubling for the disclosee.

Thus, she felt she was delivering a double whammy to the disclosee.

Example

At the same time I told Mom I was gay, I also was telling her that I was dropping out of university to move back to Vancouver to be with my girlfriend. That wasn't such a good thing. I think it confused the issue. My Mom said she was upset that I was dropping out of university and I think she was upset that I was gay. It clouded things. Things weren't as clear as they should have been or could have been. I wasn't sure how I was reacting to her. I was made that she wasn't just opening her arms to it and marching at Gay Pride Day as soon as she could. I knew that leaving university wasn't really a smart thing to do and, on the outside, it looked like it was tied to me coming out. But it wasn't really. It didn't make me not want to come out. But it confused the issue.

Category Seventeen: Fear of Loss of Intended Romance (One incident)

In this category, the co-researcher said it hindered her that she was in love with the disclosee and therefore felt she had more to lose if the disclosure went bad.

Example

I think it was harder to tell her cause I was in love with her. I think it was perhaps easier to tell other friends whom I had known for a long time because I didn't have any investment. It was like, any other friend, I told face-to-face. They were all people who knew anyway. So

it was no big surprise. But to come out to this teacher, that was harder because I was setting myself up for a rejection. Who knows? She might have taken it really negatively. She might have severed the friendship forever. She might have said, "Well this is too much for me to handle. I don't want you around. I don't want you to know my children." So I took a real risk by sending her the letter.

Validity and Reliability

As was already stated in the previous chapter, comparability, translatability and trustworthiness are three appropriate criteria to judge the validity and reliability of a qualitative study.

Comparability

In order to determine whether a study is comparable, Goetz and LeCompte (1984) said that the various components including concepts generated, population characteristics and settings need to be sufficiently well described so that the study can be used as a basis for others. In this study, all of these things were thoroughly delineated. Thirty-three helping categories and 17 hindering categories were created and described. Examples of prototypes were included for the sake of clarity. An outside checker declared these categories to be distinct and clearly defined. A mini description of each co-researcher's background was included as was a description of the various settings in which the interviews were taped and reviewed.

Translatability

In order to judge if the results of a qualitative study are translatable, Schofield (1993) said that the study needs to contain a clear description of one's theoretical stance and

research techniques. In this study, most of the steps of Flanagan's (1954) rigorous Critical Incident Technique were followed and described in detail. When the researcher chose to depart from any of these steps, she reported her rationale and described the new procedures in detail. The researcher also shared some of her own experiences and beliefs as well as referring to others' theories about this topic. As will be pointed out in the final chapter, most of the categories that were generated in this study agree with theories and literature that have been written about this topic. This finding increases the argument that the results of this study are translatable.

Trustworthiness

In developing a set of categories, it is essential that different people can use these categories with confidence. In other words, the categories need to be sound and trustworthy. Three steps were taken in this study to ensure that the categories did have an acceptable level of trustworthiness.

Use of an independent judge or checker. Flanagan (1954) recommended submitting categories to others for review and, if there is confirmation regarding the categorical system, then, he said that this should be "reassuring" for the researcher. Traditionally, a 75% level of agreement or more is required in order to consider that a category system is reliable. The first measure that I undertook to determine the level of trustworthiness of the categorical system was to hire an independent checker. This person was not involved in the original creation of the categories.

I spent an hour familiarizing the checker with the different categories and then spent a second hour doing a test run of 30 incidents that were randomly selected on the spot. I gave

the checker a list of the categories with a description and examples of incidents from each category (Appendix H). I then read the first nine incidents aloud and asked her to place each one into an appropriate category. Eight of her nine placements matched my original categorization of these incidents. After a quick discussion, I agreed to re-categorize the final incident. I then randomly selected 21 more cards and handed these incidents to the checker one card at a time. This time, the checker and I were in 100% agreement as to how we would categorize these incidents. At this time, the checker was reminded to look for key words and examine the intent or essence of what the co-researcher had said.

In summary, during the test run, the checker only disagreed with me on the categorization of one item which, upon discussion, was soon rectified.

I had already placed a series of numbers in a hat which corresponded with the total number of incident cards and had randomly selected 100 of these numbers. I then pulled the matching cards from the file box and xeroxed each incident for the checker. In an independent setting the checker spent two hours on her own categorizing these items. The next day, the two parties met to discuss the results. We agreed on the categorization of 87 of these items. During the follow-up discussion, the checker soon realized that she had incorrectly classified an additional incident. Her new placement matched mine.

The checker and I then spent one hour discussing the remaining 12 incidents to see if we could reach an agreement. The checker quickly re-categorized four of these items to match my original categorization. She re-categorized two additional incidents once I pointed out that, in two cases, the incident did not refer to the disclosee but to a third party thus changing the intent of the comment. She also agreed to another change once I

shortened the incident description to make the intent of the item more clear and to one additional change once I clarified the category description. Upon further discussion, I agreed to re-categorize two incidents to match the checker's categorization of these incidents.

It was more difficult to agree on the categorization of the two remaining incidents because it appeared that both could be classified under two separate categories. Thus, I phoned the two co-researchers to review the situation with them. One co-researcher said that both things ("seizing the moment" and "third party influence") had helped her and, upon checking the original cards, it was discovered that one card had already been filed under the first category. By shortening the incident description, it was then easy to agree on the categorization of the contentious incident. The second co-researcher also agreed that "honesty" and "obligation" were both important helping factors for him when he told his sister. Thus, two separate cards were created and filed under both categories. The checker agreed to both of these changes. The checker and I had now achieved a 100% agreement rate on the categorization of all 100 incidents. The checker stated that she thought "the categories were extremely clear."

Originally, the checker had been given a list of 38 categories. However, once the entire checking exercise was completed, I decided that the categorical system could be further honed and refined by expanding the definition of four of the existing categories and creating one new category heading. The two categories that referred to career-related matters now became subcategories of a broader heading entitled "Career Identity and Clout." The descriptions of two subcategories were broadened to include incidents from two categories

entitled "Laying the Groundwork" and "Legal Entitlement." "Obligation" and "Conviction" now became intact subcategories of "Acceptance of the Authentic Self." The checker agreed with these changes. She said that she did not feel that this decision jeopardized the trustworthiness of the categories in any way since the original categories were moved as an intact grouping of incidents to create broader headings. She also said that she felt all of the categories in the honed categorical system were still completely distinct from each other.

At a later date, the checker was given half of the hindering incidents to check. She initially placed all but four items into the same categories as I had. After a brief consultation and clarification about the particular disclosure events, she agreed to re-categorize the other four items under the same headings as I had thus achieving a 100% agreement rate.

Participation rate. A second method that was used to determine whether the categorical system was sound was to examine the participation rate amongst the participants. This means examining how many participants reported the same type of incident. One assumption is that if only one or just a few people report a category of an event, then, that category could be dismissed. However, I felt that it was important to report categories with one or more items as they might prove meaningful for people not included in this research study.

In order to determine the participation rate in the helping categories, the number of participants reporting an incident in each category was divided by the total number of participants (12). The results are recorded in Table 2 which records data in descending order of frequency of participation.

Table 2

Participation Rate in the Helping Categories

Category Name and Number	Frequency	Participation Rate
2. Positive Qualities of the Disclosee or the Relationship	12	100%
1. Acceptance of the Authentic Self	11	92%
4. Prediction of a Supportive Response	10	83%
6. Assumption that the Disclosee Already Knew	10	83%
3. Existence of a Support Network	9	75%
5. Conducive Environment	9	75%
7. Relationship Status	9	75%
8. Desire for More Intimacy	9	75%
16. Geographical Distance	7	58%
10. Need to Tell	5	42%
12. Previous Positive Disclosures	5	42%
18. Sexual Deterrent	5	42%
19. Disclosing by Letter or Phone	5	42%
9. Spirituality	4	33%
11. Therapy	4	33%
13. Seizing the Moment	4	33%
15. Teachable Moment	4	33%
17. "No Big Deal"	4	33%

(table continues)

Table 2 (continued)

Category Name and Number	Frequency	Participation Rate
20. Alcohol	4	33%
21. Other People Already Know	4	33%
22. Third Party Influence	4	33%
14. Access to Information	3	25%
23. Feminist Politics	2	17%
24. Career Identity and Clout	2	17%
25. Desire to Help Others	2	17%
26. Humour	2	17%
27. Testing the Waters	1	8%
28. Financial Independence	1	8%
29. Safety & Comfort	1	8%
30. Rehearsal	1	8%
31. Leaving the Catholic Church	1	8%
32. Assumption of Confidentiality	1	8%
33. Romantic Intentions	1	8%

n=12

Note: Frequency indicates the total number of participants who reported an incident in that category while the participation rate indicates the percentage of overall participants who reported an incident in that category.

According to Table 2, the participation rates in the helping categories ranged from a low of 8% to a high of 100%. There was a participation rate of 75% or more in eight of the categories. Only one of the hindering categories obtained a participation rate of 75% or higher. The full results for the hindering categories are presented in Table 3.

Categories with less than 75% participation are traditionally regarded as being suspect. However, it can be argued that the categories with a lower participation rate in this study are not necessarily ill-founded since the incidents in those categories are sufficiently distinct to remain intact. Furthermore, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 5, literature in this field supports the existence of almost all of the helping and hindering categories.

Opposition of the hindering categories. Another method that was used to check the soundness of the helping categories was to compare data collected from the co-researchers that hindered the disclosure process with data that helped the disclosure process. It would be a test of soundness if the hindering categories were found to mirror the helping categories. For example, if being in a supportive environment helped someone disclose, then, it makes sense that not being in a supportive environment would hinder the disclosure process and vice versa.

Fourteen of the hindering categories appeared to mirror 14 helping categories as demonstrated in Table 4. Co-researchers stated that, in one of these categories, “geographical distance” could be a helping or hindering factor depending on the situation. These findings provide additional evidence of soundness for the aforementioned helping categories. It could also be argued that the reverse is true. Since 14 helping categories

Table 3

Participation Rate in the Hindering Categories

Category Name and Number	Frequency	Participation Rate
1. Prediction or Fear of a Negative Response	9	75%
2. Lack of Acceptance of the Authentic Self	7	58%
3. Negative Legal/Social/Political Environment	6	50%
4. Lack of Positive Qualities of the Disclosee or Relationship	6	50%
5. Negative Third Party Influence	5	42%
6. Lack of Confidentiality	4	33%
7. Lack of Career Clout	4	33%
8. Negative Legacy of the Church	4	33%
9. Lack of a Support Network	3	25%
10. Desire Not to Hurt Others	3	25%
11. Geographical Proximity or Distance	3	25%
12. Uncertain Relationship Status	2	17%
13. Cultural and Language Differences	2	17%
14. Lack of Previous Disclosure Experience	2	17%
15. Permanence	1	8%
16. Complicating Factors	1	8%
17. Fear of Loss of Intended Romance	1	8%

Note: Frequency indicates the total number of participants who reported an incident in that category while the participation rate indicates the percentage of overall participants who reported an incident in that category.

