STRIVING FOR HOLISTIC INTEGRATION:
HOW LESBIANS COME OUT ON TOP

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In

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

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
July 26th, 2002
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Date Aug. 22, 02
Abstract

Little has been written about women's career development that specifically addresses the process of women becoming successful in their occupations. As well, the literature has neglected to include the experiences of lesbians. Yet there is reason to believe that lesbians, by virtue of their lesbian identity, may have unique work experiences that are different from heterosexual women, leading to different paths to occupational success. The purpose of this study was to investigate the process of lesbians becoming successful in their occupations by utilizing a grounded theory approach. Fifteen women (age range 35 to 69 years) who were identified as successful in their occupations (i.e., they were perceived as leaders in their fields) and who represented a variety of occupational fields, were interviewed about their experience of becoming successful in their careers.

The grounded theory analysis of the data led to conceptual development, ordering, and a description of a psychological process "striving for holistic integration." The central process begins by these women "managing their lesbian identities in the workplace." The process involved women "taking risks and being out" at work along a continuum that represented women "working 'in' silence," "working quietly," and being "boldly 'out' spoken." Other salient categories in this central process included: facing ongoing fear, handling homophobia, and fighting for social change. Holistic integration involved participants integrating their lesbian and work "worlds." This integration facilitated enhanced working relationships based on honesty, and, for many participants, holistic integration became transformational as they became empowered by being open and disclosing their lesbian identities in the workplace. This process involved a dynamic,
synergistic interaction between the influencing conditions (i.e., changing social times, personal background, serendipitous conditions, love and support, and a gay friendly work environment) and the unfolding of the process of striving for holistic integration.

This research contributes to our understanding of lesbians' occupational success and is an important first step for further research. The women in this sample were primarily out in their respective fields and experienced benefits from doing so, despite the barriers many of them encountered along the way. The findings of this study provide guidance for future research in the area of lesbian career development and success.
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Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge and appreciate my friends, family, and colleagues who provided tremendous encouragement to me throughout this study. I am sincerely grateful for my supervisory committee and the endless hours they spent working with me, editing, and engaging in stimulating conversation with me about my study. I am particularly indebted to Dr. Bonita Long and thank her for attention to detail, her expertise, passion for helping women, and unwavering desire for excellence. Bonnie has been a mentor and inspiration to me. I will be forever thankful for her dedication and help in achieving my potential over the past few years. I offer thanks to Dr. JoAnn Perry for her continual support and guidance in the grounded theory method; Dr. Richard Young for his feedback and expertise in career development; and Dr. Marla Arvay for her encouragement, insightful comments and her special way of helping me to recognize my accomplishments and take pride in my work. I am thankful for having a committee who have been willing to undertake the risks and challenges involved in understanding the process of lesbians becoming successful in their occupations.

I am indebted to Dr. Katharyn May and Dr. Wendy Hall for their offering of the grounded theory analytic group. The assistance, support, and enthusiasm I received from these women provided me with the expertise and guidance I needed to successfully employ the grounded theory method in this study. A special thanks to my internship supervisor, Dr. Nancy Buzzell, who made me feel welcome during my Simon Fraser University internship and enthusiastically helped prepare me for my new role as a counselling psychologist. Working with Nancy was timely as she helped me mentally prepare for my external oral examination and helped me access my own strengths and personal power.
I was lucky and blessed with a team of computer experts who helped me with the technical components of completing a dissertation. Rodney Schupe, my brother-in-law, was instrumental in trouble shooting computer problems and became my remote man, capable of fixing absolutely anything that went wrong from his own home. Thanks to Michelle Neilson for her additional computer assistance and for keeping me sane during our daily noon hour runs and chats over soup. Finally, thanks to Colleen McCarthy for her skill, patience, and creativity that she contributed to designing the diagram. A special thanks to my friend Dawn Schooler for her role in transcribing interviews and for our stimulating discussions about the research process. I am also grateful for my sister Jeaniene's help transcribing interviews and for relaxing walks and talks on the beach.

I owe a special thanks from the bottom of my heart to my family who has been there for me through all of these years and have continued to love and care for me through the ups and downs of "striving for holistic integration." I am forever grateful to my parents Ed and Mary, who have been open, honest, understanding, fair, and loving parents. They have taught me the value of hard work and commitment, have been keenly interested in the details of my work, and have had an unflattering belief in my capabilities to finish this project. In addition I thank my parents for their financial generosity which facilitated the completion of my last year by allowing me to take a leave of absence from my counselling position. My heartfelt thanks to sister Terryl who was constantly available for runs, workouts, walks and intimate talks, and whose friendship, love, and inspiration sustained me throughout this doctoral program. Thanks to her partner Rea who cooked amazing meals for me and also provided love and support throughout this process. I am thankful for the quality time I spent writing my findings chapter at sister Joey's farm in Alberta and the tremendous love I was
surrounded by as I undertook the biggest challenge of my life. The loving and fun filled environment Joey, Wayne, Ben, Kyle, and JJ created for me at the farm facilitated my ability to write that chapter and to experience the category "love and support" first hand. I am grateful to my other sisters Wendy and Jeaniene and my brothers Keith and Dale, for their ongoing love throughout this process. A special thanks to my partner Claudia, for entering my life and facilitating holistic integration and healing in my personal life and studies. Claudia's love filled me with joy, inspiration, energy, and a renewed faith in finishing this project and envisioning a future that was often difficult to see. Her wisdom, insight, and knowledge of healing practices surrounded me and grounded me as I faced the challenges of my life during this last year of my study.

There are many friends I'd like to acknowledge and appreciate for filling my life with joy and love. I appreciate Cori Brewster for inspiring me through her music and her unconditional love and friendship as she continued to remind me how important this research was. Thanks to my dear friend Joanne Sargent for her encouraging words, unending empathy, and for all the fun we had going to movies, playing basketball, and having lengthy coffee chats. To my friend Yvonne for providing guidance, encouragement and academic stimulation. To Dr. Colleen Haney for being a mentor and friend and for always knowing I can count on her to sustain and motivate me. Thanks to Dr. Cathy Bray for her sociological perspective and her energy and humor in helping me prepare for my defense. To my friends Mel Grice and Prisca Reynolds who were always there for stimulating conversation and fun.

Finally, my deepest gratitude goes to the women who participated in this study and inspired me by their stories of passion about making a difference in people's lives. I marvel at their openness and willingness to share their experiences with me and their eager and
wholehearted support for this research. Their stories of courage, hope, and love inspired me to be passionate about giving voice to their stories and to making a difference in my own work.

Forever grateful, Faith
To my parents

To my mom and dad for continuing to be the greatest inspiration of my life. Mom your positive thinking, encouraging words, loving appreciation, and continual belief in me has surrounded me with love and motivated me to become all I can be. Dad I am grateful to you for teaching me the value of education and dedication. Your intelligence, generosity, wisdom, and compassion for others has inspired me to strive to make a difference in the lives of those I work with.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Despite the growing literature on the career development of women, little is known about what contributes to women’s occupational success (Fassinger & Richie, 1994). In addition, researchers have called for an expansion of the career development theories to reflect diversity among women (Fitzgerald, Fassinger, & Betz, 1995). For example, lesbians’ career development has been neglected both theoretically and empirically (Fassinger, 1991; Fitzgerald & Betz, 1994; Morgan & Brown, 1991). It is not known how lesbians endure, survive, and succeed in their occupations in a competitive, heterosexist society. The lack of attention to lesbians implies that the process of lesbians becoming successful in their occupations does not differ from women in general. Yet this view does not address the unique career development experienced by lesbians.

The social cultural context of lesbians’ work experience differs from that of women in general. First, lesbians must decide if they are going to reveal their lesbian identity in the workplace, and they often fear discrimination if they do disclose. The decision to be open or conceal one’s lesbian identity is a complex issue that involves careful strategizing and planning. Lesbians who choose to remain closeted in the workplace often employ elaborate coping strategies (e.g., avoidance, passing as heterosexual) to maintain their invisibility because of their fear of discrimination (Cody & Welch, 1997; Hall, 1986; Shachar & Gilbert, 1983; Waldo & Kemp, 1997). Second, lesbian identity development is a complex phenomenon that may influence lesbians’ career development and consequently their occupational success. For example, lesbians who are preoccupied with the exploration of their lesbian sexual identity may neglect occupational planning or may limit their occupational choices in order to accommodate their lesbian identity, and therefore may be
less successful in their occupations (Fassinger, 1995b, 1996). Third, Fassinger (1996) suggests that lesbians may be less likely than heterosexual women to have access to mentors and role models, a factor cited by career theorists as having a negative impact on the career development of women (Fassinger, 1991).

Therefore, the overall aim of this study was to explore the occupational experiences of a diverse sample of lesbians in order to understand how they have succeeded. In addition, the grounded theory method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was employed in order to understand the process of lesbians’ attaining occupational success. Understanding the process of lesbians becoming successful in their occupations contributes overall to women’s career development theory by including diversity (i.e., lesbians) and by identifying the process that contributes to success, a process that is notably absent in the women’s career development literature.

Kingdon (1979, p. 44) defined a lesbian as, “a woman whose primary emotional, psychological, social and sexual interests are directed toward other women.” This definition of the term lesbian is used throughout the present study. The term gay often pertains to homosexual men or women, however, in this study I refer only to men in using the term gay. Although men and women are sometimes referred to as homosexual, this term has negative and clinical connotations (Carl, 1990) and thus is not used in this study.

The complexity, confusion, and usefulness of the term career or career development has been debated (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989; Richardson, 1993; Young, Valach, & Collin, 1996). Traditional career theorists have often equated “career” with paid employment and neglected to include non-work activities. Theorists have attempted to expand existing definitions of career to include experiences beyond paid employment and to consider contextual factors (e.g., influence of gender). For example, Young et al. (1996) have
expanded our understanding of “career” to include a contextual explanation of career. This approach views the person as agent, who is goal directed and intentional and the approach focuses on the social construction of the process of career. Although this view of the career process potentially includes career success (e.g., career process being purposive, goal-directed, embedded in context and social processes), it is not known what specific processes lead to career success for lesbians.

Thus, to address the confusion surrounding the usefulness of the term career, for the purposes of this study, the term occupation is used interchangeably with the term career and refers to paid employment or work. As well, the terms occupation and career were used interchangeably by participants who often used the term career to describe their occupational path over time. The terms career and career development are used in reference to distinct theories and subsume the terms occupation and occupational success.

Operational definitions of occupational success vary among empirical investigations (Howard & Bray, 1988; Herriot, Gibson, Pemberton, & Pinder, 1993). Occupational success has been assessed as intrinsic success (e.g., job satisfaction) as well as extrinsic success (e.g., salary, current hierarchical position). However, external indicators of success (e.g., salary, promotion) may tell us little about the internal indicators of success (e.g., satisfaction, happiness) and vice versa. It may not be assumed, however, that objective definitions of occupational success encapsulate lesbians’ understanding of success. In the present study, I examine the complex process of occupational success, which includes both external and internal factors.

Fassinger and Richie (1994), and Richie, Fassinger, Linn, Johnson, Prosser, and Robinson (1997) criticized traditional definitions of career success because the definitions
reflect White, male, middle-class standards of excellence, and therefore are not representative of the experiences of women or other minority groups. In their studies of prominent Black, White, and lesbian women in the United States, participants were selected as successful, high achieving, or prominent because they were identified as leaders in their fields through recognition by national organizations (e.g., award winners) and in the media. The authors acknowledged that the use of award winners and media-recognized achievers reflects a professional bias that may include sexism, racism, or homophobia and therefore neglects to recognize the accomplishments of many talented women who did not receive awards or who may have been prevented from entering organizations in the first place.

The present study focuses on women who are recognized as leaders in their fields. In contrast to previous investigations (Fassinger & Richie, 1994; Richie et al., 1997), in the present study, evaluations of members of the lesbian community were used to initially identify women perceived as successful. Thus, successful lesbians were identified by external criteria (e.g., leaders in their fields) by the lesbian community.