Table 4

Comparability of the Helping and Hindering Categories

Helping Categories	Opposing Hindering Categories
Acceptance of the Authentic Self	Lack of Acceptance of the Authentic Self
Positive Qualities of the Disclosee or the Relationship	Lack of Positive Qualities of the Disclosee or the Relationship
Existence of a Support Network	Lack of a Support Network
Prediction of a Supportive Response	Prediction or Fear of a Negative Response
Conducive Environment	Negative Legal/Social/Political Environment
Relationship Status	Uncertain Relationship Status
Spirituality	Negative Legacy of the Church
Previous Positive Disclosures	Lack of Previous Disclosure Experience
Desire to Help Others	Desire Not to Hurt Others
Third Party Influence	Negative Third Party Influence
Geographical Distance	Geographical Proximity or Distance
Career Identity and Clout	Lack of Career Clout
Assumption of Confidentiality	Lack of Confidentiality
Romantic Intentions	Fear of Loss of Intended Romance

are in opposition to 14 hindering categories, then, this provides additional evidence of soundness for those particular hindering categories.

Gender Differences

The next research question concerned whether or not there appeared to be any gender differences in the official results. In order to determine this, I counted the number of helping incidents for females and males in each category to see if I could detect any pattern. (See Table 5.) Overall, there were 158 incidents from women and 166 incidents from men. A Spearman rank order correlation was .74 at $p = .05$ (using the eight categories that had a 75% or higher participation rate). Thus, there was a high correlation between the two gender groups in the categories with the highest participation rate. However, by visually scanning all 33 categories, it appeared that there were minor differences. Females had a higher response rate (more than three incidents) in the following categories: acceptance of the authentic self, conducive environment, therapy, seizing the moment, access to information, third party influence, and feminist politics. The males in this study had a higher response rate in the following categories: positive qualities of the disclosee or the relationship, prediction of a supportive response, spirituality, and the need to tell.

Link With Ishiyama's Self-Validation Model

A third research question concerned whether or not there was a link between the helping categories and the five domains and themes posited by Ishiyama (1995) in his Self-Validation Model. In order to see if there was any relationship, I attempted to categorize each of the 33 categories into one of Ishiyama's five domains of self-validation: self, activities, relationships, things and places. In fact, I was able to place all of the 33 categories.

Table 5

Gender Differences

Category Name	Male Responses	Female Responses
Acceptance of the Authentic Self	21	27
Positive Qualities of the Disclosee or the Relationship	23	15
Existence of a Support Network	20	12
Prediction of a Supportive Response	17	10
Conducive Environment	13	8
Assumption That the Disclosee Already Knew	5	8
Relationship Status	6	7
Desire For More Intimacy	6	6
Spirituality	9	1
Need To Tell	9	1
Therapy	2	8
Previous Positive Disclosures	3	5
Seizing the Moment	1	6
Access to Information	1	6
Teachable Moment	4	3
Geographical Distance	2	5
"No Big Deal"	3	3

(table continues)

Table 5 (continued)

Category Name	Male Responses	Female Responses
Sexual Deterrent	3	3
Disclosing by Letter or Phone	2	3
Alcohol	1	4
Other People Already Know	1	4
Third Party Influence	0	5
Feminist Politics	0	4
Career Identity and Clout	1	3
Desire to Help Others	3	0
Humour	2	0
Testing the Waters	2	0
Financial Independence	2	0
Safety and Comfort	1	0
Rehearsal	0	1
Leaving the Church	1	0
Assumption of Confidentiality	1	0
Romantic Intentions	1	0
Total Incidents	166	158

I then re-hired the original independent checker to see if she would categorize the 33 categories under the same headings. I gave the checker the revised copy of the 33 helping categories (Appendix J) and an additional information sheet (Appendix K) to explain my rationale about placements. We had a 100% agreement rate in our placements as denoted in Table 6.

I also compared the helping categories to Ishiyama's five thematic components of self-validation by attempting to link the 33 helping categories with one of the themes. Ishiyama (1989) described each of the five thematic components in the following way:

Security, comfort, and support. He said this component is concerned with the feelings of physical and emotional security and comfort, protection, familiarity with the environment, predictability, and social support, among others.

Self-Worth and self-acceptance. He said the degree of unconditional self-respect probably depends on a number of factors including one's past and present experiences and relationships as well as the reference points used for defining and evaluating one's self (e.g. unconditional right to a personal existence and self-worth, usefulness to society, caring relationships, social status, academic status, parental approval, social recognition etc.).

Competence and autonomy. He said that this component of self-validation is concerned with the degrees of competence and autonomy that people experience in different dimensions of their life (e.g. social, vocational, intellectual, physical, financial etc.). Among other things, he said this component includes social skills and abilities to communicate, obtain information, study the social norms, access others' resources, and seek help from others.

Table 6

Sorting of Categories by Domains of Self-Validation

Domain	Helping Categories
Self	Acceptance of the Authentic Self Positive Qualities of the Disclosee or Relationship Assumption that the Disclosee Already Knew Need to Tell Desire for More Intimacy Spirituality Previous Positive Disclosures "No Big Deal" Other People Already Know Desire to Help Others Feminist Politics Career Identity and Clout Safety and Comfort Romantic Intentions Assumption of Confidentiality
Activities	Prediction of a Positive Response Therapy Seizing the Moment Access to Information Teachable Moment Disclosing by Letter or by Phone Alcohol Sexual Deterrent Testing the Waters Rehearsal Humour Leaving the Church

(table continues)

Table 6 (continued)

Domain	Helping Categories
Relationship	Existence of a Support Network Relationship Status Third Party Influence
Things	Geographical Distance Financial Independence
Places	Conducive Environment

Identity and belonging. Ishiyama (1989) explained that people often define themselves in terms of their physical appearance, gender and sexuality, occupation, reference groups, social status, academic achievement, roles, religion. and political and philosophical orientations.

Love, fulfillment and meaning in life. This fifth component of the self-validation model concerns the quality of life and, according to Ishiyama (1989), is the central theme of human existence.

Since some of the 33 helping categories elicited in this thesis appeared to fit with more than one theme, I thought about the underlying psychological construct and meaning of the category in question and then attempted to make the match. I was able to place all of the categories as there appeared to be a strong relationship between the various categories and Ishiyama's thematic components. The results are outlined in Table 7. This relationship may have some implications for counsellors. These will be discussed in the next chapter.

Summary

Three hundred and twenty-four critical incidents were sorted into 33 helping categories and 93 critical incidents were sorted into 17 hindering categories. Using the criteria of translatability, comparability and trustworthiness, it appeared that the results obtained in this study are both reliable and valid. There did not appear to be any major differences between the way men and women answered the main research question. However, there did appear to be a link between the helping categories and Ishiyama's (1995) five domains and thematic components of self-validation. The meaningfulness of these results will be discussed in the next chapter.

Table 7

Sorting of Categories by Thematic Components of Self-Validation

Theme	Helping Categories
Security, Comfort, and Support	Positive Qualities of the Disclosee or the Relationship Existence of a Support Network Prediction of a Supportive Response Conducive Environment Assumption that the Disclosee Already Knew Relationship Status Geographical Distance Previous Positive Disclosures Disclosing By Letter or By Phone Alcohol Other People Already Know Safety and Comfort Rehearsal Assumption of Confidentiality Humour Third Party Influence
Self-Worth and Self-Acceptance	Acceptance of the Authentic Self Need to Tell Therapy Leaving the Catholic Church
Competence and Autonomy	Access to Information Seizing the Moment Financial Independence Testing the Waters "No Big Deal"
Identity and Belonging	Career Identity and Clout Sexual Deterrent Feminist Politics Teachable Moment

(table continues)

Table 7 (continued)

Theme	Helping Categories
Love, Fulfillment and Meaning in Life	Desire For More Intimacy Desire to Help Others Romantic Intentions Spirituality

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Through interviews with 12 co-researchers, 324 critical incidents were elicited that described what facilitated the act of disclosing one's sexual orientation to someone else and 93 incidents were elicited that described what hindered the act of disclosure. These incidents were then placed into 33 helping categories and 17 hindering categories. Some of the helping and hindering categories were found to be more trustworthy than others due to a higher participation rate. However, this chapter will demonstrate that the helping and hindering categories with a lower participation rate are still relevant for three reasons. First, as will shortly be pointed out, the literature that is available in this field tends to support the existence of these categories. Second, it was the aim of this study to create a comprehensive list of things that facilitated and hindered the act of disclosure for the co-researchers in this study. Thus, it is important to list all of the categories in order to create this comprehensive map. Third, the categories that contained one or two incidents may still be quite meaningful for people who did not participate in this research study.

This chapter will also examine the link between data elicited in this study, motivation, and self-validation. It will outline limitations to this study. Finally, this chapter will suggest implications for counselling gays and lesbians as well as implications for future research.

Support of Related Literature

It appears that the results of this study back up the ideas that were presented in the literature review at the beginning of this thesis. However, as noted in that chapter, although

there is a great deal of anecdotal literature about gays and lesbians, there is only a small body of formal research that talks strictly about the things that facilitate and hinder the act of disclosure for gays and lesbians. Also, there appears to be more literature written about the hindering factors. This chapter will review the existing literature about the disclosure process in relation to the categories that were elicited in this study. It will do so by creating a comprehensive map that shows the relationship between the different stages of gay/lesbian positive identity development and the helping and hindering categories that were derived from this study. Some of the literature that will be cited in this chapter was published after the original proposal for this thesis was submitted three years ago.

Gay/Lesbian Positive Identity Development Models

There are many different gay identity development models but they all have similar developmental stages. For the sake of this thesis, I am using Troiden's Model (1989) as it tends to synthesize data obtained from some of the earlier models. The overall thrust of this model and others is the integration and acceptance of the gay/lesbian self. As Rogers (1961) said, a basic precept of becoming a person is to move away from pleasing others, from wearing a facade, and from cultural expectations and to move towards the "self which one truly is" (pp. 167-176). Therefore, it makes sense that the first helping category that emerged during this study was "acceptance of the authentic self." Ponce (1978) said that the fact of disclosure "serves to facilitate the elaboration of gay identity" (p. 86) while a number of other studies suggested that the openness of gays and lesbians is associated with greater psychological adjustment and well-being (Ellis & Riggle, 1995). As one co-researcher said:

One goes through an evolution. When you first realize you are gay, you approach things differently from somebody who has been out for more than 10

years. We go through stages like you first come out to yourself, then to close relatives and friends, and then to the world. As times goes by, you have more confidence and you then get to a point when you want to educate people.

Ponse (1978) pointed out that the act of disclosure of one's sexual orientation to others is intimately linked with secrecy. People in the earlier stages of identity development are more prone to keeping their gay and lesbian identity secret. Disclosure involves revealing the secret to others. In these earlier stages, it therefore makes sense that the hindering factors would play a more dominant role and that there would be more emotional turmoil when disclosing. This was the case for co-researchers in this study as they cited more hindrances in their earlier disclosures. One of the major hindrances that was cited at this time was internalized fear. This finding goes hand-in-hand with the concept of internalized homophobia that was discussed in Chapter 2. It also explains why the "prediction or fear of a negative response" and "lack of acceptance of the authentic self" were the two most common hindering factors that were derived from this study. It is important to note that usually the co-researchers' fears were unfounded as most disclosees had a positive reaction.

Stage One (Sensitization)

Troiden's (1989) model posited that there are four steps involved in the development of a gay/lesbian positive identity. In the first stage, he said most lesbians and gay males assume they are heterosexual because they are usually going through this stage at puberty when children are still forming their sexual identities. They engage in heterosexual and homosexual play but do not necessarily define their sexual experimentation in heterosexual

or homosexual terms. However, he said they do experience feelings of marginality and perceptions of being different from their same-sex peers.

Disclosure at this stage is out of the question. The young would-be gays and lesbians are hindered by a total lack of knowledge about their authentic self. In fact, they are not even aware that they are gay or lesbian although they may sense that they are different in some way.