Women's career development theories (e.g., Astin, 1984; Farmer, 1985; Gottfredson, 1981) do not sufficiently explain the role of internal barriers (e.g., self-esteem, decision making), external structural constraints (e.g., discrimination), and cultural influences (e.g., prejudice against lesbians) that may influence lesbians' ability to become successful in their occupations. Moreover, these unique factors have not been incorporated into recent theories of women's career development. The existing literature on lesbian career development identifies these important factors, however, the literature is mostly atheoretical and anecdotal (Fassinger, 1996) and has been focused on barriers (e.g., fear of discrimination) that may influence lesbians' occupations. Moreover, investigations of lesbians' occupational
experiences have focused primarily on the work experiences of middle-class, White, Americans (Croteau, 1996).

Notably absent from the existing literature is the attention to facilitative factors that may contribute to lesbians’ occupational success. For example, what facilitative factors lead to lesbians attaining success in their occupations despite the internal and external barriers they may face? The present investigation addressed these gaps in the literature by employing the grounded theory method to understand the process of lesbians becoming successful in their occupations. Grounded theory method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was appropriate for studying lesbians’ occupational success because much knowledge about the occupational success process can be gained from examining the experience of lesbians who have endured, survived, and succeeded in a competitive, heterosexist society. Therefore, to address this problem I explored the process of lesbians attaining occupational success in order to answer the question, “how do lesbians become successful in their occupations?”
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been a lack of attention to the experiences of lesbians in both the theoretical and empirical literature (e.g., Croteau, 1996; Fassinger, 1996; Fitzgerald & Betz, 1994). Therefore, the extent to which career development theories and models accurately reflect the process of attaining success and are inclusive of the experiences of lesbians is clearly inadequate. Thus, the overall purpose of this study is to explore the occupational experiences of successful lesbians in order to understand the process of lesbians becoming successful. Strauss and Corbin (1998) recommend that a grounded theory researcher not review all of the literature in the field prior to an investigation because the researcher may be constrained by such a review. They also suggest that it is not possible for the researcher to know, prior to the investigation, what the salient problems will be or what theoretical concepts will emerge. Therefore, in the present study, the literature serves a number of important functions: (a) it will be used to formulate the initial interview questions, (b) to provoke questions during the analysis process, (c) to suggest areas for theoretical sampling (e.g., lesbians out at work, lesbians not out at work), (d) to compare data and concepts from the literature, in terms of their properties and dimensions, and (e) to confirm or reject findings (i.e., findings can be used to illustrate where the literature only partially explains phenomena). Thus, the final discussion chapter includes a further review of the literature that allowed for “extending, validating, and refining knowledge in the field” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 52).

In this literature review, I begin with a brief examination of the historical and current social context, which highlights the pervasiveness of homophobia and heterosexism in gay and lesbian lives, in contrast to the support and empowerment provided by the gay and lesbian community. Second, I provide a limited explication of some prominent theoretical
frameworks of women’s career development as they relate to lesbians’ occupational success. Third, I briefly review studies in the area of career development that have focused on successful women. Fourth, I review factors affecting lesbians’ occupational success (e.g., discrimination, being out in the workplace, and coping strategies in the workplace). Finally, I identify gaps and limitations in previous theory and research and indicate the implications for the present investigation.

Social Context

Same-sex sexual behaviour has existed through the ages and across cultures. Most of the knowledge that exists about same-sex behaviour is derived from religious and legal sanctions against same-sex behaviour (Fassinger, 1991). In the Judeo-Christian tradition, same-sex behaviour has generally been viewed as morally unacceptable, and at times has resulted in excommunication and even loss of life (Bidwell, 1988). It is not known how many homosexuals died in the holocaust, but in the late 1970s, the Protestant Church of Austria estimated that there were 222,000 homosexual victims and because homosexual women were grouped with asocials and traitors, there is no way of knowing how many homosexual women died (Chenier, 1992).

The attitudes towards gays and lesbians have ranged from tolerance to oppression, with the norm in Western culture being hostility and condemnation. In contrast to North America, the European Community officially discourages discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in its member states (Jennings, 1994, p. 240). In 1989, Denmark became the first country in the world to recognize gay and lesbian partnerships.

Atkingson and Hackett’s (1988) brief overview of the history of same-sex behaviour in Europe and the United States suggests that throughout history religious views have
influenced legal codes that have been antigay. For example, in the 6th century, homosexuals were found guilty of causing plagues and famines and were often put to death. In the medieval period, witchcraft was associated with same-sex activity and resulted in the burning of witches. A legal code in 1260 condemned homosexual women to mutilation, clitorectomies, and burning at the stake for repeated lesbian activities. The 16th century’s Protestant-Catholic conflict resulted in legal action against same-sex behaviour, whereas the 17th century saw a decline in attention to women involved in same-sex behaviour, yet prosecution of men for same-sex behavior continued.

The historical pattern of discrimination against gays and lesbians continues to the present day as gays and lesbians face discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation. The medical and the psychiatric communities have long considered gays and lesbians to be sick or perverted. For example, it was not until 1973 that the term “homosexuality” was removed from the American Psychiatric Association (1980) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III) as a mental disorder/disease/crime, declaring it as simply another manifestation of sexual expression (Bidwell, 1988).

The current legal status of gays and lesbians worldwide is largely dependent on local laws. Legal protection for gays and lesbians in the United States varies from state to state. Similarly, Canada’s progress toward gay and lesbian equality varies from province to province. Casswell (1996) summarizes the progress made in the Canadian legal system over the past few decades:

1969 Consensual lesbian and gay sexual activity is decriminalized in Canada
1977 Quebec becomes the first Canadian province to include sexual orientation as a prohibited ground of discrimination in its human rights legislation
1982 The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms comes into force
1985 Section 15 of the Charter, guaranteeing equality rights, comes into force
1992 The court reads sexual orientation into the Canadian Human Rights Act as a prohibited ground of discrimination.

1995 The Supreme Court of Canada in Egan and Nesbit v. Canada holds that sexual orientation is a prohibited ground of discrimination under section 15 of the Charter—that is, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is contrary to the constitution of Canada (pp. 643-644).

The developments in gay and lesbian equality have been notable over the past three decades as the focus of attention has shifted from a debate concerning the decriminalizing of consensual gay or lesbian activity to claims for protection against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. In the most recent landmark ruling, the Supreme Court of Canada declared Ontario’s Family Law Act unconstitutional insofar as its definition of spouse excluding individuals involved in same-sex relationships (M. v. H, 1999). Gatehouse (1999) contended that this ruling will bring into question an estimated 1000 laws across the country. This decision may reduce the gap in legal rights between same-sex couples and heterosexual couples as same-sex couples are provided with more rights and responsibilities (Skelton, 1999). Skelton suggested that although the ruling is specific to Ontario, other provincial and federal governments are likely to follow and change their laws to protect same-sex couples. British Columbia, perhaps one of the most progressive provinces, was the only province at the time that already included same-sex couples in its definition of spouse. Presently (i.e., May, 2002) these laws are being addressed provincially to bring them in line with the Supreme Court of Canada decision.

Gays and lesbians may face discrimination in their efforts to create and maintain families. Most gay and lesbian couples are denied same-sex benefits like insurance and health benefits, filing joint income tax returns, next-of-kin rights when a partner is hospitalized, and legal custody of children. The AIDS epidemic and the increased number of
gays and lesbians who are choosing to have families have led to a push for legal protection of families (Fassinger, 1991).

With regard to the legal rights of gays and lesbians, same-sex couples cannot legally marry anywhere in Canada (Casswell, 1996). As well, gay and lesbian couples generally are not legally able to adopt children in Canada. Exceptions are British Columbia, Alberta, and more recently (May, 2002) Nova Scotia, and Ontario are the only provinces in Canada that have enacted legislation permitting a lesbian or gay couple to adopt a child as a couple.

One of the most alarming ways gays and lesbians experience the consequences of societal homophobia is through harassment and violence. In Herek’s (1989) review of hate crimes against lesbians and gay men in the United States, he found that as many as 92% of gay and lesbian people reported experiencing verbal abuse and over a third of those surveyed were survivors of physical attacks due to being identified as gay or lesbian. His review indicated that as many as 90% of the victims failed to report their attacks due to a fear of being exposed as gay or lesbian and a fear of residence eviction or being fired from their jobs. The surveys were conducted in major cities in the United States (e.g., Philadelphia Lesbian and Gay Task Force, Gross et al., 1988; National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Berrill, 1986) with respondents mostly lesbian and gay adults as well as junior and senior high school students.

Gay and lesbian communities exist to address the societal concerns discussed above by providing support and empowerment for individuals. Vancouver, British Columbia, is considered a gay friendly, multicultural city that has over 100 organizations for gay and lesbian people that include recreational, political, and social service organizations. Among these are: peer support groups; counselling services; organized sports leagues (e.g.,
Vancouver Gay Volleyball Association; English Bay Water Polo Club; political action groups (e.g., Gay and Lesbian Educators; Gay and Lesbian Immigration task force; Pride BC); arts groups (e.g., Out on screen, Vancouver Lesbian and Gay choir); HIV/AIDS resources (e.g., AIDS Vancouver, Friends for Life Society); support groups (e.g., coming out groups, Celebrate Sobriety, Renaissance Christian Church); a number of gay and lesbian publications (e.g., Xtra West); and a variety of youth services (e.g., Queerlings, YouthCO Aids Society).

The gay community is known for its symbols that are discernible worldwide in gay communities. For example, the rainbow flag has become the readily recognized colors of gay pride and diversity. The symbolism of the rainbow began in 1978 when it first appeared in the San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Freedom Day Parade. This symbol was designed by San Francisco artist Gilbert Baker in response to a need for a symbol that could be used year after year in gay pride parades. The six stripes of the rainbow flag represented components of the community: red for life, orange for healing, yellow for sun, green for nature, royal blue for harmony, and violet for spirit. The pink triangle is another popular and widely-recognized symbol for the gay community. Its roots come from World War II, and remind the community of the tragedies of that era. Homosexuals were only one of many groups targeted for extermination by the Nazi regime, however, history often excludes this information, thus the pink triangle challenges that notion. The pink triangle was worn by homosexual prisoners in the concentration camps in order to designate their reason for incarceration. The red ribbon, or the AIDS awareness ribbon is commonly seen adorning jacket lapels and other clothing items as a symbol of solidarity and commitment to the fight against AIDS. The red ribbon campaign occurs every year on December 1st, a day designated as World AIDS
awareness day [Rainbow Icon Archive: Icons for the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, & Transgender Community (on-line), 2002]. All of these symbols are symbols of pride and are often seen on car bumpers (e.g., rainbow flag), on clothing items (e.g., pink triangle, red ribbon), in gay pride parades, or are recognized in doorways of restaurants or businesses (e.g., rainbow flag stickers) as signs of gay and lesbian pride or as specifying a gay and lesbian friendly business.

Similar to many identifiable gay and lesbian communities, Vancouver’s visible community represents only the tip of the iceberg of the city’s gay and lesbian population. This visible element is White, middle-class, youthful, and generally male dominated. The composition of the remainder of the population and the networks through which individuals socialize are difficult to determine. The lesbians who live in Vancouver represent a variety of lifestyles and differing degrees of commitment to lesbian life. Some lesbians are upper class professionals who socialize only in their own homes among close friends. Others are women who are closeted and many of these remain married to men. Some women live quietly with their partners and do not associate with other lesbians. Many women participate in lesbian life by frequenting women’s bars and participating in social groups and recreational activities. Though there is no formal geographic boundary for the Vancouver lesbian community, many lesbians tend to live in particular areas of the city. There is a rich and diverse nightlife for gays and lesbians and meeting places for dozens of social and professional groups in Vancouver (Collins, 1997).