Stage Two: Identity Confusion

In this stage, Troiden (1989) theorized that adolescent gays and lesbians experience inner turmoil and uncertainty about their sexual identity. They no longer take their heterosexual identities as a given but they have yet to develop perceptions of themselves as homosexual. Troiden said that several factors contribute to this identity confusion including the stigma surrounding homosexuality and inaccurate knowledge about homosexuals and homosexuality.

The literature suggested that gay and lesbian individuals may now suffer from the existence of heterosexism and homophobia that permeate society. As Eichberg (1990) stated, most people, whether they are gay or straight, were taught that homosexuality is a sin, a crime, an aberration or an illness when they were growing up (pp. 10-11). Co-researchers in this study dubbed this hindrance as the impact of a “negative social, legal and political environment.”

Morris (1997) cautioned that it is important to note in which social, legal, political environment gay people were born because of the potent changes in societal views of lesbians and gay men over the past several decades:

In the realm of civil rights legislation, for example, change has been quite swift. Twenty years ago there was no protection from discrimination in housing and employment for lesbian and gay people, and now hundreds of local governments, and even some states, have made such discrimination illegal. Coming out and being out in different historical contexts embodied a diversity of meanings. (p. 18)

Part of the negative legacy of the social, legal and political environment has been created by certain churches. Hunt (1990) postulated that the Roman Catholic Church, in particular, is either out-of-date or so thoroughly homophobic that it will never permit sexually responsible gays and lesbians to be good standing members of the Church. The co-researchers in this study defined this hindrance as the “negative legacy of the church.” One co-researcher said he still feels angry at the Roman Catholic Church and that is why he cited “leaving the church” as a helping factor (category number 31):

To me, the Church really squashed or tried to squash the life out of me. When you're a kid growing up and you're hearing all this evil about who you supposedly are, it has an impact on you. I would be praying to God, “Don't send me to Hell.” When I got my teaching degree, I went back to Newfoundland and taught in a small Catholic community. Duhhh! I was teaching religion. Teaching these things like it's okay to be homosexual but you're not allowed to practise it. And so that's been the major hindrance and I have not admitted it until the last year or year and a half.

Thus, it makes sense that individuals may feel that they have to leave the Church in order to begin a path of self acceptance, to avoid the sense of condemnation, and to begin disclosing to others (Havey, 1990; Hunt, 1990). Eichberg (1990) suggested that gays and lesbians should examine their religion. If it does not support them to integrate their life with

integrity, he suggested that they look to their own spiritual awareness for the solution rather than wasting a lot of energy into trying to change beliefs that are held by any particular church (pp. 102-103).

The co-researchers in this study also noted that “spirituality” (category number nine) as opposed to attending a church helped them with the disclosure process. Shannon and Woods (1991) cautioned therapists working with gay clients to distinguish between religiosity and spirituality. They said that many gay men struggle with “meaning of life” questions such as why they are gay. While traditional churches don’t help them answer this question, spirituality might (p. 211). Browning, Reynolds, and Dworkin (1991) also said that therapists can help lesbians recognize and validate needs for a spiritual community and discover how to fulfill them. Clark (1987) pointed out that many gays and lesbians have sought spiritual alternatives to the mainstream churches. He said that this search may have accelerated due to the AIDS epidemic that increased the urgency of a collective spiritual search.

Troiden (1989) said that lesbians and gay males typically respond to their identity confusion by using different coping strategies including denial and avoidance. One strategy that some gays and lesbians use to perpetuate this process is to drink excessively. Kus (1990) said that alcohol serves as a denial and coping mechanism for gay people’s internalized homophobia. “Thus, alcoholism develops in men and women who do not accept their non-chosen sexual orientation as a positive state of being” (p. 69). He even postulated that if these people could accept their orientation, then, sobriety would follow.

Co-researchers in this study said that drinking "alcohol" (category number 20) helped them to disclose because it lowered their inhibitions. One of the frequently recorded effects of alcohol is "disinhibition" which refers to the fact that, under the influence of alcohol, people do and say things they normally would not do for fear of adverse consequences. The alcohol appears to reduce the influence of the negative consequences causing the person to feel less inhibited (McKim, 1991, p. 96). McKim said that, "For this reason, alcohol is probably the best 'truth serum' in the world" (p. 96). But as Kus (1990) pointed out, using alcohol as a coping strategy may have a negative side if it leads to alcohol abuse which is a chronic problem in the gay and lesbian community.

Another coping strategy that gays and lesbians utilize in this stage is acceptance. Troiden (1989) said that men and women now start to acknowledge that their behaviours, feelings and fantasies may be homosexual and start to seek out additional sources of information to learn more about their feelings. Clark (1987) stated that reading is a helpful source that can stimulate people to question their privately unquestioned basic assumptions. Kus (1990) also explained the benefits of reading gay or lesbian positive literature. He said this activity is particularly important for rural people who do not have access to the same support systems as city dwellers.

Stage Three: Identity Assumption

Although the process of self acceptance and disclosing to oneself begins in the second stage, it is not until the third stage that gays and lesbians feel comfortable enough to start disclosing their sexuality to others. During this stage, they usually disclose to a few carefully chosen people. Ben-Ari (1995) said that, in his study of 32 gays and lesbians and

27 parents of gay and lesbian children, all parties thought that being honest was the most common motive for disclosing. In this study, the co-researchers identified their "desire to be authentic with others" (a subcategory of category number one) as a major facilitating factor.

Troiden (1989) stated that, in Stage Three, gays and lesbians really begin the process of coming out. He said the earmarks of this stage are self-definition of oneself as homosexual, identity tolerance and acceptance, regular association with other homosexuals, sexual experimentation and exploration of the homosexual subculture. Troiden said that gay people now start to experience a homosexual lifestyle first hand by going to gay bars, parties, or parks, to meet other gays and lesbians. He said personally meaningful contacts with experienced homosexuals could help diminish feelings of solitude and alienation for the individual.

Once they have adopted homosexual identities, Troiden (1989) postulated that gays and lesbians are now confronted with the issue of stigma and its management. He said they often adopt a strategy of passing which is pretending to be a heterosexual. Thus, they end up feeling that they are leading double lives. On the other hand, they may totally isolate themselves in the gay and lesbian world in order to avoid stigmatization. They also start disclosing to others.

It is in this stage that gays and lesbians find themselves in the greatest need of supportive strategies that will facilitate their disclosing process. The reading that they may have done in the second stage can now be put to good use. Bass and Kaufman (1996) said that sharing this information with others during the disclosure process can facilitate the

event. Co-researchers in this study said that “access to information” about gays and lesbians (category number 14) helped them with the disclosure process.

Because adolescents are more dependent upon their parents, the reactions of their family are particularly important. As Morris (1997) said, they could face the problem of being thrown out of their house and cut off financially if they disclose to their parents. One co-researcher in the study cited two different instances where having “financial independence” (category number 28) helped him to disclose.

Morris (1997) said a social network of lesbian friends can play a strong facilitating role in the disclosure process. Clark (1987), Sophie (1987), and Bass and Kaufman (1996) maintained that there is plenty of support from the community and an available supply of role models who have traveled the same path who can act as mentors and contradict harmful stereotypes. Sophie said gays and lesbians might even consider enlisting the support of an ally to support them during the disclosure process. That is precisely the reason one co-researcher brought a friend with her when she mailed a disclosure letter to her mother:

Having that woman there, I think I knew that when I mailed the letter, it would be emotional for me. And so I wanted someone there to be able to talk to someone about it and to say, “Let’s put it in the box.”

Browning (1987), Clark (1987), and Sophie (1987) all talked about the importance of seeking help from resourceful and knowledgeable therapists. Sophie suggested that therapists could help by role playing disclosures with their clients in advance. Neisen (1993) said that therapists can help gays and lesbians to break the silence by encouraging discussions of how they hid their sexuality from others, of the emotional cost of denying

their sexuality, of attempts to change their sexual orientation and of how they blamed themselves for being “bad” or “sick” (p. 58).

Co-researchers in this study said that the “existence of a support network”, which included the existence of role models (category number 3), “therapy” (category number 11), and “rehearsal” (category number 30) helped them with the disclosure process. They also pointed out that the “lack of a support network” hindered the process.

Co-researchers also reported that a major helping theme was the “positive qualities of the disclosee or the relationship” (category number two) just as the “lack of positive qualities of the disclosee or relationship” was a major hindrance. If they felt that they trusted and felt close to the person to whom they were about to disclose, then, the trust in that relationship facilitated the process. As stated in the literature review, Wheelless and Grotz (as cited in Radonsky & Borders, 1995) said that trust is a strong facilitator of the disclosure process. Anderson and Mavis (1996) also said that lesbians tend to disclose more in the context of a trusting relationship. Most authors argued that gays and lesbians felt safer disclosing to members of their own community first (Ponse, 1978). That was not necessarily true for the co-researchers in this study.

A huge hindrance that was discussed by the co-researchers was a “lack of confidentiality” after the disclosure had been made. They were worried that the disclosees would gossip. This also goes to the question of trust as, conversely, the co-researchers said that having an “assumption of confidentiality” (category number 32) was another facilitating factor. Perhaps this is one reason why gays and lesbians go to therapists because

they may feel more confident about the privileged nature of their communications (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 1993, p. 103).

Clark (1987) cautioned gays and lesbians to disclose to someone close and then take years to explore their new relationship. He said that sharing this information demands that each person relate more completely to one another after the disclosure has been made.

Anderson and Mavis (1996) said that, based on the literature, one of the prime motivators behind disclosing for lesbians is their desire to establish more authentic interpersonal relationships. Ben-Ari (1995) backed up this viewpoint when he said that a prime motivator for disclosing is, "the attempt to develop and maintain a close relationship" (p. 91). Ponse (1978) also said that disclosing can intensify the bonds of friendship. In fact, the co-researchers said that one of the things that facilitated the disclosures for them was their "desire for more intimacy" in their relationships (category number eight).

Two other co-researchers said that what helped them to disclose was their need for "testing the waters" (category number 27). They used the disclosure to see how the disclosee would react which, in turn, would affect whether or not they wanted to have a closer working relationship with that person. Bass and Kaufman (1996) talked about testing the waters in advance of a disclosure to check out how the disclosee might react. They even included a sample script in their book about how to do this (p. 129).

Several co-researchers also reported that what helped them disclose was their "need to tell" someone else (category number 10) and that this process of telling accelerated their ability to come to terms with their sexual orientation. One co-researcher used the word "babbling" to describe this process. Ponse (1978) said that a critical feature of disclosing is

the emphasis on the verbal act of “putting it into words” which allows the person to break down the barrier of secrecy (p. 83). The foundation of many client-centered therapies is the premise that clients will facilitate their healing process by telling their story. Furthermore, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers & Myers, 1977) which defines various personality traits including extroversion and introversion is based on the premise that extroverts make decisions by talking with others.

One of the scariest things about disclosing is the inability of the gay person to accurately predict another person’s reaction (Clark, 1987, p. 186). The co-researchers in this study cited “prediction or fear of a negative response” as their number one hindrance. That fear stemmed from the possible consequences that could result. As Harry (1993) pointed out, the principal reason for not being out is that someone might react punitively through sanctions which could be economic, violent, or ones of social disapproval or loss of prestige. Anderson and Mavis (1996) found that, of the 134 lesbians they surveyed, the disclosure process was most hindered by the potential reaction and the consequences that the participants anticipated from the disclosure. They likened these considerations to outcome expectations which according to Bandura (as cited in Anderson & Mavis, p. 48) are the individual’s judgment of the likely consequences of an act.

Conversely, the co-researchers cited “prediction of a supportive response” (category number four) as being a popular helping theme. Of course, as they pointed out, it would help if they had an “assumption that the discloser already knew” that they were gay or lesbian (category number six). Sophie (1987) said that many people were remarkably good at deciding to whom and how to disclose and, as a result, they got mostly positive

responses. She said that therapeutic clients are in the best position to judge how people in their life will respond. She also pointed out that clients who are most likely to seek out therapists are those who come from unsupportive environments.

Sophie (1987) also cited safety as being a key core value that affects the disclosure process. So did one co-researcher (category number 29). Actually, a number of other co-researchers referred to feelings of safety and comfort as being an important facilitator in the disclosure process but they preferred to name the things that caused or instigated these feelings of safety rather than the feelings themselves as being the true helping factors.

There were other strategies that gays and lesbians enlisted to help them with the disclosure process. First, many gays and lesbians said that "disclosing by letter or phone" (category number 19) helped them because they felt they were in more control of the situation. Clark (1987) advised people to write letters to get in touch with their feelings about their sexual orientation (p. 128). He said people may choose to destroy the letter or disclose by sending it to someone else. Eichberg (1990) included three full chapters of letters that gays and lesbians had used to disclose to their parents and others.

The co-researchers said that another strategy that helped them was to wait to make the disclosure until there was "geographical distance" between them and the disclosee (category number 16) so that, if the disclosure went sour, they would not have to bump into each other. Morris (1997) argued that geographic location can play a role in the coming out process of lesbians. She said that many lesbians have moved to larger cities or away from parents because of their need for anonymity. Some co-researchers also argued that "geographical distance" hindered the process because they wanted to disclose face-to-face.

A third strategy that helped the co-researchers with the disclosure process was to choose a “conducive environment” (category number five) in which to make the disclosure. Tessina (1989) suggested gays and lesbians choose the time and place carefully (p. 180). She said, with family and friends, it is best to organize a quiet gathering with only essential people. Bass and Kaufman (1996) encouraged gays and lesbians to “pick a place that is private and a time that is unhurried” (p. 134). Many co-researchers noted that it helped them to make the disclosure “one-on-one” in a private environment.

A fourth strategy that some of the co-researchers said helped them to disclose was “seizing the moment” (category number 13). For example, one co-researcher said she felt “pissed off” at the management of a particular hotel and so impulsively disclosed to the assistant manager because she was “fed up” and just “not thinking” at that moment. Eichberg (1990) cautioned people against disclosing if they are feeling angry, arrogant, or contemptuous because he says that ultimately they will only end up proving that they are oppressed and have a right to feel bitter.

Another helping strategy suggested by some co-researchers was to use “humour” (category number 26). As Klein (1989) pointed out, humour can give us power and a new perspective. “It can help us cope and provide the strength to get through the most adverse situations” (p. 3). Gail Sheehy in her best-selling book Pathfinders discovered that humour is one of four coping devices that pathfinders (people who overcome life’s crises) can use successfully to help them with that transition. Similarly to the co-researchers in this study, two other devices were dependence on friends and prayer (as reported in Klein, 1989, p. 7).

The co-researchers noted that “third party influence” (category number 22) played a helping role in their disclosures while the reverse factor (e.g. “negative third party influence”) hindered the situation. For example, one co-researcher admitted that her partner influenced her to disclose to her mother. Anderson and Mavis (1996) stated that these kind of third party influences e.g. having a partner, friend, or sibling offer opinions about coming out, could play a role in the disclosure process in that they could either enhance or diminish someone’s confidence in their ability to make the disclosure.

This process should not be equated with “outing” as outing refers to an abrupt public exposure of someone’s sexual orientation which often results in feelings of shame and disgrace for the outed individual (Vargo, 1998, p. 124). One co-researcher told the story of how he was almost outed by a former student and how much the experience scared him:

I taught in a small community. So one of the things I wondered is how many of these guys are gay. So three months ago, I get a call from one of my former students saying: “Hello Mr. I just want to let you know that I’m gay. I’m coming out on the Oprah Winfrey show and I think you should watch it. Oh My God. I’m going to be outed on national TV and I don’t even know about it. On Oprah. All I could think of is that he’s said, “Oh Mr. is gay and we all knew. And I went Oh My God.

Stage Four: Commitment

Troiden (1989) said that this stage involves adopting homosexuality as a way of life. He said that entering a same-sex love relationship marks the onset of this stage. The co-researchers said that having a partner or their “relationship status” (category number seven) gave them both a reason to disclose and provided them with additional support. Conversely, two co-researchers reported that their “uncertain relationship status” hindered

their disclosure process. Vargo (1998) said the presence of a partner may be a reason for opening up and disclosing (p. 46).

One co-researcher also divulged that “romantic intentions” (category number 33) also helped him to disclose. He wanted to have a relationship with another man and so was motivated to disclose to him. Harry (1993) suggested that this kind of disclosure can often occur for the very first time during late adolescence once individuals recognize their erotic desires and want to act on them (p. 26). Another co-researcher said her “fear of loss of an intended romance” hindered her because she felt she had a lot to lose if the disclosee reacted negatively.

Troiden (1989) stated that another predictor of this stage is the disclosure of the homosexual identity to heterosexual audiences. Vargo (1998) said that by this stage, a gay man becomes aware that:

Speaking out is also a part of ‘gay pride’. Having accepted his sexuality and perhaps gained a heightened political awareness in the process, the individual may now find himself feeling a sense of dignity as a gay man. Not only does he no longer wish to conceal or change his orientation, he wishes to live it openly, with distinction. (p. 33)

The gay man or lesbian is now disclosing to family members, coworkers, employers, and even to the media. Radonsky and Borders (1995) found a significant correlation between the number of groups to whom 407 lesbians disclosed and their levels of internalized homophobia. Co-researchers stated that, by this time, they were motivated by the success of “previous positive disclosures” (category number 12) whereas, earlier on, they had been hindered by their “lack of previous disclosure experiences.”

The co-researchers also said that the fact that “other people already know” (category number 21) helped them disclose because these people could act as allies when they disclosed to the next person in the group. Harry (1993) supported this idea when he said that one reason for being out to a given audience is that one is already out to other audiences:

In this situation one may perceive the need to conceal from some but not others as an insult to one’s integrity. Having established a pattern of self-disclosure in many situations, it becomes a psychological cost to have to alter or revert to a former mode of self-presentation. (p. 27)

By this time, some co-researchers said that they were starting to think more about others than themselves. They said that their “desire to help others” (category number 25) now facilitated the disclosure process. Some co-researchers even said they used the disclosure as a “sexual deterrent” (category number 18) in order to keep from hurting the disclosee’s feelings and to keep that person at bay. Conversely, some co-researchers said that their “desire not to hurt others” hindered them. Vargo (1998) said that people may not disclose if they feel that opening up may cause their loved ones any discomfort. He pointed out that a less integrated homosexual might respect other peoples’ feelings more than he respects his own, at times, being too selfless for his own good.

One co-researcher said it was the “permanence” of the disclosure act that hindered him. As Harry (1993) said, “coming out to a given audience is irreversible. Once one has disclosed to a given other one can not close the closet door” (p. 29). Ben-Ari (1995) also referred to this irreversibility as an underlying hindrance.

Troiden said that, in this stage, lesbian feminists are especially likely to view lesbianism as all-encompassing. Ponse (1978) pointed out that politicized lesbians often choose to disclose in order to confront stigmatization. She emphasized that this process involves more than just educating but becomes a political consciousness-raising technique. Female co-researchers in this study reported that their "feminist politics" (category number 23) helped them to disclose.

Since there were a number of co-researchers who were also teachers, it is not surprising that some of these people said that what helped them to disclose was the opportunity of experiencing a "teachable moment" (category number 15). Clark (1987) said that teachers can, even with casual remarks, reinforce the idea that being gay is honorable and worthy of respect. Vargo said that a gay parent may choose to educate his child at this time to broaden the child's awareness of diversity. Rasi and Rodriguez-Nogues (1995) said that some people may choose to educate others in the workplace. Eichberg (1990) challenged all gays and lesbians to disclose in order to educate people about the greater spectrum of gay individuals and gay issues. He said this would lead to more accuracy and replace stereotypes with the truth that eventually would lead to more understanding, acceptance, and respect.

Harry (1993) postulated that teachers are the most closeted of all of the occupational groups. A recent study by Waldo and Kemp (1997) argued that more lesbian, gay, and bisexual educators are disclosing to their classes to challenge stigmatization. They found that when an instructor declared that he was gay to a class of 40 undergraduate students, results from a post course survey indicated that the students exhibited improved attitudes

towards gays. The stigmatization that teachers feel might explain why some of the co-researchers cited the "lack of career clout" as a hindering factor.

Two co-researchers cited four incidents in which they felt that their "career identity and clout" (category number 24) facilitated their disclosure process. Both had university degrees. Eichberg (1990), a psychologist who caters to a gay and lesbian clientele, said that he often discloses by sharing what he does professionally. Troiden (1989) observed that the educational level can facilitate or hinder the identity development and disclosure process.

In this final stage of development, gays and lesbians feel they have a choice about when to disclose. In fact, according to some of the co-researchers they felt that it was "no big deal" (category number 17) any more. As one co-researcher said:

Well who gives a shit in the long run? In the grand scheme of things, what does it really mean if I am gay or straight? What's the big deal? Sure I'm attracted to other men. I fall in love with a man. What's the big deal?

In summary, the results of this study suggest that there is a relationship between the various stages of the gay identity development models, the disclosure process, and almost all of the helping and hindering categories elicited in this research study. This relationship has some useful implications for counsellors who are working with gay and lesbian clients as well as for gays and lesbians themselves who require more insight and assistance with their disclosure process.

A Motivational Approach to Disclosing

When asked what things helped them to disclose, a number of co-researchers focused on things that were tied up in their reason or motive for disclosing. They divulged many different motives that they said helped them to disclose including their desire or need:

- to be more honest and authentic with others
- to increase or maintain the intimacy in the relationship
- to tell or process their personalized search for self-validation
- to teach and educate others (teachable moment)
- to voice feminist politics and speak up on behalf of women who don't have a voice
- to help others
- to sexually deter the disclosee
- to let the disclosee know that he/she is romantically available
- to test the waters to see if a future relationship with the disclosee would be compatible

Anderson and Mavis (1996) suggested that one's desire or need to come out is at the root of the disclosure process. Since a desire or need to act is defined as a "motive" by Webster's Dictionary (Mish, 1983, p. 774), then, what Anderson and Mavis are really saying is that the prime facilitating factor in the disclosure process is one's motivation. This idea would explain why the co-researchers in this study often described their particular motive as a facilitating factor in the disclosure process.

The co-researchers described several factors that hindered the disclosure process. However, they were able to overcome these hindrances and take action. It appears that the potency of the various helping factors including the level of the co-researcher's motivation

overrode the level of resistance created by the hindering factors. Otherwise, the co-researchers would not have been able to complete their disclosures. Anderson and Mavis (1996) posited that the reason for this might be due to “coming out self-efficacy” which they claimed is a salient construct for lesbians (p. 31). They suggested that coming out self-efficacy is based on the confidence level surrounding a person’s ability to disclose. Their definition is predicated on Bandura’s (1997) concept of self-efficacy. He theorized that self-efficacious people believe they are more capable and are therefore more likely to take action. He also suggested that changes in one’s self-efficacy can ultimately affect one’s level of motivation which then affects one’s ability to act (pp. 122-137).