It is apparent that the city of Vancouver provides a vital and alive gay and lesbian community that provides support, recreation, entertainment, and advocacy for community members. The lesbian community provides common social spaces for lesbians (e.g., bars,
bookstores, concerts) that allow lesbians, regardless of class, racial, or ethnic backgrounds to find a common identification as a lesbian (Allen, 1990). However, many lesbians are not actively involved in community life. Many women consider it risky to be visible lesbians (e.g., fear of discrimination) and thus choose not to participate in community events or activities that could possibly out them (e.g., pride parade, lesbian sports league, gay and lesbian activists). Consequently, these women risk the possibility of not only feeling oppressed by society, but also the perception that the gay and lesbian community may consider them cowardly and therefore reject them.

The social context within which some lesbians live is made up of a supportive gay and lesbian community that exists within the oppressive effects of homophobia from society and the ensuing internalized homophobia that some individuals experience. Fitzgerald and Betz (1994) define cultural factors as “beliefs and attitudes commonly found among group members—often these are socialized by society (i.e., internalized homophobia), but after internalization they serve as self-perpetuating barriers to the individual” (p. 107). Internalized homophobia is a cultural factor that may affect the process of career success for lesbians. Barbeler (1995) defined homophobia from an external or cultural perspective as belief systems that support negative myths and stereotypes about gays and lesbians. More inclusively this means a belief system that discriminates on the basis of sexual orientation; the use of language that is intended to offend gays and lesbians (e.g., queer, dyke); and a belief system that does not value gay and lesbian life-styles equally with heterosexual life-styles. This conceptualization of homophobia was used in this study.

Popular culture has reflected considerable change in the last few years regarding gays and lesbians. For example, it is not uncommon for mainstream television shows to include
gay and lesbian characters (e.g., Will and Grace, Ellen, ER). Hollywood is regularly releasing movies to mainstream movie theatres that focus on gay and lesbian life from a positive perspective (e.g., “Kissing Jessica Stein” released April, 2002) and as well reveal the harsh realities of homophobia in movies such as “Boys Don’t Cry”, a show that chronicles the tragic end of Teena Brandon’s life. In addition, the media has been instrumental in covering gay and lesbian news and featuring celebrities who come out (e.g., Rosie O’Donnell in 2002) or who support gay and lesbian rights (e.g., celebrities wearing red ribbons for major awards shows). As well, prime time news shows, newspapers, and magazines are eager to cover both the positive (e.g., gay and lesbian adoption rights) and negative (e.g., 2002 murder of a gay man in Stanley Park) realities of gay life. For example, a local television news show reported two events on May 6, 2002 that involved homophobia. The first story reported the beginning of a trial of four men accused in a gay-bashing incident where two women in their early twenties were assaulted. In the second story, it was reported that a gay Ontario teenager had launched a civil suit against his school board for disallowing him to attend the school prom with his boyfriend. His Catholic school claimed they could not condone the student’s lifestyle and the student went to court to get two injunctions, one to allow him and his partner to go to the prom, and another to prevent the school from canceling the prom.

In summary, society has experienced some profound shifts over time as social mores change and move away from homophobic beliefs. However, despite the progress made toward equality and freedom for gays and lesbians in Canadian law, Casswell (1996) reminded us that there is reason to be “cautiously optimistic...there was significant opposition both to the inclusion of sexual orientation in the hate crimes sentencing provisions of the Criminal Code and to the addition of sexual orientation as a prohibited ground of
discrimination under the Canadian Human Rights Act” (p. 649). The present study positions itself within this current social context that holds both progressive and oppressive views of gays and lesbians who live within a thriving, visible, and supportive gay and lesbian community within Vancouver, British Columbia, and the Lower Mainland area in British Columbia. Furthering our understanding of the influence of the social/cultural context on lesbians occupational success will be helpful.

Theories of Women’s Career Development

In recent years women’s career development has been the focus of both theoretical and empirical study. Complex theoretical models have emerged that identify gender-role beliefs and structural constraints on women’s work as potential influences on career development (Astin, 1984; Farmer, 1985; Gottfredson, 1981). In the following sections, I present three prominent theoretical frameworks (e.g., sociopsychological, individual differences, and social cognitive models) and describe models within each orientation that provide possible explanations for women’s career development. None of these models are able to adequately explain the process of women or lesbians becoming successful in their occupations. I review and critique these models in order to identify questions these theories have left unanswered and in what ways they might fail or succeed in reflecting lesbians’ experiences of occupational success.

Sociopsychological Theories

Sociopsychological models (Astin, 1984; Gottfredson, 1981) have attempted to integrate both individual and environmental influences that affect career development. The power of social forces and the role of socialization have been identified as paramount in these models.
Astin's sociopsychological model of career choice and work behavior. Astin (1984) proposed that personal characteristics and social forces were the two major factors that shape work behavior. In her model she identified psychological factors (e.g., work motivation and expectations) and cultural-environmental factors (e.g., gender-role socialization and the structure of opportunity) that interact to produce career choice and behavior. Astin's developmental model was designed to account for the occupational behavior of both women and men. She contended that both sexes experience work motivation, however, men and women make different choices due to socialization experiences and different structural opportunities. Her need-based sociopsychological model is based on four major constructs: motivation, expectations, gender role socialization, and the structure of opportunity. First, she proposed an individual's work behavior is motivated to satisfy three basic needs: survival, pleasure, and contribution. These needs are interactive and present whenever an individual is motivated to engage in work behavior. Survival needs are referred to as specifically related to physiological survival. Work is seen as providing the income necessary for buying food, clothing, shelter, and other items essential for physical health and well-being. Pleasure needs are referred to as both the intrinsic pleasure that work provides and the intellectual and emotional pleasure that one derives from attaining goals. Contribution needs reflected one’s need to contribute to the well-being of others and resulted in a feeling of self-worth.

Second, career choices are based on expectations regarding the accessibility of alternative types of work and their ability to satisfy the three basic needs. Expectations include an appraisal of options open to an individual as well as an assessment of work activities an individual feels capable of performing. One’s expectations are a function of gender role socialization and of the perceived structure of opportunity.
Third, Astin (1984) focused on gender role socialization and suggested that expectations are influenced by early socialization experiences with family, childhood play, school experiences, and early work experiences. She claimed values are modeled by parents, teachers, and other adults, and are gradually inculcated. Therefore, Astin suggested that children’s early experiences influence the formation of gender-differentiated expectations, leading to gender-differentiated career choices and work behaviors. She noted that the changing role of women influences the socialization process of future generations of women and men. For example, children who have employed mothers may possess less sex-typed ideas of what gender appropriate work entails.

Finally, the structure of opportunity included economic conditions, the family structure, the job market, the occupational structure, and other environmental factors that are influenced by major historical events, scientific discoveries, and social movements. The socialization process and the opportunity structure in this model are interactive, each influencing the other to some extent. This helps explain the changes in women’s career aspirations in the past two decades because recent sociostructural trends have reduced barriers that women face, and hence, have increased career options (Astin, 1984).

The strength of Astin’s (1984) model lies in its attention to critical factors that affect women’s vocational behavior such as: (a) individual differences in values, beliefs, attitudes, and expectations; (b) socialization experiences; and (c) Astin’s most critical contribution, the influence of the structure of opportunity. Astin’s theory has been criticized for the broad generality of its constructs which are difficult to operationalize (Fitzgeral et al. 1995) and therefore making it difficult to determine whether empirical data support the theory. For example, Poole, Langan-Fox, Ciavarella, and Onedei (1991) collected data on Australian
youth in 1973, 1976, and 1982 and reported support for Astin’s basic principles (i.e., socialization, structure of opportunity, and work expectations) in predicting professional attainment. Professional attainment in this study was defined as the attainment of a professional versus nonprofessional position. However, the assessment problems raise questions regarding the reliability and validity of the results. Overall, Astin’s model has not proven heuristic, perhaps because of its poorly defined constructs, and its failure to provide suggestions for measurement. Astin’s model may best be considered a general theoretical framework because it is not testable in its present form.

Furthermore, Astin’s (1984) model has not looked at the interaction of factors such as class, race, sexual orientation, and career choice. More specifically, a limitation in her framework is that it has not captured the issues, challenges, and obstacles that characterize the career development and occupational success of lesbians. Lesbians may face structural factors such as discrimination and negative stereotyping that affect occupational choice, adjustment, and success. For example, a lesbian may feel discouraged from pursuing the teaching field because of harmful myths associated with conversion or seduction of students to the gay lifestyle.

In contrast, Morgan and Brown (1991) reviewed Astin’s (1984) The Meaning of Work in Women’s Lives: A Sociopsychological Model of Career Choice and Work Behavior and its relevance to lesbians. They suggested that the model may have applicability to lesbian occupational experiences because it explores the interactions between personal characteristics and social forces and describes how socialization influences a person’s view of the opportunity structure. Morgan and Brown point to a feature of this model that makes it very
appropriate for understanding and counselling lesbians, “it provides a conceptualization of how opportunity structure changes over time as a result of social forces” (p. 285).

In summary, the strength of Astin’s (1984) model for the purpose of this investigation is its emphasis on socialization and how socialization influences an individual’s view of the opportunity structure. For example, a woman may self-identify as a lesbian at various stages in life and the timing may have an influence on her view of opportunity structure, occupational success, and job satisfaction. As well, this model could show how a lesbian’s occupational path may be affected by change in the social climate regarding lesbians, change in legislation protecting lesbians, and an increase in positive role models who are “out” in various occupations. Thus, questions that need to be addressed include, “How does the coming-out process affect lesbians’ occupational paths? In what ways do role models or mentors influence a lesbian’s occupational success?” Finally, a limitation in this theory is weak constructs that are difficult to operationalize. Morgan and Brown (1991) call for theory development and suggested that, “It is possible that the development of a theory of lesbian career development, might shed new and different light on our paradigms for all women’s career development” (p. 289).

Gottfredson’s theory of circumscription and compromise. Gottfredson (1981) formulated a model of the development of women’s and men’s occupational aspirations that included both psychological and non-psychological variables. Gottfredson attempted to explain how differences in aspirations by social group (e.g., race, sex, social class) develop, and focused on the role of self-concept in occupational aspirations indicating that people seek employment that is compatible with their self images. The model emphasized the importance of sex type, prestige, interests, and the influence of the realities of work in occupational
decision making.

Four stages of cognitive development are outlined during which individuals form relevant elements of their self-concept and their occupational aspirations.

Stage 1: Orientation to size and power (ages 3-5 years) when children begin to think about being an adult.

Stage 2: Orientation to sex roles (ages 6-8 years) when children develop a gender self-concept.

Stage 3: Orientation to social valuation (ages 9-13 years) when children become familiar with concepts such as social class and ability that influence social behavior and expectations.

Stage 4: Orientation to the internal, unique self (age 14 and up) when adolescents begin to develop their own values, attitudes, and vocational aspirations.

Gottfredson (1981) suggested that as individuals’ progress through these developmental stages, a process of circumscription or narrowing of occupation-choice alternatives and compromising between occupational preferences and employment realities occurs on the basis of sex-type preference, prestige preference, and interests. Women often choose low-status occupations that are compatible with their self-concept and their perceptions of job accessibility. Gottfredson further suggested that when compromise occurs due to the reality of the work world, one’s field of interest is compromised first, then prestige, and sex type last.

Similar to Astin’s (1984) model, Gottfredson’s attention to the determinative role played by socialization and the importance of social forces in women’s career development is an important contribution to career theory. The model also explicitly described the process of
occupational compromise and takes into account a substantial body of research. However, a limitation of this model is its neglect to include the occupational experiences of lesbians because, compared with heterosexual women, lesbians tend to hold to feminist values and find traditionally male stereotyped jobs more acceptable (Morgan & Brown, 1991). Brooks (1981) found, in her review of personality characteristics of lesbians compared with heterosexual women, that lesbians rate significantly higher on measures of assertiveness, dominance, perseverance, self-confidence, independence, tenderness, and capacity for intimate contact and feeling reactivity.

Thus, Gottfredson’s model (1981) if applied to lesbians, may demonstrate different patterns of career development and occupational success than heterosexual women, because lesbians may hold broader definitions of what appropriate work is for women. In order to understand the process of lesbians developing occupational success important questions need to be asked. What occupational experiences have led lesbians to their current position? Does being a lesbian affect perception of accessibility of work options? Addressing these questions may shed light on the influence of being a lesbian on the process of developing occupational success.