In this study, the number one hindrance was the “prediction or fear of a negative response.” The co-researchers admitted that this fear was often based on their own level of internalized homophobia. However, they were able to overcome this internal resistance and disclose. According to Anderson and Mavis (1996), this would have meant that they had high levels of coming-out efficacy. It is interesting to note that none of the co-researchers mentioned self-efficacy as a helping factor. The co-researchers did talk about feeling better about themselves as they became more self accepting. Most likely there is a correlation between this process and a growing sense of self-efficacy. This issue is outside the scope of this particular study but would be a fascinating question for a future research paper.

Self-Validation

The gay identity models propose that gay and lesbian individuals go through various stages of development in order to integrate their authentic selves and develop a gay/lesbian positive identity. In other words, they are going through a process of self-validation.

Ishiyama (1995) suggested that people are motivated to seek self-validation and, in order to do so, must go through a process of restoring and reinforcing their sense of self-worth, meaning in life, and personal identity. He outlined five thematic components to self-validation:

1. Security, Comfort & Support vs. Insecurity, Discomfort & Abandonment
2. Self-Worth & Self-Acceptance vs. Self-Deprecation & Self-Rejection
3. Competence & Autonomy vs. Helplessness & Incompetence
4. Identity & Belonging vs. Identity Loss & Alienation
5. Love, Fulfillment & Meaning in Life vs. Lovelessness, Emptiness & Meaninglessness

By now, the relationship between these themes and the aspects of a gay/lesbian positive identity should be self-evident. As already noted in the previous chapter, there appeared to be strong links between all of the helping categories elicited in this thesis with Ishiyama's (1989) five thematic components of self-validation. There were obvious links such as "acceptance of the authentic self" (category number one) and "self-worth and self-acceptance" (component three) or "spirituality" (category number nine) and "love, fulfillment and meaning of life" (component five). Some links were more tricky as the helping categories appeared to fit with more than one theme. In those cases, I chose to match the categories with the most appropriate theme. Appropriateness was determined by the core meaning and underlying psychological construct of the category in question. For example, I chose to match "career identity and clout" (category number 24) with "identity and belonging" (component four) rather than "competence and autonomy" (component

three) because it seemed to me that there was a stronger emphasis on identity rather than competence in this category.

We have already seen that there are links between Ishiyama's (1989) domains of self-validation and the 33 helping categories as both the checker and I achieved a 100% agreement rate when we independently matched the helping categories with Ishiyama's domains (see Table 6). I have also demonstrated in the first part of this chapter that there are links between Troiden's (1989) gay identity model and the 33 helping categories. This thesis has also described the links between the gay/lesbian identity model and the act of disclosure. Thus, Ishiyama's model may have some important implications for therapists who are counselling clients about the disclosure process.

In fact, the Self-Validation Model has been used successfully in research on the gay population once before. In 1994, Fraser used this model to help seven gay men improve their self-esteem, influence their internalized homophobia, and validate more than just their sexuality. Fraser got significantly higher scores when he compared post-test to pretest results on various scales. Fraser acknowledged that his small sample size was a major limitation to the study and would affect the generalizability of his results.

Limitations of This Study

There were a number of factors that limited this research study. First, the results cannot be generalized for several reasons. In addition to interviewing gays and lesbians from the Vancouver area, this study purposefully excluded bisexuals and people who are infected with the HIV virus as this could have confounded the results.

There was a sampling bias in this research study as eight of the participants (66%) were university educated and six were or had been teachers. It could be that this study attracted teachers because, according to the literature, members of that profession are actively dealing with the disclosure issue. All of the co-researchers were volunteers and volunteers tend to be better educated, of a higher social class, more intelligent, more sociable, more altruistic, more unconventional, less authoritarian, less conforming, and more extroverted than non-volunteers (Schumacher & McMillan, 1993, p. 160). This study did not attract any gays and lesbians of differing ethnic backgrounds or over the age of 43. Since the gay development models argue that gays and lesbians do not disclose publicly until the final stage of development, then, it is likely that gays and lesbians in the earlier stages of the coming out process may have been ignored by this study.

Part of this limitation arises from the fact that the gay and lesbian population is hidden (Fassinger, 1991). Thus, it is impossible to access a random sample of people in this population.

Another limitation is that the categories were derived from self reporting rather than being corroborated through observation. Thus, the critical incidents that were obtained are limited to the events that people could remember in an interview. It is likely that the co-researchers forgot to mention certain things or felt some situations might have been too sensitive to disclose to a stranger.

The Critical Incident Technique calls for interviewing a person at a set point in time. Depending on their sense of recall over time, people may tell their stories differently. The co-researchers that I interviewed talked about critical incidents that happened recently as

well as incidents that happened years ago. Woolsey (1986), however, noted that recency may not be that important because it is the “quality of the incidents themselves” that really matters (p. 246).

Osberg (1989) tried to challenge the consistency and truth of reports obtained by the Critical Incident Technique. In the qualitative world, it is recognized that knowledge is a human construction consisting of a cognitive mapping of categories and relationships (Polkinghorne, 1991, p. 171). Thus, individuals’ beliefs, feelings and explanations are treated as “significant realities (Locke, Spirduso & Silverman, 1993, p. 99). I would argue that the anecdotal accounts obtained from the co-researchers in this study are real for them although not necessarily generalizable to others. The fact that several co-researchers reported the same themes, however, provides more validity for the results.

The final limitation springs from my own personal biases. As I explained in the foreword, I changed the research question due to my own assumption that gays and lesbians would probably receive a negative response from the disclosees. This assumption was based on a thorough literature review but I began to wonder if the literature had focused too much on negative events and reactions. Only further studies in this area will be able to answer that question.

Counselling Implications

The results of this study expand the research concerning the facilitation of disclosing one’s sexual orientation to others. The basic implications are fivefold:

Comprehensive map. This study has created a comprehensive map of the things that help and hinder gays and lesbians to disclose their sexual orientation to others. Therapists

can use this list as a conversational device to facilitate the disclosure process for gay and lesbian clients who are struggling with this issue. At the same time, this discussion could lead to an exploration of the deeper issues and internal barriers that are hindering the development of a gay/lesbian positive identity and assist the client to overcome these barriers in order to accept his/her authentic self. However, therapists should only use these categories as a conversation piece until additional research is done.

Providing a framework. This study has discussed the list of facilitating factors in context of the gay and lesbian positive identity development model. Therapists might want to use this model as a framework to help their clients determine what facilitating and hindering factors would be most useful to them at that particular point in time. For example, if a client appears to be in the second stage of Troiden's (1989) model, the therapist might want to suggest "accessing information" before disclosing to someone else. If a client appears to be drinking a lot in order to facilitate the disclosure process, the therapist might want to talk about the hindering factor of the "negative social, legal and political environment."

Disclosing to mother. In this study, 11 co-researchers chose to relate a disclosure story about their mother. Ben-Ari (1995) found that his study supported past research which stated that most gays and lesbians usually disclose to just one parent, particularly their mother (p. 106). He said his study indicated that parents who receive a separate disclosure from their child find the news easier to deal with.

Zitter (1987) reminded us of the compelling relationship that often exists between lesbians and their mothers and the resultant complications that can occur when the lesbian

chooses to disclose to her mother. She suggested that therapists might want to view the entire coming out process as a reworking of earlier separations from one's mother. She also suggested that therapists help lesbian clients understand the mourning process that is involved in the disclosure process.

Interventions. The Committee on Lesbian and Gay Concerns (1990) explored biases within the therapeutic community in the United States. The members found that therapists often underestimated the possible consequences of a client's disclosure to others. The Committee reported that one therapist virtually insisted that her client disclose to her family. The client did and subsequently attempted suicide in the aftermath.

Many of the individual helping factors in this study suggest some useful therapeutic interventions that could help facilitate the disclosure process for gays and lesbians while at the same time ensuring that the above situation does not occur. These include:

- assisting the client to explore core beliefs around homosexuality and lesbianism before making a disclosure
- providing the client with an up-to-date list of relevant resources
- helping the client to determine the best place and time to make the disclosure or whether disclosing would be an appropriate course of action at that time
- assisting the client to determine the best strategy to use when disclosing e.g. face-to-face or by phone or letter, one-one-one or in a group, using humour or not
- rehearsing the disclosure with the client in advance
- helping the client to develop strategies to cope with a negative reaction to a disclosure

Self-validation. As was pointed out, there appears to be a link between Ishiyama's (1995) Self-Validation Model and the helping categories elicited in this study. Thus, a counsellor might want to use Ishiyama's model to provide additional context when discussing the disclosure issue. As well, Ishiyama's theory has led to the creation of a therapeutic tool called the Validationgram which could be used to help clients explore the things that might facilitate their disclosure process as well as helping them to validate their authentic selves.

Implications for Future Research

Since the results of this study are not easily generalized, it would be important to do further research in this area. For example, a survey instrument based on the results of this study could be created to survey a large number of gays and lesbians.

A number of individuals in this study stated that the thing that helped them disclose was often a specific kind of motivation. It might be interesting for future researchers to focus on the motives behind disclosing to see what role these motives actually play in both the disclosure process and the gay/lesbian development process. As was already mentioned in this chapter, it might also be interesting to examine the role self-efficacy plays in the disclosure process. Also, Miller and Rollnick (1991) developed a motivational interviewing technique to help people change their addictive behaviours. This technique is based on the concept of helping the client gain self-efficacy. Future research could determine whether or not this form of interviewing would be useful in helping gays and lesbians facilitate their disclosure process.

Since bisexuals, older, gays and lesbians, and people who are HIV positive were not included in this study, additional studies could be conducted with any one of these groups to see if the 33 categories could be refined, extended or modified in a meaningful way to incorporate their unique needs. For example, future research might determine whether the categories elicited in this study hold true for bisexuals or is confounded by the fact that these individuals can straddle the heterosexual and homosexual fence. Harry (1993) noted that cohort studies of older gays and lesbians might be influenced by the more conservative era of the pre-1960s. Thus, it is foreseeable that older gays and lesbians might place an even stronger emphasis on the impact of the "negative social, legal, political environment." People who have been diagnosed with HIV are also coming to terms with their own mortality. Future research could determine whether this grieving process in some way interferes with the categorical system described in this study.

Fassinger and Miller (1996) questioned whether gay/lesbian identity development models such as Troiden's (1995) would apply to members of different ethnic minorities. Future research will need to determine if, in fact, this is true and whether or not this kind of background would be useful when discussing the disclosure process with these clients. As well, additional studies need to be conducted with members of different ethnic populations to see if the results of this study are relevant for those populations.

Since so many co-researchers noted that their disclosures to their mothers were particularly important for them, future research might examine the significance of the mother-gay/lesbian child relationship with respect to the disclosure and development process.

Future researchers might also want to research whether the helping and hindering categories elicited in this study hold up for other groups who are dealing with the disclosure issue such as people who have been sexually abused or people who have hidden disabilities.

The final area of research involves the Critical Incident Methodology itself.

Flanagan's (1954) original methodology was limited to observable behaviours. Since a number of researchers are now departing from this strict methodological structure in order to incorporate psychological processes, a fascinating area of research would be to create a new and improved Critical Incident Technique that incorporates these internal constructs and yet maintains the integrity and validity of the original methodology.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Last year, Matthew Shephard was murdered for being gay while, two years ago, Ellen DeGeneres lost her show after disclosing that she was a lesbian. Today, there may be an enhanced awareness of the legitimacy of same sex orientation but there is still a need to combat the tentacles of homophobia, heterosexism and internalized homophobia that pervade our society. In order to end this kind of hatred, gays and lesbians need to overcome their inner fears and loathing to become self-actualized human beings. The literature argues that the disclosure process is an essential strategy that can help gays and lesbians do this.