Individual Differences Models

Farmer’s individual differences model of career motivation in women and men.

Farmer’s (1985) model presented a multidimensional, developmental model that focused on background, personal, and environmental variables in career development. Farmer attempted to extend previous models criticized as being incomplete and narrowly focused. She proposed that background factors (e.g., gender, race, age), personal characteristics (e.g., self-esteem, values, independence), and environmental variables (e.g., parental and teacher
support) are important for predicting career and achievement motivation in young women and men.

Farmer (1985) investigated the relations among background factors, personal characteristics, and environmental variables for three motivation dimensions: (a) level of occupation chosen (i.e., aspiration), (b) motivation to achieve on short-range challenging tasks (i.e., mastery), and (c) degree of commitment to long-range prospects of a career. The samples she studied were young men and women in the 9th and 12th grades ($N = 1,863$) who were White, Black, and Hispanic. Farmer found that young men and women experienced significant differences in achievement motivation as a result of the interaction of background, personal, and environmental variables. She employed hierarchical multiple regression analyses and found that all three sets of influences significantly related to each of the three motivation dimensions. Path analyses results identified significant indirect effects and direct effects on all motivation dimensions. Background factors (e.g., sex, social status, race) were the strongest predictors of occupational and educational aspirations, and personal variables (e.g., independence) were the strongest predictors of mastery strivings. Farmer concluded that career motivation was strongly predicted by personal variables, whereas background and environmental variables added limited predictive power to the model.

A limitation of Farmer’s (1985) model is that she does not include sexual orientation as a background variable along with gender, race, age, and social status. It is not known how many gay or lesbian adolescents participated in her study. For lesbians, an important environmental factor that was not considered in this model may be the perceived support one has for entering a particular field. Thus, the question arises, what is the role of family, friends, and educational background that lesbians’ attribute to occupational success?
The Betz-Fitzgerald-Fassinger model of career-choice realism. Another individual differences model of women's career development (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Fitzgerald, Fassinger, & Betz, 1989) is a framework for predicting career choice that was tested by Fassinger (1985, 1990). This multi-dimensional model focused on high-ability college women and assumed individual differences play a major role in predicting career choice, whereas environmental restraints played a minimal role. They examined individual differences in the realism of women's career choices as a major outcome variable, that is, the extent to which a career choice is congruent with the abilities and interests of the individual. In their model they predicted that factors such as previous work experience, academic success, role model influence, and perceived encouragement were associated with attitudes toward work, self, gender roles, and realism of career choice.

The model was first tested by Fassinger (1985) with a sample of 300 college women ($M$ age = 21), employing structural equation modeling techniques. She found that ability, achievement orientation, and feminist orientation influenced career and family orientation, which in turn influenced career choice. Fassinger (1990) tested the model with a larger, more heterogeneous sample of 663 college women ($M$ age=19) and found that high ability levels interacted with gender role attitudes and agentic characteristics to influence career orientation and choice. In 1993, O'Brien and Fassinger tested the revised model with 409 college-bound, female high-school seniors ($M$ age = 17.31), and found general support for the theory. Results suggested that ability and a sense of personal agency were critical influences on women's career behavior.

Gender-role orientation (e.g., especially feminist attitudes) is another factor that has consistently emerged in tests of the career-choice realism model. To assess participants'
beliefs regarding the feminist movement, the Attitudes Toward Feminism and the Women's Movement Scale (Fassinger, 1995a) was developed and used. Participants were asked to rate their agreement with 10 items on a 5-point Likert scale, with high scores representing more positive attitudes toward feminism. Participants were also asked a single question as an indicator of gender role attitudes in which the respondent indicated her willingness to label herself a feminist on a 5-point scale. The higher scores reflected a strong agreement with use of the feminist label. Overall, this study validated previous findings indicating the importance of gender role attitudes in the career orientation of women (Astin, 1984; Fassinger, 1990; Gottfredson, 1981). The presence of liberal, pro-feminist attitudes was found to be positively related to career development.

The strength of Betz and Fitzgerald's (1987) and Fitzgerald et al.'s (1989) model is its attention to the important influences of ability, agency, and gender role orientation on the development of women’s career capabilities and achievements (e.g., high ability young women possessed liberal gender role attitudes and were instrumental and efficacious in regard to math and science careers). As well, this framework has been tested with large samples employing sophisticated modeling strategies. Fitzgerald et al. (1995) suggested that this model is limited by the failure of a number of background variables (e.g., role model influences, perceived encouragement) to exert a significant influence, given a history of such influence has been found in other studies. Moreover, psychometric limitations in the measurement of constructs were reported by Fassinger (1985, 1990).

A further limitation of this model is that it is not known to what extent these findings apply to lesbians' career development. Previous research has indicated that lesbians, compared with heterosexual women, hold feminist values and exhibit more gender
nonconforming behaviors (Brooks, 1981). Thus, it may be that lesbians are more likely to make occupational choices that are congruent with interests and abilities. It is important to explore the influence of ability, personal agency, as well as feminist attitudes and their role in lesbians' occupational success.

Social Cognitive Frameworks

Hackett and Betz's application of self-efficacy theory. Hackett and Betz (1981) introduced a suggestive model of women's career development that focused on self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977). Their model was aimed at stimulating further research in that they proposed that gender role socialization influenced cognitive processes (e.g., self-efficacy), which, in turn, influenced career decision making, adjustment (i.e., persistence), and achievement. More specifically, due to socialization experiences, they suggested that some women lack strong expectations of personal efficacy for career behavior and thus fail to reach their potential or utilize their full abilities in career pursuits. Hackett and Betz based their model on the work of Bandura (1977) who suggested that efficacy expectations are developed by four sources of information: performance accomplishments (i.e., successful performance of a task); vicarious learning (i.e., observing others succeed); verbal persuasion (i.e., encouragement and persuasion from others); and emotional arousal (i.e., level of anxiety).

In an initial empirical test, Betz and Hackett (1981) examined gender differences in occupational self-efficacy and tested this application of self-efficacy theory and its utility in predicting the number of occupational alternatives considered by male and female college students. As predicted, significant gender differences were found in occupational self-efficacy expectations when the traditionality of the occupation was taken into account. For
example, women's self-efficacy expectations were lower than men's for nontraditional occupations and significantly higher than men's for traditional occupations.

Subsequent empirical investigations (Fitzgerald et al., 1995) have shown that career-related efficacy influences the degree to which women utilize their abilities, develop a wide range of interests, and consider a wide variety of career options. As well, career self-efficacy may also be related to the ability of women to persist in male-dominated careers and attain success. Hackett and Betz's (1981) model is notable because of its inclusion of cognitive processes in mediating career behavior. The degree to which lesbians develop a wide range of interests and consider a variety of occupational options may be influenced by self-efficacy expectations, which may explain how lesbians' overcome barriers and attain success in their occupations.

Social cognitive theory. Lent, Brown, and Hackett's (1994) social cognitive framework focused on how career interests develop, how academic and career choices are made, and how performance outcomes are achieved in terms of the construct of personal agency. This model was also built on Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986) and included self-efficacy, expected outcome, goal mechanisms, and their interrelateness with individual factors (e.g., gender), contextual factors (e.g., support systems), and experiential/learning factors. The role of contextual factors and personal agency are most notable features of this emerging theory.

Lent et al. (1994) proposed that contextual factors assist in shaping the learning experiences (e.g., modeling, feedback from important others) that influence personal interests and choices. They contend that contextual factors include the real and perceived opportunity structure within which career plans are devised and implemented. In addition, Lent et al.
highlighted the influence of environmental factors that may exert direct effects on career choice and implementation (e.g., discrimination in hiring or promotion).

Lent et al. (1994) outlined 12 sets of propositions, each with several specific hypotheses, in order to organize existing empirical findings and to guide future research. These hypotheses proposed:

1. Occupational interests are reflective of concurrent self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations.

2. Occupational interests are influenced by abilities and are mediated by self-efficacy beliefs.

3. Self-efficacy beliefs influence the choice of goals and actions, both directly and indirectly.

4. Outcome expectations affect the choice of goals and actions, both directly and indirectly.

5. Individuals will aspire to enter occupations consistent with their interests.

6. Individuals will aspire to enter (i.e., develop choice goals for) occupations compatible with their choice goals, provided that their goal is clear and proximal to the point of entry and they are committed to their goal.

7. Interests affect entry behaviors indirectly by their influence on choice goals.

8. Self-efficacy beliefs affect career performance directly and indirectly through their effect on performance goals. Outcome expectations affect performance indirectly through their effect on goals.

9. Ability affects career performance directly and indirectly through its influence on self-efficacy beliefs.
10. Self-efficacy beliefs derive from performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and physiological reactions to particular occupationally relevant activities.

11. Outcome expectations are generated through direct and vicarious experiences with occupationally relevant activities.

12. Outcome expectations are partially determined by self-efficacy beliefs, particularly when outcomes (e.g., successes, failures) are closely tied to the quality of one’s performance.

Lent et al. (1994) proposed additional hypotheses for each proposition that specifically addressed contextual determinants (e.g., gender, race) that influence career behavior. For example, hypothesis 1G states,

Gender and racial/ethnic differences in interest and in interest-goal relations arise largely through differential access to opportunities, supports, and socialization processes. Thus, such group differences will be reduced when differences in opportunity structures, support systems, barriers, and socialization practices are controlled. (p. 108)

A strength of this relatively new social cognitive theory is that it is easily accessible for testing and empirical examination because of its detailed hypotheses. Lent et al.’s (1994) inclusion of the interaction of cognitive mediators and contextual factors has been important in our understanding the career development of women and the potential for a more comprehensive understanding of other minority groups, including lesbians who have not been considered in the existing theoretical frameworks.

Morrow, Gore, and Campbell (1996) discussed the applicability of social cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1994) to the career development of lesbian and gay people. Specifically, they reviewed factors that influence the development of self-efficacy beliefs and
outcome expectations and the impact of contemporary barriers on the translation of interests to goals and career choices for gays and lesbians. Morrow et al. concluded that two major aspects of social cognitive career theory have relevance to the career development of lesbian and gay people: (a) distal contextual barriers in the development of self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations; and (b) contextual barriers proximal to career choice. For example, they suggested that for gays and lesbians environmental influences affect self-efficacy beliefs and that societal stereotyping, gender-role expectations, and peer pressure may prevent early attempts at activity involvement, resulting in a limited range of academic and career interests (i.e., distal contextual barriers). In addition, gender-stereotyped models or negative persuasive messages from influential authority figures may inhibit the development of interests.

Morrow et al. (1996) suggested that the career development of gays and lesbians is influenced by outcome expectations that are shaped by societal forces. Barriers proximal to career choice include prejudices, stereotypes, and discrimination based on sexual orientation related to hiring, promotion, and same-sex benefits (Croteau, 1996; Fassinger, 1996; Morgan & Brown, 1991). Another factor that may affect the pursuit of interests is safety. Lesbians may choose to work in an environment that is “gay friendly” at the expense of interests (Fassinger, 1996). Morrow et al. proposed that gays and lesbians may face environmental barriers at most stages of their career development. They further noted that the earliest barriers may be the most harmful because they may prevent individuals from participating in activities that contribute to greater self-efficacy and positive outcome expectations.

Morrow et al.’s (1996) description of how environmental and contextual influences may shape gays’ and lesbians’ academic and career interests through their impact on self-
efficacy beliefs makes an important contribution to theories of career development. However, additional research is needed to more fully understand how environmental barriers may prevent or facilitate lesbians' engaging in activities that enhance self-efficacy and positive outcome expectations.

Occupational Success

The concept of occupational success has many meanings that may vary for men and women and within men and women. Organizational indicators of success (e.g., salary and promotion) may tell us little about the psychological or internal successful occupational experiences of women. Betz and Fitzgerald (1987) identified an important criterion of success that needs to be considered—women's perception of their own success. Frye (1984) suggested that subjective feelings of success are a combination of the evaluations of significant others, self-evaluations compared with coworkers, and self-evaluations of age/career expectations. Frye concluded that self-perceptions of success are more highly related to satisfaction than an objective criterion of success such as salary.

Poole and Langan-Fox (1997) suggested that subjective criteria for success (e.g., intrinsic measures such as satisfaction) have been neglected in most career theories. They recommend that theoretical models designed to assess career success should include objective and subjective components of career success. Poole and Langan-Fox's longitudinal study examined the careers, life satisfaction, and success of women ($N = 1489$) who were part of the Career Development Project in Australia, a national longitudinal study of 5000 young men and women beginning their careers. Their definition of career included paid and non-paid work viewing career as a life career that included both work and family. Poole and Langan-Fox attempted to embed the lives of the women in their study within a particular
time-frame in which social, cultural, and policy changes were occurring, and thus considered
the social and contextual influences on the orientations, successes, and achievement of these
women. The study began in 1973 when participants were 17 years old and followed the lives
of the young women through to age 35 in 1990, charting their educational pathways, early
occupational choices, and overall career trajectories. Results indicated that the subjective
meaning of career success was found to be an important aspect of career and life satisfaction
for these women. Subjective factors (i.e., work satisfaction) were more important in
determining perceptions of career success than objective factors such as academic
qualifications, income, and occupational status. However, results indicated that professional
attainment (i.e., participants that attended post secondary education and became
professionals) contributed to perceived career success; thus, suggesting the importance of
both objective and subjective components of perceived career success.

The results of an in depth survey and interviews with participants in the Poole and
Langan-Fox (1997) study indicated that the most significant predictor of success for women
was their enrollment in post secondary education. Parental expectations were also found to be
an important factor in attainment and career success. Having children was found to be a
negative determinant of achieving professional status and success. Interviews revealed the
women experienced conflict and compromise regarding their career and family orientations.
Poole and Langan-Fox concluded that no single variable, by itself, determined the career
success of the women sampled. Rather, career success was part of a dynamic, multi-
dimensional picture, inclusive of both rational and intuitive decision making processes,
subjective and objective components, and embedded in micro- and macro-contexts. Thus,
Poole and Langan-Fox suggested career theory must represent and describe this dynamic
process that includes multiple trajectories for women. A limitation of this study is the neglect to identify or include minority groups such as lesbians. It is not known if any of the “single” women surveyed were lesbian. Although some lesbians may be mothers and face similar dilemmas regarding career and family, most lesbians are not parents. It may be that lesbians occupational experiences are not inter-connected with family in this way.

None of the career theories reviewed include the concept of occupational success explicitly nor do they incorporate an understanding of the paths leading to occupational success. There has been a call for studies to examine this construct, and more specifically, recommendations for investigations to address the diversity of successful women (Fassinger & Richie, 1994). Recently, a few studies have begun to address this important construct and are briefly reviewed.

Yewchuk, Aysto, and Schlosser (2001) surveyed highly successful women from Canada (N = 827) and Finland (N = 280), listed in a Who’s Who biographical publication of each country, in order to identify factors that facilitated or prevented achievement in their careers. The two samples were found to be similar on birth order, education, marital status, and motherhood. Results indicated that the eminent women reported that their own qualities and personal convictions were the primary reasons they attributed to their prominence or fame. They reported that the majority of the eminent women surveyed believed that their own convictions and qualities were deciding factors in their career success.

Both samples also attributed their success to their families and spouses who provided them with encouragement and support. In addition, professors, teachers, coaches, colleagues, and friends were seen as encouragers. The Canadians and Finns both attributed the same factors as being detrimental to their careers: stereotypical attitudes of others, being female,
children, availability of childcare, and parents’ socioeconomic status. Yewchuk et al. concluded that personal characteristics and the support from others are important factors that influence career success.

Schlosser (2001) employed narrative analysis of the life stories of 12 of the Finnish women from the Yewchuk et al. (2001) investigation. Themes that emerged from the interview data included: personal self-reliance, the superiority of their work, and their interdependence with others including family members and co-workers. An additional finding that emerged was the importance of egalitarianism, referring to, “a belief in human equality especially with respect to social, political, and economic rights and privileges” (p. 78). Participants attributed their success to the society and homes they grew up in as well as support they received from others. Analysis of their narratives revealed that these women believed they became eminent because they were self-confident and able to produce superior work. Their stories also revealed the important role of others in their success and their feelings of responsibility for others. These women went beyond their individual achievements and focused on appreciating others, caring for others, and being willing to serve others while striving to maintain equality. Although these studies do not report whether or not any of these women are lesbians, the studies clearly demonstrate the importance of personal characteristics and the supporting role of others in career success. The present study will explore these facilitative factors (e.g., personal characteristics, societal influences, support systems, and interpersonal relationships) to determine their significance for lesbians’ career success.

Fassinger and Richie (1994) examined achieving styles, coping strategies, gender roles, and feminist attitudes of 125 (M age = 53) prominent Black (N = 23) and White women
This study is part of an ongoing program of qualitative research on the career development of more than 100 prominent (i.e., notable, high achieving) diverse women in the United States that includes African American-Black and White women (Richie et al., 1997), lesbians (Hollingsworth et al., 1997), Asian American women (Prosser, Chopra, & Fassinger, 1997), and women with disabilities (Noonan & Fassinger, 1999). The authors use the terms prominent, high achieving, notable, and successful interchangeably. Results indicated that regardless of race, the women preferred an intrinsic-direct achieving style most strongly (e.g., focus on task mastery, achieved through self-reliance, and use of internal standards of excellence to evaluate their own performance). The achieving style preferred least often was social-instrumental (e.g., develop relationships and networks to move toward specific goals and an awareness of the politics of a situation). The researchers concluded that prominent women may feel isolated at this stage in their careers. In addition, results indicated that Black women and White women were more similar than different in their gender roles, feminist attitudes, and ways of coping. Canonical analyses revealed strong, positive relationships between all achieving styles in the direct domain (e.g., task oriented and focused on individual achievement), the personal-instrumental style (e.g., use personal attributes, accomplishments, and family backgrounds to persuade people to reach their goals and evaluate their achievement on the basis of recognition and relationships), and contributory-relational style (e.g., directly contribute to goals set by other people and know that their help toward reaching these goals will bring rewards to other people) and the confrontive coping (e.g., aggressive effort to change the situations), self-controlling (e.g., control actions or feelings in a situation), and planful problem solving (e.g., analyze the situation and attempt to solve the problem) coping styles. These achieving styles were also found to be negatively
related to the escape-avoidance (e.g., behavioral efforts to avoid the problem) coping strategy, and indicated that successful women who control and succeed at their tasks and face problems head on are able to persuade others, and are interested in helping with others’ tasks.

The results of canonical analysis also revealed a strong, positive relationship between the competitive-direct (e.g., desire to do a task better than anyone else) achieving style and the distancing (e.g., detaching from the situation), self-controlling, escape-avoidance, positive reappraisal (e.g., create meaning in the situation), and accepting responsibility (e.g., acknowledging one’s role in the situation) coping strategies. A negative relationship was found between the competitive-direct achieving style and planful problem solving. The researchers concluded that this surprising finding may suggest that a woman who prefers a less traditionally female style of achieving (i.e., direct and competitive) in a male-dominated environment, relies on internal and indirect approaches to cope rather than more direct and forceful ways of dealing with workplace stress.

Results indicated that the competitive-direct, the power-direct (e.g., take charge), and the personal-instrumental achieving styles were strongly related to an instrumental or masculine gender role and were negatively related to the contributory-relational achieving style and to an expressive or feminine gender role. Fassinger and Richie (1994) concluded that women employ achievement styles adopted in a male-dominated work environment to achieve their goals whereas feminist attitudes characterize women who take charge, are competitive, and use their personal qualities to persuade and work with others.

Richie et al. (1997) employed a modified grounded theory method to investigate the career development of 18 prominent, highly achieving African American-Black and White women in the United States identified from their previous study (Fassinger & Richie, 1994).
The aim of this study was to generate a theory of the career development of participants that was grounded in their experiences. Richie et al. investigated the women's career paths, background, and current influences, stress, coping, resiliency, external challenges and limitations, self-efficacy, community, social support, and individual personality factors.

Participants were nine African American-Black women and nine White women identified by the media and various professional organizations as being leaders in one of the following eight occupational fields: business, education, athletics, science, law/politics, visual arts, literary arts, and journalism/media. Open-ended, in-depth interviews that were approximately 90 minutes were used to collect the data. An interview protocol was developed by a research team through a process of reviewing the literature and team discussion. The interviews were analyzed using a modified grounded theory method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Open coding was used to identify and record basic concepts from the transcripts, and then to group similar concepts into categories. Categories were described in terms of their properties, or the characteristics describing the group of concepts, and dimensions, or the degree to which various properties were found in each category. The next step was axial coding where similar categories were grouped into key categories. The third step was selective coding, in which a core category was selected from all the key categories to describe the most central aspect of each participant's story. The relationship between the key categories and the core category constituted the emergent theory, which was then validated against the data.

The theoretical model derived from the data included five major components: (a) a core story consisting of participants' work experiences and attitudes, which is enacted within (b) sociocultural, (c) personal background, and (d) current contextual conditions and leads to
particular career actions and consequences. Overall, participants were described as relationally oriented women who persisted in the face of obstacles and were passionate about their work. Participants relied on internally determined high standards to measure their success and focused on balancing tasks and relationships. The women were strongly connected to other people and were committed to helping other women through their work and making conditions better for other women and African American-Blacks. This study is limited by its criteria for choosing successful women. The use of media-recognized achievers reflects the bias of success in traditional workforce terms. In addition, a modified grounded theory method was employed. For example, the women were only interviewed once and theoretical sampling was not employed limiting further interview questions or observations based on the developing theoretical analysis.

Most recently, Gomez, Cook, Fassinger, Prosser, and Mejia (2001) investigated the career development and success of 20 notable Latinas. Similar to Richie et al. (1997), the grounded theory method was employed and the emergent theory proposed a theoretical framework that is dynamic and a constantly evolving person-environment interaction influenced by sociopolitical, cultural, contextual, and personal variables.

The theoretical model of Latina’s career development and success derived from the data included five major components: (a) career paths were found to be unplanned and nonlinear, (b) participants’ sense of self and career motivation was influenced by background variables, socioeconomic status, and educational experiences, (c) family, culture, and cultural identity were important, (d) relational support systems were influential (e.g., family, spouses, mentors), and (e) participants’ coping strategies (e.g., cognitive reframing) and optimism,
persistence, and passion helped them deal with challenges and stay true to their values, beliefs, and sense of self.

As part of the same qualitative research project in the United States, Hollingsworth et al. (1997) are presently analyzing data of the career experiences of a diverse sample of highly successful lesbians, in order to construct an inclusive theoretical model of career achievement for lesbians. They employed grounded theory method and interviewed 26 women who were selected from an initial pool of 275 lesbians identified through the media and nominations by professional organizations in the United States. The results of this investigation have not been published at this time.

Because of the paucity of research on career success, Baltes and Carstensen’s (1996) research on the process of successful ageing is also examined. Baltes and Carstensen discussed the process of successful ageing within a meta-model of selective optimisation with compensation that was developed by Baltes and Baltes (1990). In this model, success was defined as goal attainment and successful ageing as minimization of losses and maximization of gains. Although this model specifically focused on the process of successful aging, the construct of attaining success may be useful for the present investigation. This model focused on successful adaptation and viewed successful mastery of goals as an important component in the process of successful ageing. Success was defined as the attainment of goals that may vary greatly among people and can be measured against diverse standards and norms. Baltes and Carstensen suggested that no one criterion for success has been found acceptable. Therefore, they concluded that a multicriteria approach is needed with a flexible definition of success outcomes. They suggested success can be defined by different authorities (e.g., peer group, society, theory) and by different norms (e.g., functional, ideal).
and should not be measured against one standard. Their process-oriented approach accepts personal goals as success outcomes, avoids imposing universal values and standards, and acknowledges the heterogeneity of ageing people. In addition, this process-oriented approach focused on the strategies people use to master specific goals and hence moved away from a focus on prescribed outcomes to the processes people use to obtain desired goals. The process of lesbians becoming successful may include a variety of strategies and a variety of goals leading to occupational success. In addition, as Lent et al. (1994) suggested, minority groups may have limited access to opportunity structures and supports (i.e., contextual factors) and thus lesbians' goals may be influenced by these external factors. The present study attempts to more fully explore the context of lesbians' lives and the influence goal setting has on occupational success.