The aim of this study was to compile a list of things that helped gays and lesbians in this research study disclose their sexual orientation to someone else. This study has addressed and met its purpose. Thirty-three categories emerged from this study that co-researchers said helped them to disclose their sexual orientation to others and 17 categories emerged which hindered this process. Several methods were used to validate the results.

The findings of this study contribute to the field of counselling psychology by providing a comprehensive list of themes that therapists can share with gay and lesbian clients who are interested in discussing their disclosure process. By exploring these helping things, it is hoped that gays and lesbians will have an easier time disclosing to others which, in turn will help them achieve greater self-acceptance and a better sense of self.

Also, this study can serve as a basis for additional research in the area of facilitating the disclosure process.

AFTERWORD

From my own perspective, I feel that this thesis has been an act of disclosure and has indeed helped me to develop a more authentic sense of self. It has been a validating experience to research academic literature that supported my own story. Furthermore, the categories that were elicited in this study are all things that I can relate to. This study has forced me to explore my own level of internalized homophobia especially since my original research question appeared to have been asked by someone still stuck in the earlier stages of Troiden's (1989) development model. Finally, this thesis has contributed to more disclosures on my part which, in turn, have helped me to develop a better sense of self. For example, when people have asked me to explain the topic of my thesis, I have felt obligated to disclose to them since my thesis topic is entwined with my identity. This has been both a challenge and a gift.

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12. Asian Society for the Intervention of AIDS (ASIA)
13. Hominum (gay men's coming out group)

HAND DELIVERED TO SPECIFIC GROUPS & INDIVIDUALS

1. Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)
- 2.. Monsoon (Lesbian women of colour group)
3. Women's Student Office at UBC
4. The Pride Club at UBC
5. Women's Resource Centre at UBC
6. "Out on Campus" group at SFU
7. The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered Centre
8. Vancouver Lesbian Connection
9. Harry's Restaurant (on Commercial Drive)
10. Womyn's Wear
11. Little Sister's Bookstore and Art Emporium
12. The Firehouse Theatre (when the play "Faghag" was running)
13. Lesbian Support Group at UBC (chair Susan Tutte)
14. The Health Clinic at the Centre
15. Langara College gay and lesbian club
16. Douglas College gay and lesbian group

GENERAL POSTINGS

1. Department of Counselling Psychology, UBC
2. Department of Social Work, UBC
3. Department of Psychology, UBC
4. Department of Education, UBC
5. The Student Union Building, UBC
6. Five bulletin boards at Langara College
7. Four bulletin boards at Douglas College
8. Five bulletin boards at Simon Fraser University

APPENDIX C
INSTRUCTIONS FOR CO-RESEARCHERS

This study is part of the requirements for Lin Moody's Master's thesis in Counselling Psychology.

AIM

The aim of this study is to explore what things help and hinder gays and lesbians when they disclose their sexual orientation to someone else.

RATIONALE

It is hoped that this study will result in a number of useful things that gays and lesbians can do when they choose to disclose their sexuality to someone else.

&

Therapists working with gay and lesbian clients may find this information useful too!

PROTECTING YOUR RIGHTS & CONFIDENTIALITY

1. Your participation is voluntary.
2. You can withdraw at any time.
3. I will refer to you by a pseudonym.
4. You can choose your pseudonym.
5. No one else will know who you are unless you tell them.
6. All materials that identify you will be kept in a safe place and eventually destroyed.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE PROCESS

1. I will be using the Critical Incident Technique. As part of this Technique, I will ask you to remember up to six significant stories in which you disclosed your sexual orientation to someone else.
2. I will then ask you what things you did to help you make that disclosure. And I will also ask you what things you think hindered that process. I will also want to know why you thought these things helped and hindered you.
3. I will then transcribe your stories and I will also look through your stories for common themes and ideas that jump out at me as the process evolves. I will give them back to you so you can double-check them for accuracy and also add further information.
4. I will then cluster the information according to these common themes. Eventually, this will lead to a map of what gay men and lesbians use to help themselves when they disclose their sexual orientation to others.

At any time in the study, you are welcome to ask me any questions. I would be happy to answer them. Thank you again for your participation in this study.

Before the third interview, the researcher will have transcribed the tape and given you a copy. You will have two weeks to review the transcript. Then, you will meet with the researcher one final time to clarify or add information to your original interview. This final interview will also be audio taped and will last about an hour.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

The researcher will then review the transcripts looking for common themes and ideas. She will group the data according to these themes and, eventually, create concrete categories that best capture these ideas.

CONFIDENTIALITY

1. The original documents will all be kept in a safe place and destroyed after a reasonable period of time...five years maximum.
2. The tapes will be stored in the same safe place and erased after the final thesis has been approved.
3. The taped interviews will be referred to by a pseudonym which you can pick.
4. No one but the researcher will know your real name.
5. No one but the researcher will know you participated in this study unless you choose to disclose this fact.

QUESTIONS & CONSENT

The researcher will be at your disposal to answer any questions you might have concerning the study and its procedures either before or after the interviews. Participation in this research is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice or any kind.

I, _____, (please print) have read and understood the above information and consent to be a co-researcher in this study. I acknowledge receipt of a copy of this consent form.

Participant's Signature: _____

Address: _____

Phone Numbers: _____

Date Signed: _____

Researcher's Name: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study.

ADDENDUM TO ORIGINAL CONSENT FORM
SEPTEMBER 15, 1997

The following changes are being made to the thesis proposal and consent form:

1. The aim of this study has been changed to explore the things that help and hinder gays and lesbians to disclose their sexual orientation to others in the first place. Thus, the title of the study is now changed to the following: Speaking Up and Speaking Out: Gay Men And Lesbians Reveal What Helped Them To Disclose Their Sexual Orientation To Others".
2. During the taped interview, you will be asked to describe up to six incidents in which you revealed your sexual orientation to someone else. You will be asked to describe the incidents and what helped and hindered you to disclose to that person in the first place. In some cases, you will be asked to describe what helped and hindered you to deal with the person's reaction if that reaction was a negative one.
3. The original screening interview will be done by phone. All necessary paperwork will be dealt with during the second interview.

CONSENT

I, _____, have read and understood the above information and consent to be a co-researcher in this study. I acknowledge receipt of a copy of this consent form.

Participant's Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone Numbers: _____

Date Signed: _____

Researcher's Name: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

APPENDIX F
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Participant Pseudonym:

1. What is your age?

2. What is your occupation?

3. Do you refer to yourself as a "lesbian" or "gay man"? If so, what does this term mean to you?

4. What other terms do you use? What do these mean to you?

5. What is your ethnic background?

6. What is your present relationship status?

7. Can you please give a brief synopsis of your relationship history?

8. How would you describe your present financial situation?

9. What socio-economic class would you consider yourself to be a part of and what does this mean to you? If you are willing, can you specify what annual salary range this particular class would encompass?

10. What kind of involvement do you have with the lesbian or gay community?

11. Are you a member of any lesbian/gay groups? Can you please specify which groups?

12. Are most of your friends lesbian? Gay? Bisexual? Transexual? Heterosexual?

13. Are you "out" to the general public? To your family? To your friends? To your coworkers? What does being "out" mean to you?

14. Do you spend most of your time in a gay or lesbian environment? Please specify in what places?

APPENDIX G
REVISED INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Before we start the interview, I want to make sure that you are feeling comfortable. Next, I want to make sure that the tape recorder is working properly. Can you please tell me a little bit about yourself. [Tape recorder levels are checked]. Now, I want you to relax and, as you relax, I want you to think about some significant times when you disclosed your sexual orientation to someone else. Now, select one of these incidents and tell me about it.
2. Can you give me more details about what led up to this disclosure?
3. Can you tell me more about what happened at the actual moment of disclosure?
4. Can you tell me more about what happened after you disclosed to [person]?
5. Were there any long term effects or legacy from that disclosure?
6. How is your relationship with that person today?
7. I'm wondering why this incident was significant for you?
8. How did you react emotionally?
9. I want to take you back to the beginning of that event, the moment before you told [person] that you were gay or lesbian. What things do you think helped you in making that disclosure?
10. How do you think that thing [name it] helped you in making that disclosure?
11. How do you know if that thing was helpful or not?
12. Can you please tell me a little more about why you think this thing was helpful?
13. How exactly did it help you with this particular disclosure?
14. Okay, now tell me what things you think hindered you in making that disclosure?
15. How do you think that thing hindered you?
16. How do you know that thing hindered you?
17. You had another story to tell me about a second/third/fourth/fifth/sixth disclosure incident. Can you tell me that story? *or* Let's go to your next disclosure. Can you tell me what happened there?

APPENDIX H

ORIGINAL HELPING CATEGORIES

1. Positive Qualities of the Disclosee or Relationship

The discloser refers to open, accepting or supportive qualities of the disclosee e.g. "I didn't think that she was homophobic" *or* This category can also include inferences to these kind of qualities by referring to the disclosee's past positive connections with other gay people *or* The discloser may refer to the closeness and quality of the relationship he/she has had with the disclosee e.g. "It's definitely about our relationship because it was different with my dad because we don't have that relationship and I waited longer."

2. Existence of a Support Network

Subcategory one: existence of a non-gay support network. The discloser refers to some kind of support system or community that helped him/her make the disclosure. This support is offered by someone (or a group) who is a third party and not the disclosee e.g. "Knowing that if she did have a bad reaction, I would be supported in the work site."

Subcategory two: existence of a gay support network. The discloser specifically mentions that the support system has something to do with the gay community or another gay individual e.g. "I went to the gays and friends of gays Al-Anon meeting which helped me."

Subcategory three: existence of individual role models. The discloser looks to other people in his/her life as solid role models and feels supported by the fact that these people exist. He/she might also be influenced by someone else's positive disclosures e.g. "It was a combination of my partner having talked to her family and having had a good response."

3. Acceptance of the Authentic Self

Subcategory one: self acceptance. The discloser says he/she feels more comfortable with or confident about his/her sexual orientation. The discloser might say something like, "I was confronting own internalized homophobia" or "I didn't want anybody to have misconceptions about who I who I was."

Subcategory two: being authentic to others. The discloser does not want to lie about or hide his/her sexual orientation and therefore discloses so that another person will know the truth and, in some cases, be able to share the discloser's happiness. For example, the discloser might say something like: "I needed to let her know who I am."

4. Prediction of a Supportive Response

The key point of this category is that the person is anticipating a future positive or non negative reaction from the disclosee that has not yet happened. He/she might say: "I knew I could get support from her".

5. Conducive Environment

Subcategory one: supportive environment. The discloser describes the entire environment or a special quality about the environment (e.g. I was pretty certain that the prevailing attitude in the school districts I want to go to, I don't believe that would be a problem") in which the disclosure was made that allowed him/her to feel safer.

Subcategory two: private one-on-one environment. The discloser felt safer making the disclosure to one other person or making the disclosure in a private environment e.g. "When I first talked to her about it, we were alone."

Subcategory three: social/political environment. The discloser refers to the fact that the overall social environment has changed and is now more accepting e.g. "times have changed in those 10 years and maybe my relatives have received the education."

6. Assumption of Previous Knowledge: Disclosee Already Knew

The discloser assumed or knew that the disclosee already knew that he/she was gay or lesbian e.g. "I knew that she had already known because I had worked with her for six years."