Friend (1991) proposed a theory of successful aging focusing on lesbian and gay people that is relevant to the present study. This theory is based on a social construction framework and highlights the relationship between the social construction of lesbian and gay identities and the individual psychology of gay and lesbians who have successfully grown old within the context of a particular socio-historical period of time. Friend suggested that those lesbian and gay people who age successfully have affirmative sexual identities. In addition, affirmative sexual identities are the result of the reconstruction of homosexuality as positive within the contexts of individual psychology, interpersonal dimensions, and legal and political advocacy. For example, Friend described “crisis competence” as a dimension of individual psychology that involves managing issues associated with sexual orientation such as the potential loss of family, friends, and jobs. Social and interpersonal dimensions included family, friends, and community as sources of affirming homosexuality in a positive
way that facilitates successful aging. Finally, Friend suggested that in the process of achieving an affirmative gay or lesbian identity, many people develop advocacy skills for managing heterosexism and ageism in a direct fashion. This model suggested that the process of reconstructing homosexuality as positive results in the gain of positive attitudes, skills, and emotional resources that promote successful aging. In the present study, the influence of developing an affirmative lesbian identity on occupational success was explored.

Although there are a variety of ways in which to conceptualize occupational success (e.g., subjective, objective, attainment of goals), very little theory has been developed that explicitly includes the concept of occupational success and incorporates an understanding of the process of women becoming successful in their occupations. There is limited research focusing on lesbians’ occupational success, and the studies reviewed reveal that lesbians face tremendous obstacles and barriers (i.e., external and internal) on their path to success. Existing research on lesbians’ occupational success suggests that lesbians are able to attain success defined by either objective or external criteria (e.g., identified as leaders in their field) despite the barriers they face. By further exploring this process of lesbians becoming successful based on objective criteria, the present study moves beyond objective determinants of success and examines lesbians’ subjective perceptions of their occupational success. The process of how these women come to evaluate themselves as successful in their occupations (e.g., achievement of goals, professional attainment, satisfaction) was explored.

Summary

The theories discussed have identified significant variables and dynamics that may influence women’s occupational success (e.g., environmental influences, social forces, socialization, cognition). However, limitations of these theories reveal constructs that are
difficult to operationalize and frameworks that neglect to include the experiences of minority groups. All of the theorists reviewed have attempted to integrate and to articulate a wide range of factors that influence women's occupational choices, aspirations, and patterns of career development. A review of the women's career development theories revealed a clear gap in understanding how women become successful in their occupations. The theories reviewed do not adequately address the dynamic, interpersonal process involved in women's occupational success. The dynamic and process oriented components of women's occupational success are notably lacking in these theories.

In addition, what is consistently lacking is the experiences of lesbians, whose occupational experiences may be quite different than those of heterosexual women. As well, the focus of research has been limited to women who are White, upper or middle class, and college and high school students, failing to include the experiences of more diverse women and women who are well established in their careers. This lack of attention to the work experiences of lesbians suggests that the experiences of lesbians can be subsumed under the study of heterosexual women (Morgan & Brown, 1991). This position overlooks the potential differences between the personal and occupational experiences of lesbian and heterosexual women and differences in career development, career counselling needs, and consequently the occupational paths that lead to success for lesbians. Thus, the influence of being a lesbian on the development of occupational success is important to explore in order to present theories and models that accurately reflect the experiences of lesbians.

To date, women's career development theories have inadequately explained the role of structural (e.g., discrimination) and cultural factors (e.g., homophobia) that may contribute to the occupational success of lesbians (Fitzgerald & Betz, 1994). This has limited our
understanding of lesbians and the unique factors that have contributed to their occupational success. It is clear that exploratory work is needed that will lead to theorizing that is developed from lesbians’ experiences of structural and cultural obstacles throughout their work lives and how they have managed to attain occupational success despite these obstacles.

Factors Affecting Lesbian Occupational Success

The empirical research on the occupational success of lesbians is scant despite the fact that gays and lesbians constitute approximately 10% of the population. Various researchers and social scientists have reported estimates on the number of people who self-identify as gay or lesbian. Fassinger (1991) suggested 10% to 15% of the American population may be gay or lesbian. Reis (1990) reported Canadian statistics ranging from 4% to 10%, although most consensus endorse 10%. Croteau (1996) identified three important variables that have been the focus of previous research on the career development of gay and lesbian people: (a) discrimination, (b) the degree of openness about being gay or lesbian, and (c) coping strategies for concealment or openness. I briefly review empirical investigations that focus on these issues and critique them within the context of the present study’s aim to understand the process of lesbians achieving occupational success. A review of the research to date on lesbian career development illustrates the importance of recognizing the structural and cultural factors that affect lesbian career experiences and therefore the development of models that include these critical factors. Additionally, women’s career development theories do not focus on women’s occupational success and I address this gap by focusing on factors that contribute to the process of lesbians attaining occupational success.
Discrimination in the Workplace

Employment discrimination against lesbians is mostly anecdotal, the source of which is courtroom testimony, personal accounts, and general psychological reports on lesbian life (Darty & Potter, 1984). These sources of information indicate that lesbians fear job discrimination. Morgan and Brown (1991) noted that gays and lesbians by virtue of oppression, discrimination, and violence by majority groups are afforded minority group status. Furthermore, lesbians also experience the effects of gender-based employment discrimination and face at least double minority status—as women and other potential minority status groups (i.e., race/ethnicity, physical disability, or age).

Casswell (1996) summarized the findings of a Canadian survey concerning harassment and discrimination against lesbians and gays in the workplace. Findings indicated “that because of their sexual orientation, 20% of the survey’s respondents believed at one time in their careers that they had not been hired, 20% believed that they had not been promoted, and 20% believed that they had been fired” (Caswell, 1996, p. 171). The results also indicated that lesbians faced slightly more discrimination than gay men. The survey indicated that an alarming 63% of gay men and 80% of lesbians feared future discrimination in the workplace. By exploring the occupational experiences of successful lesbians, we may come to a better understanding of how these women are able to deal with the effects of discrimination or the fear of discrimination and attain success in their occupations.

Woods and Harbeck (1992) examined the work experiences of 12 lesbian physical educators who ranged in age from 25 to 50 years old. They employed a phenomenological interviewing technique that consisted of three, in-depth open-ended interviews. The goal was to have participants reconstruct their work experiences in relation to their identities as
lesbians and teachers and reflect upon its meaning. All of the teachers lived and worked in the United States and seven of the teachers were employed in suburban schools, three taught in rural settings, and two worked in urban schools. Eleven of the participants were White, one was Black, and the majority of participants described themselves as coming from middle class backgrounds. Findings indicated that all participants believed they would lose their job if their lesbianism was known, and that they were frequently negatively stereotyped as lesbians.

Similarly, Squires and Sparkes (1996) examined the lives of five lesbian physical education teachers at different stages in their careers by employing a life history approach. Participants ages ranged from early 20s to late 40s. All of the participants were White and described themselves as coming from middle class backgrounds. Three participants were employed in suburban secondary schools, one taught in a rural secondary school, and the other in a rural middle school. Squires and Sparkes found that all five participants experienced heterosexism and homophobia in ways that negatively influenced their relationships with colleagues and students (e.g., keeping a distance). Participants often reported a denial of self and an enforced split between their private and public lives. These women felt constantly like they were under surveillance and were conscious of being assessed from the vantage point of heterosexuality, and therefore edited their conversations with teachers and students so as not to reveal their lesbian identity. Therefore, the teachers all felt they were denied the freedom to interact in public without having to hide their sexual identity, and construct their school lives to the prescribed script of assumed heterosexuality. These two investigations are limited by their narrow focus on middle-class physical
educators, are mostly descriptive in nature, and focus on the negative consequences of being a lesbian in the workplace.

Ellis (1996) reviewed sexual identity issues in the workplace and claimed that issues for gays and lesbians have remained constant over the past 20 years. He suggested that early academic writing focused on discrimination in the workplace, whereas recent investigations document increased violence and discrimination. A consequence of this discrimination has been an increase in the number of private and public institutions that have modified existing discrimination clauses to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation. A question that arises from the work of Ellis that raises an issue worth exploring with successful lesbians is, “To what extent does workplace protection for lesbians that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation affect occupational success?”

From Croteau’s (1996) review of the methodology and content of nine published studies on the workplace experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people (N = 1068), he concluded that discrimination is pervasive in the work experiences of this population, despite the methodological inadequacies (i.e., sampling, data analysis) of the few empirical investigations that exist. Croteau found that discrimination was evident in all nine studies and establishes the pervasiveness of discrimination experienced by gay, lesbian, and bisexual people in the workplace. Of note, the majority of participants were lesbians (approximately 700). Croteau identified three specific types of discrimination: (a) formal (e.g., fired due to sexual orientation; passed over for promotions; policies that exclude same-sex partners); (b) informal (e.g., harassment, loss of credibility, lack of acceptance due to sexual orientation); and (c) fear of discrimination (e.g., anticipated discrimination if sexual orientation found out).
Being Out in the Workplace

In the present study, the term being out or coming out in the workplace was considered both an event and a process. Each time a lesbian decides to disclose her sexual identity to another person it is a specific event. However, the process of coming out is an ongoing process where lesbians must continually choose when and who to reveal their sexual identity to. Several studies have focused on the issue of being out at work (Ellis & Riggle, 1995; Griffin, 1992; Schneider, 1987; Squires & Sparkes, 1996; Waldo & Kemp, 1997; Woods & Harbeck, 1992). Schneider defines the coming out process as one that “focuses on the decisions and consequences of public disclosure of an affirmed sexual identity” (p. 465). Boatwright, Gilbert, Forrest, and Ketzenberger (1996) define coming out as, “recognizing and acknowledging to one’s self emotional and sexual attraction to an individual(s) of the same sex, along with telling others about identifying as lesbian” (p. 214). A phenomenon often referred to as “being in the closet” (Kingdon, 1979) infers a decision to remain silent and to keep one’s sexual identity a secret.

Ellis and Riggle (1995) assessed the relation between openness about one’s sexual orientation in the workplace and job satisfaction among lesbian and gay people. One hundred and sixty-four gay (N = 73) and lesbian (N = 91) individuals who were chorus group members ranging from 21 to 59 years of age and living in California or Indiana participated in this study. Participants’ responses to the Job Descriptive Index (Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1969) indicated that overall there was a strong relationship between openness about their sexual orientation and job satisfaction. More specifically, lesbians’ and gay males’ satisfaction with co-workers was associated with openness in the workplace. Findings also indicated that individuals who were less open were found to be more satisfied with their
salaries and tended to make more money than those who were completely out. Ellis and Riggle contend that it may be more difficult to be out in many higher-paying professions.

Griffin (1992) investigated the experiences of 13 lesbian ($N = 7$) and gay ($N = 6$) educators, between the ages of 36 and 45, representing nine school districts in Massachusetts, with the purpose of empowering them through collective reflection and action. Overall, participants’ stories revealed professional lives “filled with daily decisions about how much of one’s self to reveal or conceal, driven by an underlying tension between a fear of accusation and a quest for integrity and integration” (p. 183). Griffin found that gay and lesbian teachers felt they could be more productive and effective if they did not have to expend energy attempting to conceal their sexual identity. In Griffin’s study, none of the teachers were publicly out at school yet all of them reported that they were not completely closeted. Similarly, studies that have examined the lives of lesbian physical educators (Squires & Sparkes, 1996; Woods & Harbeck, 1992) found that none of the teachers in their studies were totally out at work, yet all of the teachers reported disclosing their sexual identity to at least one colleague or student. All of these qualitative studies are descriptive in nature and limited by their lack of sample diversity, being restricted to middle class educators. These studies failed to examine the coming out process in relation to occupational success.

Khayatt (1992) explored the experiences of 19 Canadian lesbian teachers and their disposition not to reveal their sexual orientation. Her ethnographic study followed the lives of lesbian teachers in the context of the early to middle 1980s. Khayatt addressed the historical, ideological, political, and social contexts that influenced how lesbian teachers managed their sexual identity within the context of the school, the classroom, and the community. Khayatt
concluded that these Ontario lesbian teachers felt they could not come out at work and they perceived a prevailing tolerance if they did not "rock the boat." In addition, participants described strategies they employed to separate their personal and work lives that contributed to their invisibility as lesbians (e.g., denial, lying, passing, avoiding social interaction, distancing).

Croteau (1996) found, in his integrative review on the work experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, a wide variation of concealment versus openness across workers. For example, one of the studies he reviewed sampled 228 lesbian workers among various occupations and found that 29% were not open at all, 32% were somewhat open, 23% were mostly open, and 16% totally open (Schneider, 1986). Fassinger's (1996) review of lesbians in the workplace revealed wide variation in relation to the degree of concealment or openness of lesbian identity in the workplace. She identified the factors that contribute to lesbians' degree of openness in the workplace (e.g., work environment, geographic location). Fassinger (1995b) suggested that work environments range from gay-friendly to homophobic settings and thus environment is a large determinant of self-disclosure, regardless of personal comfort with lesbian identity. In addition, geographic location appears to be a critical factor, with large urban areas fostering greater attitudinal tolerance as well as wider career choice and greater opportunities to locate a supportive environment. Schneider's (1987) investigation of the factors that facilitate coming out at work indicated that a lesbian's decision is influenced by risk factors (e.g., income and working with children), socioemotional climate variables (e.g., gender structure and human service work), and previous loss of job due to disclosure.

Jordan and Deluty (1998) investigated relations between 499 lesbians' disclosure of their lesbian identity and psychological adjustment. The women responded to a questionnaire
assessing their level of disclosure, sources of social support, forms of socializing, selfdescription of sexual orientation, and length of self-identification as a lesbian. Findings suggested that the more widely a woman disclosed her lesbian orientation the less anxiety, more positive affectivity, and greater self-esteem she reported. The degree of disclosure (i.e., to family, gay and lesbian friends, straight friends, co-workers) was related to overall level of social support, with those who more widely disclosed having greater levels of support. In addition, they found that participants who more widely disclosed had a larger percentage of lesbian friends and were more involved in the gay and lesbian community.

Morrow, Campbell, and Beckstead (1995) investigated the impact of invisibility and silence on the career development of 15 lesbian and bisexual women who represented a variety of occupations (e.g., teacher, therapist, auto repair, clown) living in or near San Francisco (9 participants) and Salt Lake City (6 participants). The results of this investigation illustrated that for most of these women, they were dissatisfied with remaining hidden in the closet and had a desire to become more and more open about their lesbian identities at work. They also found that the more open participants were in their workplaces, the happier they felt with their level of openness. Participants emphasized the importance of being themselves, telling the truth, and thus being true to themselves in the workplace.

In summary, it is clear from the existing literature that the decision to be open or conceal one's sexual identity is a complex issue that involves calculation of the risks (e.g., discrimination) involved in disclosure. Questions that may facilitate a deeper understanding of the coming out process in relation to occupational success include, "Have lesbians changed jobs or moved to geographic regions that are perceived as gay friendly environments
in order to attain success? What has prevented lesbians from coming out at particular career points? What are the benefits of coming out at work?"

**Coping with a Lesbian Identity in the Workplace**

Gay or lesbian individuals who choose to conceal their sexual identity often employ coping strategies that help maintain their invisibility in the workplace. Similarly, individuals must cope with the consequences of choosing to come out at work. Empirical investigations have focused primarily on coping strategies lesbians and gays employ at work because of the negative status ascribed to being lesbian or gay (Cody & Welch, 1997; Hall, 1986; Shachar & Gilbert, 1983; Waldo & Kemp, 1997).

Shachar and Gilbert (1983) investigated salient areas of interrole and intrarole conflict reported by 79 working lesbians and their perceptions of whether being lesbian influenced their experience of interrole and intrarole conflicts. Interrole conflict was described as difficulty in meeting the perceived demands for two or more roles. Intrarole conflict was described as difficulty in meeting perceived demands from others regarding behavior within a particular role. Participants were on a mailing list of a local lesbian newsletter and also included the friendship network of one of the investigators. They ranged in age from 21 to 58 and were primarily White and well educated. A research questionnaire was mailed to 220 women with a return rate of 30%. It was hypothesized that participants using coping strategy Types I and II would report less stress due to role conflict and greater satisfaction with coping than would participants using Type III. Coping strategies were based on Hall’s (1972) model of conflict resolution. Type I coping is referred to as structural role redefinition where the individual deals directly with those communicating demands or expectations for the role to negotiate a mutually satisfying set of role expectations. Type II coping involves
changing one's own perceptions of roles and role demands rather than changing the external environment or role context and is referred to as personal role redefinition. Type III coping is referred to as reactive behavior and assumes that role demands are unchangeable and admits, denies, or tries to meet all role demands. Coping strategies were assessed by asking participants to respond to the question, "How would you describe how you have dealt with this conflict?" (p. 248).

To determine interrole conflict participants were asked, "What do you consider to be the most important pair of roles for which you have in the past or currently experience conflict?" (Schachar & Gilbert, 1983, p.248). Participants identified these roles and described the conflict, rating the three role-conflict items on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (i.e., not at all) to 6 (i.e., very). Directional hypotheses were tested by one-tailed t-tests. The most frequently reported interrole conflict (41%) was between the work and lover roles (e.g., allocation of time and energy to both roles), however participants indicated that this interrole conflict occurred independently of one's lesbianism. The most frequently reported intrarole conflicts involved work (e.g., feeling socially unacceptable in a heterosexual environment) and daughter roles (e.g., fathers preferring daughter to be heterosexual). Participants felt being lesbian contributed little to their interrole conflicts and employed predominantly role restructuring strategies (Types I and II coping) to deal with conflicts.

In contrast, participants viewed their lesbianism as highly related to their intrarole conflicts and used reactive strategies (Type III coping) to deal with conflict almost as frequently as role restructuring strategies. For example, they felt that being identified as a lesbian would jeopardize one's job security and career development. Participants who chose Type III strategies for intrarole conflict reported that they either could not see any way to
deal with the situation or they avoided the conflict. Therefore, a lesbian may find herself in a no-win situation with regard to employers’ or parents’ expectations. Choosing a Type I strategy (e.g., disclosing her lesbianism) may be too great a risk (e.g., loss of employment or affection), and thus a Type III strategy may be chosen. This coping strategy may not be the most personally satisfying choice, however, it may prove to be the most effective choice politically. Overall, participants viewed their intrarole conflict as quite stressful ($M = 4.61$) and their lesbianism as contributing substantially to the conflict ($M = 4.61$). Satisfaction with coping was moderate ($M = 3.56$), measured on a six-point scale answering the question, “How satisfied are you with the way you dealt with this conflict?”

Hall (1986) employed semi-structured interviews in her phenomenological study to investigate the work experience of 13 lesbians employed by large corporations. Participants were between the ages of 27 and 40 and all worked in corporations employing more than 100 people. Of the 13 interviewed, 31% held lower or middle management positions; 23% had clerical jobs; 8% were in sales, and 8% were in personnel. Interview questions were open-ended and designed to evoke the ways in which participants experienced their lesbianism at work. Strategies used to manage being a lesbian in a largely White, heterosexual, male corporation frequently included deception (e.g., withholding information, passing). Other strategies employed included: denial and dissociation, avoidance, distraction, and token disclosure. A limitation of this study is that themes are integrated into a descriptive statement of the lesbians’ experiences. What is missing is a set of well-developed categories that are related through statements of relationship to begin to form a theoretical framework that helps explain lesbians’ experience of coping in the workplace and attaining occupational success.
Woods and Harbeck (1992) found that lesbian physical educators \( (N = 12) \) in the United States engaged in a number of identity management strategies in an attempt to conceal their lesbianism. Coping strategies most often employed included passing as heterosexual, self-distancing from others at school, and self-distancing from gay issues. Participants frequently adopted strategies that misled their colleagues and students into believing that they were heterosexual. For example, participants described changing pronouns and names of lovers from female to male in order to conceal their lesbian identity. Self-distancing was employed as a strategy to avoid interactions with colleagues and students that may require the sharing of personal information. Active avoidance of communication was a consequence of using this strategy. By self-distancing from gay issues (e.g., homophobic comments, AIDS education) the teachers believed they could conceal their lesbian identities. Overall, the strategies employed by the teachers to conceal their lesbianism reflected the division between their personal identities as lesbians and their professional identities as teachers.

In Griffin’s (1992) qualitative investigation of the work experiences of seven lesbian and six gay educators, participants described many strategies used to prevent colleagues and students from knowing their sexual identity. The strategies all involved careful planning and preparation on how to respond to direct confrontations and regulating how much information they were willing to share with colleagues and students. All participants were aware of maintaining a separation between their lesbian/gay identity and their professional identity and having to establish themselves as competent teachers in the hopes of limiting the negative effects of being publicly accused of being gay or lesbian. Specific strategies aimed at managing their gay or lesbian identities included: (a) passing as heterosexual, (b) covering (i.e., omitting information or censoring what they shared), (c) being implicitly out (i.e.,
honest sharing about one’s personal life without self-identifying as lesbian or gay), and (d) being explicitly out (i.e., disclosing their gay or lesbian identity to selected few at school).

This study, similar to the previous ones described, contributed important descriptions of the coping strategies used by lesbian and gay educators in order to conceal their lesbian identities at work. Consistent among all of the studies reviewed is identification of coping strategies employed by lesbians to deal with the negative status attributed to being a lesbian. The studies reviewed do not examine coping resources and their potential negative or positive influence on lesbians’ decisions to come out at work or to remain closeted, in relation to attaining occupational success. To address the limitations of the studies reviewed, in the present study, I employ the grounded theory method to examine lesbians’ experiences of success from a broad spectrum of occupations and diverse work environments. By building variation into this study and sampling environments and successful lesbians that represent differences in the properties of emerging concepts (e.g., being out or not out at work, gay friendly environment), the findings of this study contribute to understanding the complex process involved in attaining occupational success.

In summary, lesbians’ decisions to be out at work is an ongoing, dynamic process that involves careful planning, strategizing, and deciding how much of one’s lesbian identity to reveal. The strategies range from silence and invisibility or passing as heterosexual to disclosing one’s lesbian identity in the workplace (Croteau, 1996; Fassinger, 1996). There is some evidence that lesbians who choose to come out experience self-integrity, less fear, and an integration between personal and professional aspects of the self (Croteau, 1996). Some lesbians struggle with the decision to reveal their lesbianism at work. Lesbian’s coping strategies reveal the complexity of this choice and the high risks involved in disclosure in the
workplace. The present study may identify coping resources that have facilitated lesbians’ occupational success.

Gay and Lesbian Identity Development

Overall, the research indicates that managing one’s lesbian identity at work is a complex, essential career task that may have a profound influence on the careers of lesbians (Boatwright et al., 1996). Similarly, the process of sexual identity development may have a direct impact on the occupational success of lesbians. Gay and lesbian identity development is a complex process that can begin at any time during the lifespan (Cass, 1979). This aspect of lesbian lives becomes a complicating factor potentially influencing lesbian career development and success in a variety of ways. Several models (e.g., Levine, 1997; Sophie, 1986) of gay and lesbian identity development have been proposed that recognize a number of stages (e.g., recognizing, accepting, and affirming) of gay sexual identity development.