7. Relationship Status

The discloser says he/she has a partner or is in a relationship or makes reference to the quality of the relationship e.g. "The fact that I'm in a relationship with somebody who's already been active in the gay community for 15 years or so has certainly given me a lot of support to accept myself...."

8. Need to Tell

The discloser needs to tell his/her story to someone else because the telling or "babbling" allows him/her to process and stop it from "festering" inside and to get some outside feedback to help him/her deal with the issue. This category also includes the discloser's need to identify and name it to himself/herself and, in so doing, legitimize and give value to it e.g. "I wanted to give a name to it...By giving a name to it and talking about it, even though it was already known, I think it legitimizes it and gives value to it."

9. Desire For More Intimacy

The discloser wants to get closer to or have a more intimate relationship with the disclosee e.g. "I wanted him to know. I wanted him to share in my life in that sense. I wanted him to know who I was....."

10. Spirituality

The discloser refers to meditation, spirituality and religion helped him./her to disclose e.g. "She was also into Sufism. She had a son who was interested in Aleister Crowley so there was the spiritual connection there as well."

11. Seizing the Moment

The discloser has had little or no preparation time before making the disclosure but decided to take the opportunity of the moment *or* the discloser felt that the circumstances created the right situation to make the disclosure or it just felt like it was "the right time". Also, in this category, the discloser may have just spoken off the cuff in an impulsive way e.g. "Then the opportunity presented itself...I don't know if I formally made a decision. I think it was more spontaneous when the opportunity came up."

12. Previous Positive Disclosures

The discloser had disclosed several times before and had a positive response. He/she said this made it easier to disclose this time e.g. "I had told a few people...people were fine with it....."

13. Teachable Moment

The discloser says he/she wanted to teach or educate the disclosee or wants to be a role model for others (in order to teach them) e.g. "I think his sexism began to get on my nerves. In a way, it was part of a process of calling him on that, teaching him."

14. Geographical Distance

The discloser has moved away or is about to move away and so feels that the distance becomes a helping factor e.g. "I was living in a different city so if they had reacted negatively I wouldn't have bumped into them in shopping malls and it wouldn't have been so awkward."

15. No Big Deal

The discloser says that telling is "no big deal" or that he/she doesn't really care about how the disclosee will react e.g. "It helped because I don't know the people. If they can't handle it, too bad. If you are interested, this is who I am, come in."

16. Legal Entitlement

The discloser refers to some kind of legislation, legal contract or other rights that he/she knows about and therefore feels protected by. This also includes protection due to the fact that homosexuality is no longer regarded as a disease by the American Psychiatric Association.

17. Therapy

The discloser says that therapy, a therapist, or a therapeutic group helped him/her.

18. Disclosing by Letter or by Phone

The discloser says that disclosing in a letter or on the phone to the disclosee helped him/her to make the disclosure.

19. Alcohol

The discloser says he/she was drunk or under the influence of alcohol and that made him/her feel less inhibited and thus able to make the disclosure.

20. Other People Already Know

Other people, perhaps family members or friends, already knew e.g. "They [his parents] knew a secret and he did not. So that made me feel guilty that he didn't know."

21. Desire to Help Others

The discloser thought that, by telling the disclosee they were gay/lesbian, that this would help the disclosee from being hurt e.g. "I didn't want her to think that there was something about her personality that I didn't find attractive. I really didn't want her to feel bad about herself...."

22. Third Party Influence

The discloser reveals that the disclosee already knew because a third party had already told him/her in advance. Thus, the discloser did not have to tell the disclosee himself/herself but had to respond to the disclosee asking whether or not he/she was gay/lesbian. Also, in this category, the discloser might say that a third party pressured him/her to disclose e.g. "She was very adamant about me telling my mother. And to be honest, I felt quite a bit of pressure."

23. Conviction

The discloser felt absolutely convinced that the disclosee's views are wrong and therefore felt he/she had to disclose in order to set the record straight e.g. "It was being so secure in seeing this situation was wrong."

24. Access to Information

The discloser has read certain books or refers to particular authors or more general information that helped him/her disclose. For example, one person said what helped her was: "Having access to information....Living in an urban centre where there are resources."

25. Privileged Status: Feminist Politics

The discloser felt that he/she had a privileged status resulting from his/her education, ethnicity, or class and therefore could politically act whereas someone else without these privileges would not have the power to do so. Thus, she disclosed e.g. "It's a political act. I can do it but a lot of other people can't. I refuse to accept the heterosexism around. It needs to be challenged and sometimes I'm the one who has to challenge it."

26. Sexual Deterrent

The discloser tells the disclosee so that the disclosee will stop coming onto him or her sexually e.g. "I did it so the guys would stop hassling me."

27. Laying the Groundwork

The discloser felt that he/she was "laying the groundwork" to set the tone for a future relationship. This category includes helping the disclosee to let go of unrealistic expectations about the future e.g. "I wanted her to let go of her expectations because, on some level, she did expect me to get married....So I just wanted her to know that that was probably not going to happen."

28. Romantic Intentions

The discloser was attracted to the disclosee and wanted a relationship e.g. "He asked me something about it [being gay]. He made a crude allusion to a sexual act I might like to perform. That was when I acknowledged that desire or orientation."

29. Humour

The discloser thought that humour helped him/her to disclose.

30. Professional Identity

The discloser feels that his/her sexual orientation is part of his/her professional identity or career e.g. "People say what do you do, what do you study? And I say, I do queer theory, women's studies, life histories of lesbians. So I can identify through my work. That helps."

31. Academic Authority and Clout

The discloser feels that he/she is in a power position to the disclosee and is therefore safe in disclosing.

32. Testing the Waters

The discloser uses the act of disclosing to test the disclosee and find out how he/she will react after the disclosure is made.

33. Safety and Comfort

The discloser said that he/she felt more safety because of certain factors. For example, one person said that he felt safer in disclosing just to women.

34. Financial Independence

The discloser felt that he/she had no economic ties to the disclosee and thus felt the disclosee had no economic power over him.

35. Obligation

The discloser disclosed because he felt that, out of respect or obligation for the disclosee, the disclosee should be told.

36. Rehearsal

It helped the discloser to rehearse in advance what he/she was going to say.

37. Leaving the Church

It helped the discloser to leave the Church and be more true to himself.

38. Confidentiality

The discloser felt that the disclosee would keep his/her counsel and not "out" him/her to others. Thus, he felt safe to disclose.

APPENDIX I HINDERING CATEGORIES

Category One: Prediction or Fear of a Negative Response

In this category, the co-researchers revealed that they were afraid to tell because they either feared that the disclosee would react in a negative way to the disclosure or were unsure of how the disclosee would react and therefore assumed the worst. The co-researchers often followed this admission by stating that their true fear was that this rejection would impinge on the quality of their relationship and they would eventually get hurt.

Category Two: Lack of Acceptance of the Authentic Self

The co-researchers revealed that they had internal fear or shame of identifying themselves as gay or lesbian, or in some way experienced internal conflict or shyness about disclosing to others. This kind of internalized homophobia inhibited the disclosure process.

Category Three: Negative Legal/Social/Political Environment

In this category, the co-researchers said that societal homophobia and heterosexism prevented them from disclosing. In some cases, the co-researcher related a specific event which had occurred in the community that caused societal disapproval and left a legacy of uncertainty and distrust for the co-researcher.

Category Four: Lack of Positive Qualities of the Disclosee or Relationship

The co-researchers said that the lack of closeness in the relationship with the disclosee or the lack of openness and even homophobia displayed or voiced by the disclosee inhibited the disclosure process. In some cases, the co-researchers related a particular event that had happened to the disclosee which created homophobic feelings for the disclosee. In other cases, the co-researchers said they just knew the disclosee had negative belief systems that could affect their reaction to the disclosure.

Category Five: Negative Third Party Influence

In this category, a third party attempted to influence the co-researchers not to disclose or inadvertently got in the way.

Category Six: Lack of Confidentiality

The co-researchers said they were afraid to disclose because the disclosees might gossip and tell others which they felt could lead to a loss of support.

Category Seven: Lack of Career Clout

In this category, the co-researchers stated that they feared that the disclosure would have a negative impact on their work or future work. A number of the co-researchers were teachers and talked about the professional repercussions of coming out in a teaching environment.

Category Eight: Negative Legacy of the Church

Either the co-researcher or disclosee had been influenced by a Church or religion that does not accept homosexuality or lesbianism. Therefore, the co-researchers felt timid about disclosing as they assumed the disclosees' reactions would not be favourable.

Category Nine: Lack of a Support Network

This category consists of two subcategories.

Subcategory one: no support network The co-researchers stated that a major hindrance was a lack of any kind of support network in case the disclosure went sour.

Subcategory two: lack of role models. In this subcategory, two co-researchers said that it hindered them not to have any role models in their lives.

Category Ten: Desire Not to Hurt Others

In this category, the co-researchers revealed that they felt that the disclosees could be pained or hurt by the disclosure.

Category Eleven: Geographical Proximity or Distance

The co-researchers said that either living a long distance away or living too close got in the way of the disclosure.

Category Twelve: Uncertain Relationship Status

In this category, two co-researchers stated that the uncertain nature and lack of stability of the relationship with their respective partners inhibited the disclosure process. In one case, the co-researcher said the relationship was just too new to have any stability and, in the other case, the co-researcher said that the relationship was not secure.

Category Thirteen: Cultural & Language Differences

In this category, two co-researchers stated that the fact that one disclosee spoke a different language and the other was from a different culture had a hindering effect on the disclosure process.

Category Fourteen: Lack of Previous Disclosure Experience

In this category, two co-researchers referred to their lack of practice with regard to disclosing to other people as a hindering agent.

Category Fifteen: Permanence

The co-researcher, in this category, said that what hindered him was the permanent nature of the disclosure. Once the deed is done, it cannot be undone. Underlying this hindrance was the fear that the disclosee might react in a negative fashion.

Category Sixteen: Complicating Factors

One co-researcher said that the disclosure process was hindered by another situation that occurred at the same time which could also have proved troubling for the disclosee. Thus, she felt she was delivering a double whammy to the disclosee.

Category Seventeen: Fear of Loss of Intended Romance

In this category, the co-researcher said it hindered her that she was in love with the disclosee and therefore felt she had more to lose if the disclosure went bad.

APPENDIX J
FINAL HELPING CATEGORIES

Category One: Acceptance of the Authentic Self (48 Incidents)

This category contains the following four subcategories. All are psychological constructs which involve aspects of coming to terms with one's gayness or lesbianism and then wanting to share this information with others.

Subcategory one: self acceptance (15 incidents). This subcategory involves incidents that describe the co-researchers' feelings of comfortability or level of acceptance about their gayness or lesbianism which, in turn, helped them to feel more comfortable in disclosing their sexual orientation to others. As one co-researcher said, she finally "felt strong enough" to disclose.

Subcategory two: desire to be authentic with others (28 incidents). This category often followed subcategory number one in that, once the co-researchers felt comfortable about their sexual orientation and had achieved a sense of self acceptance, then, they felt ready to disclose to others. They now felt that they did not want to lie about or hide their sexual orientation and therefore disclosed so that the other person would know the truth. This subcategory also includes the idea that some co-researchers wanted to lay a foundation for a more authentic relationship in the future by helping others, especially parents, to let go of unrealistic expectations.

Subcategory three: obligation to be authentic with others (three incidents). In this subcategory, the co-researchers went beyond feelings of honesty that motivated them to disclose in subcategory two to a deeper place of obligation and respect for the disclosee. They said that they revealed their sexual orientation because they felt that the disclosees had a right to know and deserved to hear the truth.

Subcategory four: conviction to be authentic with others (two incidents). In this subcategory, two co-researchers were absolutely convinced that the disclosee's views were wrong and, thus, the disclosees needed to be challenged and their views taken to task.

Category Two: Positive Qualities of the Disclosee or the Relationship (38 Incidents)

In this category, the co-researchers referred to the open and supportive qualities of the disclosee or the relationship with that person as being the thing that helped them feel comfortable enough to disclose. They often described past positive connections they had had with the disclosee which had resulted in a close, quality relationship. Thus, the co-researchers felt they could trust the disclosee enough to reveal their sexual orientation. This category does not include the factor of being able to predict whether the disclosee would react in a positive fashion once the disclosure had been made as many co-researchers rated this as a separate helping factor but, obviously, there is a relationship between these two things.

Category Three: Existence of a Support Network (32 Incidents)

This category contains three separate subcategories that all mention some kind of network or support system.

Subcategory one: existence of a non-gay support network (15 incidents). In this category, the co-researchers said that the existence of some kind of community or support system helped them to make the disclosure. This category is different than category two because it is a third party, not the co-researcher (as was the case in category two), that provided support and allowed the co-researcher to feel safe enough to make the disclosure.

Subcategory two: existence of a gay support network (nine incidents). In this subcategory, the co-researchers specifically mentioned that their support systems were either lesbian or gay.

Subcategory three: existence of supportive role models (eight incidents). In this subcategory, the co-researchers looked to other people as solid role models and felt supported by the fact that these people exist. In some cases, these role models had disclosed their sexual orientation and received a positive response thus leaving the co-researchers with the hope that they too might receive a positive response. In one case, a co-researcher revealed that he disclosed because someone else whom he had regarded as being a positive role model did not disclose their secrets and consequently lived in despair. It was this negative role modeling that led to his disclosure. These role models were all people that the co-researchers had met personally rather than famous people they had never met.

Category Four: Prediction of a Supportive Response (27 Incidents)

The key point in this category is that the co-researchers were anticipating a future positive or, at least, non negative reaction from the disclosee. The co-researcher often related that this prediction was based on the premise that he/she had a strong supportive relationship with the disclosee but that was not always the case. In some cases, this premise was based on the fact that the co-researcher knew the disclosee had already reacted positively to other gays and lesbians.

Category Five: Conducive Environment (21 Incidents)

This category contains three subcategories. Each has to do with some kind of environment that helped the co-researcher to disclose.

Subcategory one: supportive environment (six incidents). In this subcategory, the co-researchers described a particular kind of environment which made them feel safe and supported and thus able to make the disclosure.

Subcategory two: private one-on-one environment (nine incidents). In this subcategory, the co-researchers said they felt safer making the disclosure to one person at a time. In many cases, the co-researchers carefully chose a private environment where they wouldn't be interrupted. In other situations in this category, the co-researcher focused on the privacy and intimacy of being able to disclose to only one person at a time.

Subcategory three: social/political/legal environment (six incidents). In this subcategory, the co-researchers referred to the overall accepting nature of the times as compared to a more non accepting environment several years before as being the thing that helped. The co-researcher sometimes referred to specific changes in legislation, legal contracts, or other rights that he/she felt protected by. It is this supportive environment that allowed the co-researcher to feel more safe and comfortable which then facilitated the disclosure.

Category Six: Assumption that the Disclosee Already Knew (13 Incidents)

In this category, the co-researchers assumed that the disclosee already knew that they were gay or lesbian and, therefore, the disclosure was not as much of a personal risk.

Category Seven: Relationship Status (13 Incidents)

The co-researcher said that having a partner and being in a good relationship provided support and made it easier to disclose.

Category Eight: Desire For More Intimacy (12 Incidents)

In this category, the co-researcher disclosed in order to develop a closer, more intimate relationship with the disclosee and to maintain the closeness that was already there.

Category Nine: Spirituality (10 Incidents)

The co-researchers referred to meditation, spirituality and/or religion as being the thing that helped them to disclose. Often, the co-researchers would talk about these beliefs as being a core comfort that could be relied on if the disclosure went sour.

Category Ten: Need To Tell (10 Incidents)

In this category, the co-researchers needed to tell their story to someone else because the very act of telling then allowed them to process this issue and stop it from festering inside. It also helped to tell because the co-researcher often got feedback from the person he/she was disclosing to. The act of disclosure thus facilitated and became part of the coming out process. In a way, this category is a bookend to the one entitled "Self Acceptance" because, according to what various co-researchers stated here, it is the act of telling that enabled the co-researcher eventually to accept him/herself.

Category Eleven: Therapy (10 Incidents)

The co-researchers said that going for therapy, attending a therapeutic group or seeing a therapist helped them to disclose. Often they said that the therapist helped them deal with a specific aspect of a particular disclosure by discussing related problems in advance of the disclosure.

Category Twelve: Previous Positive Disclosures (Eight Incidents)

The co-researchers said that because they were practised at disclosing and other disclosures had gone positively, then, this created more comfortability in taking a risk and disclosing again.

Category Thirteen: Seizing the Moment (Seven Incidents)

In this category, the co-researchers impulsively chose to seize the moment and disclose. Sometimes, this was due to being put on the spot by the disclosee. Other times, circumstances presented the co-researcher with a golden opportunity to disclose.

Category Fourteen: Access to Information (Seven Incidents)

In this category, the co-researchers referred to authors, books, resources or information that helped them feel more knowledgeable which then helped them to make the disclosure. In some cases, the co-researcher went on at great length about a particular author and said this person was a "role model" for him/her. The difference between this kind of role modeling and the role models mentioned in category three is that, here, the co-researcher did not know the role model and only read about that person in a book.

Category Fifteen: Teachable Moment (Seven Incidents)

In this category, the co-researchers revealed that what helped them was their desire to use the disclosure as a teaching opportunity for the disclosee. The co-researchers often mentioned that they wanted to be a role model (as opposed to having a role model as discussed in categories three and 14). It is notable that six of the co-researchers had a background in teaching.

Category Sixteen: Geographical Distance (Seven Incidents)

In this category, the co-researchers said that the geographical distance between them and the disclosee was a helping factor because they would not have had to see the disclosee if the disclosure went badly.

Category Seventeen: "No Big Deal" (Six Incidents)

The co-researchers in this category said that the act of disclosing was no big deal and had no major consequences for them. Thus, they felt they weren't taking any risk in disclosing because they felt they had nothing to lose.

Category Eighteen: Sexual Deterrent (Six Incidents)

In this category, the co-researchers said the thing that helped them disclose was that they wanted to use the disclosure to deter the disclosees from coming onto them sexually.

Category Nineteen: Disclosing By Letter Or Phone (Five Incidents)

The co-researchers who mentioned this helping factor said that choosing to disclose either in a letter or over the phone made them feel more safe and in control of the situation.

Category Twenty: Alcohol (Five Incidents)

The co-researchers admitted that they were under the influence of alcohol and that made them feel less inhibited. Thus, it was easier to disclose.

Category Twenty-One: Other People Already Know (Five Incidents)

In this category, the co-researchers said that because other people in a particular group (usually family) already knew, then, it was easier and provided a motive for them to tell the final member of that group.

Category Twenty-Two: Third Party Influence (Five Incidents)

In this category, the co-researchers revealed that a third party had already informed the disclosee about their sexual orientation. Thus, they did not have to tell the disclosee themselves but did have to respond to the disclosee's question when asked. Also, in this category, the co-researchers might have stated that they felt pressured into the disclosure by a third party.

Category Twenty-Three: Feminist Politics (Four Incidents)

In this category, the co-researcher is always a woman who stated that the privilege and status she felt due to her education, ethnicity, or class allowed her to experience a sense of political power. The co-researchers revealed that they felt this power should be used to assist others who are not so fortunate and less powerful.

Category Twenty-Four: Career Identity and Clout (Four Incidents)

This category has two subcategories both of which contain career-related things that helped the co-researcher to disclose.

Subcategory one: professional identity (two incidents). In this subcategory, the co-researchers felt that their sexual orientation was part of their professional identity or career. Thus, in order to talk about their work, they had to talk about their sexual orientation.

Subcategory two: academic authority and clout (two incidents). In this subcategory, two co-researchers said they felt that they were either in a power position to the disclosee or had some kind of academic clout. Thus, they felt safer in disclosing because of the authority and power afforded by this position.

Category Twenty-Five: Desire To Help Others (Three Incidents)

In this category, the co-researchers said they wanted to disclose in order to keep the disclosee from getting hurt. In two of the three incidents, the co-researchers also noted that they were helped by the fact that they were trying to sexually deter the person. However, they pointed out that their need to help the disclosee was a separate facilitating factor.

Category Twenty-Six: Humour (Two Incidents)

Two co-researchers stated that humour helped them make the disclosure because it lightened up the situation and eased the tension of the moment.

Category Twenty-Seven: Testing the Waters (Two Incidents)

Two co-researchers said that the thing that helped them was their need to know how the disclosee would react to the disclosure because their future working relationship depended on having a good rapport.

Category Twenty-Eight: Financial Independence (Two Incidents)

Two co-researchers said they felt that economic independence provided them with a security blanket so that they could make the disclosure.

Category Twenty-Nine: Safety & Comfort (One Incident)

One co-researcher said that he felt safe in disclosing to just women.

Category Thirty: Rehearsal (One Incident)

One co-researcher said that by role playing and rehearsing the disclosure in advance, in her mind, she felt more prepared to make the disclosure.

Category Thirty-One: Leaving the Catholic Church (One Incident)

One co-researcher revealed that leaving the Roman Catholic Church had a huge impact on his life and freed him to experience more of the gay lifestyle which led to more self-acceptance and eventually more disclosures.

Category Thirty-Two: Assumption of Confidentiality (One Incident)

. One co-researcher stated that he felt he could trust the disclosee not to gossip and therefore felt safer in disclosing to her.

Category Thirty-Three: Romantic Intentions (One Incident)

One co-researcher shared that he was attracted to another man and wanted to have a sexual relationship with him. This prompted him to reveal his sexual orientation to the person in question in the hopes that a relationship would transpire.

APPENDIX K
INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE CHECKER RE. ISHIYAMA'S MODEL

1. Ishiyama (1995) postulated that there are five domains in which people can find ways of validating themselves. These are: relationships, activities, places, things, and the self. [Here is a copy of an article explaining Ishiyama's model in more detail.] I want you to categorize the 33 helping categories under one of these headings:

Relationships: This category would include any kind of individual relationship that the discloser might have with someone else including his/her partner or the existence of a relationship with any kind of group.

Activities: This category would include any kind of activity that the discloser involves him/herself in. These activities are often described in the present tense e.g. "Laying the Groundwork".

Places: This category described an actual physical place. It does not have to be a geographical location such as a particular city but does refer to a specific kind of place or environment.

Things: Anything that is a concrete physical object would be categorized under this heading. As well, social concepts could also be categorized under this heading.

Self: Any aspect of self such as a psychological construct, a desire/need, a conviction, or feeling would fall under this category.

2. Ask yourself the following questions in order to determine where an item fits (if it does fit)?

- Is there an action or activity implied by the category heading?
- Is there another person involved (implying a relationship)?
- Is a certain kind of environment implied by the heading?
- Is the heading a concrete object?
- Is the heading related to an aspect of the discloser's personal self?