Cass (1979) proposed a model of gay and lesbian identity development for men and women and suggests that identity is acquired through a developmental process and that locus for, stability of, and change in behavior is a result of the interaction that occurs between individuals and their environments. Cass suggested that individuals move through six stages to fully integrate the identity of gay or lesbian into the overall concept of self. Cass assumed an individual can accept being gay or lesbian as a positively valued status. She hypothesized that movement from one stage to another is motivated by the incongruency that exists in the person’s environment and is the result of assigning meaning to a person’s feelings, thoughts, or behaviors. Change will occur when the person attempts to resolve the inconsistency between perception of self and others. The length of time necessary to progress through the stages and strategies employed to deal with issues that arise within stages vary from person to
person. Within the model it is possible that identity foreclosure can occur at any time whereby the individual may choose not to develop further. Finally, the model specifies an interactionist process of gay and lesbian identity development as well as the importance of psychological and social factors.

According to Cass (1979) the first stage of gay or lesbian identity development is called identity confusion. This stage is characterized by feelings of turmoil and confusion about one’s sexual identity. The process begins as the individual recognizes one’s behavior may be called gay or lesbian. This realization presents an incongruent element into a previously stable situation. The individual’s perception of this behavior conflicts with one’s view of one’s heterosexuality, and, as well, with the view that others hold of the person and the person’s heterosexuality. Cass suggests that attempts to resolve this incongruence may force the individual into stage two of identity formation. However, the individual may also choose to inhibit the behavior labeled as gay or lesbian or they may cognitively restructure the behavior or the meaning of the behavior.

Stage two of Cass’s (1979) model is referred to as identity comparison and is characterized by feelings of alienation and isolation as the individual accepts the possibility of being gay or lesbian. Because of this tentative commitment to a gay or lesbian self there is an increase in incongruency in the individual’s life. The turmoil and confusion of stage one is reduced; however, in stage two, the task of dealing with social alienation arises. At this stage the individual must find new meanings for life as the continuity between past, present, and future, which was based on heterosexuality, is now gone.

Stage three is called identity tolerance and is characterized by feelings of ambivalence in which one maintains separate public and private self-images and begins to seek out other
gay and lesbian people (Cass, 1979). The individual moves towards acknowledging social, emotional, and sexual needs and by the end of stage three is able to acknowledge one’s gay or lesbian self-identity.

In stage four, identity acceptance predominates. This stage is characterized by the individual selectively self-disclosing their gay or lesbian identity. Acceptance versus tolerance of a gay or lesbian identity is central in this stage as the individual develops positive attitudes towards the gay or lesbian self.

Some individuals will move on to stage five and develop identity pride, a stage characterized by feelings of both pride and anger. The individual becomes immersed in the gay subculture. Although the individual’s social circles increase in the gay and lesbian community, a sense of alienation still exists within society, and the feelings the person may experience range from confidence and pride to anger. Identity foreclosure may occur if the individual perceives consistent negative reaction from others, but if this does not occur, stage six will be necessary to deal with the final phase of incongruency (Cass, 1979).

Stage six involves identity synthesis and is characterized by clarity and acceptance as the individual accepts one’s gay or lesbian identity as one aspect of their personal identity (Cass, 1979). The individual feels integrated and comfortable living life as a gay or lesbian person and no longer needs to hide for fear of rejection or negative feedback. Focus can now be distributed equally on all life tasks, rather than expending an extraordinary amount of energy concealing sexual identity. Consequently, the individual feels more satisfied and whole as a person. There may be a huge reduction of incongruency at this stage, however feelings of pride and wholeness are mixed with feelings of anger as the individual must still deal with a largely homophobic society. In this final stage, the person’s personal and public
sexual identities become synthesized into one image of self that receives considerable support from the person's environment that now includes gay, lesbian, and heterosexual social circles.

The process of lesbian identity development is a complex process that potentially could affect the occupational success of lesbians. However, linear models, such as Cass's (1979) may be inadequate at fully describing lesbian identity development. For example, this model fails to address the possibility that lesbian identity development is not a linear process. It may be that the order and timing of lesbian identity development varies for women, depending on their unique circumstances (e.g., gay friendly work environment, love and support). Because the recognition of being a lesbian can occur at any point in the life of a woman, it may limit her occupational choices and ultimate success due to a fear of entering certain fields. In contrast, a woman who realizes she is lesbian later in life may find herself well established in her career and experience occupational disruptions and delays as she focuses her energies on exploring and accepting her lesbian identity. Women who have not reached stage six and thus have not completely accepted their lesbian identity may feel confused and angry and this may be reflected in their work and consequently their lack of occupational success. Thus, the effects of lesbian identity development on occupational success requires further research in order to more fully understand this complex process.

In a study by Levine (1997), the fit of Cass's (1979) model of gay identity development in measuring and describing lesbian identity development was examined with a sample of 118 lesbians. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 56 years, with a mean age of 31.4 years and either identified themselves as lesbians or were questioning their sexual orientation. Most of the participants were Caucasian (86%), followed by 3% Native
American, 3% African American, and 2% Hispanic. The participants were generally well-educated (e.g., 45% had advanced degrees) and professional women. Less than 10% of the women sampled worked in an occupation that could be categorized as skilled or unskilled labor, or were unemployed.

Instruments used included a demographic questionnaire, the Self Identity Questionnaire (Brady, 1983), a Stage Allocation Measure (Cass, 1984), and the Tennessee Self Concept Scale (Fitts, 1964). Results of this study supported Cass’s model, suggesting participants progressed through key developmental tasks in the order predicted by Cass, using a Kendall coefficient of concordance (Levine, 1997). A limitation of this study is that only nine participants fell into the first three stages of development, thus the study assessed late identity development rather than the full developmental process and the majority of the participants were White middle class.

Sophie (1986) developed and tested a theory of lesbian identity formation based on a synthesis of six models of lesbian and gay identity development, including Cass’s (1979) model. She tested her model with 14 women experiencing confusion about their sexual orientation, through repeated structured interviews. Interviews were transcribed and served as the basis for analysis. Data were quantified whenever possible to facilitate comparison and content analyses of qualitative data allowed further quantification of some of the results. Each individual’s data were analyzed as a whole in order to determine the degree to which the stage theories applied. Results supported the general stage theory to a large degree, however, order and timing of events varied among women. Sophie concluded that linear models may be useful in describing early stages of identity development, however, in the later stages much variety in order and timing of events was found making linear models
inadequate. She also suggested that the process of lesbian identity development must be viewed in the context of current social and historical conditions. For example, women who had sources of support and experienced positive attitudes toward their lesbianism found it easier to accept and develop a positive lesbian identity.

Criticism of lesbian identity development models, including Cass's (1979) model, is that they do not address differences between men and women. Several models have been developed based on the experiences of gay men and then generalized to lesbians (Fassinger, 1995b). For example, Cass's (1979) model does not account for influences on women's development such as gender role socialization, the repression of sexual desire, the impact of feminism, and the role of mothering. These factors contribute to a potentially unique context for the development of a lesbian identity. It is apparent that models of lesbian identity development have not sufficiently and accurately considered social and cultural context in capturing the process of lesbian identity development. As well, models are limited in that they have not considered the effects of lesbian identity development on attaining occupational success. The context of lesbians' lives need to be considered to appreciate the unique conditions that facilitate lesbian identity development and the complex consequences in occupational success.

McCarn and Fassinger (1996) propose a model of lesbian identity formation that considers issues unique to women and includes the repression of sexual desire, the interrelationship of intimacy and autonomy, and the recent availability of reinforcement for nontraditional role behavior. Furthermore, their model clearly distinguishes between the two processes of personal development of same-sex orientation (i.e., accepting lesbian identity) and redefinition of group membership and group meaning (i.e., being part of the gay and
lesbian community). They propose a four-phase model with two parallel branches that are reciprocal and mutually catalytic, but not necessarily simultaneous. They use the term phases rather than stages because of the greater flexibility implied in the process (e.g., continuous and circular). In addition, the model is based on racial/ethnic minority identity literature and current conceptions of women's identity and gender influences in the coming out process. Their model reflects the self-definition of homoerotic desire (i.e., same-sex attraction) in terms of a relational identity. The model does not assume disclosure of lesbian identity to others as evidence of developmental advancement because disclosure is profoundly affected by environmental oppression.

McCarn and Fassinger's (1996) model consisted of four phases that occur separately in both individual sexual identity development and group membership identity development. The phases included awareness, exploration, deepening/commitment, and internalization/synthesis. The individual sexual identity development focused on the internal process of clarifying and incorporating same-sex emotional and sexual desires. The group membership identity development consisted of addressing social attitudes toward those desires and the tasks of self and group labeling. This aspect of the model is similar to racial/ethnic identity models as a woman begins to identify herself as a member of a minority reference group. Both branches of the model emerge as a result of nonawareness of homoerotic preference and socialized ideologies regarding sexual norms. Each individual's nonawareness is very specific and may range from total ignorance to strong antigay beliefs and consequently will shape the process of group identification uniquely for each woman. It is assumed that socialized heterosexism and homophobia will have occurred, and the process of group identification will involve the unlearning of both.
In summary, McCarn and Fassinger (1996) propose a heuristically useful new model of lesbian identity formation that is intended to be inclusive of the variety of diverse paths one may take to being comfortable and integrated as a lesbian. The model addresses the complexity of developing both self-acceptance and comfortable group membership for lesbians. The authors separate the individual experience from the gay and lesbian community experience to purposely remove the pressure and politicization applied to the individual that is prevalent in previous models of gay and lesbian identity development. Strengths of the McCarn and Fassinger model is their attempt to be broadly inclusive of the diverse paths women may take to integrate a lesbian identity.

In a recent investigation, Boatwright et al. (1996) interviewed 10 self-identified lesbian women ranging in age from 30 to 45 years about their recollections of forming a lesbian identity and the impact it had on their career paths. Nine of the participants were White and one was African American. Participants education levels ranged from a high school graduate to Ph.D. Occupations varied, including a counsellor, attorney, university professor, legal advocate, substitute teacher, surveyor, printer, physical therapist, massage therapist, and two full-time doctoral students. The participants were a convenience sample drawn from a friendship network and were asked to participate in a study to examine issues related to coming out and career development. The average age of self-identification as a lesbian was 23.5 years (three women in their teens, four in their 20s, and three in their 30s). The interviews focused on the timing of their coming out, whether their lesbian identity development helped or hindered their career trajectory, the effects of external and internalized homophobia on their career paths, and whether their connections with a lesbian community helped or hindered their career development.
Qualitative analysis was used to identify categories by utilizing matrices of themes that emerged from interviewees’ responses to individual questions (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Results suggested that the women experienced a “second adolescence” (p. 217) in the process of developing a lesbian identity. All 10 women described experiences of identity confusion and some sort of struggle to integrate their new identities as lesbians. Boatwright et al. concluded that the time when women are attempting to integrate their lesbian identity is often demanding and, “tends to lead to educational and career delays, disruptions, and derailments that may cause lesbian women to fall behind same-age peers or age-appropriate expectations” (Boatwright et al., p. 223). Finally, participants indicated that their connections with other lesbians provided a positive influence on their careers.

...not only did they describe developing important skills (e.g., leadership, advocacy, communication in conflict) in lesbian groups that they used later in their work environments, they also described benefits from the support, connections, and referrals from being an integral part of a community of lesbian women. (p. 225)

Lesbian identity development is an important factor that may affect lesbians’ occupational experiences and success. It is still not clear the extent to which lesbian identity development influences the occupational paths leading to success for lesbians. In the present study, I address this factor by exploring the role lesbian identity development may have in occupational success, and the role social support plays in occupational success.

Women’s Identity Development

The gay and lesbian identity development models reviewed neglect to address the influence of women’s identity development on the lesbian identity development process. The only exception is McCarn and Fassinger (1996) who proposed an inclusive model of lesbian identity formation that is derived from the literature on racial minorities and women’s
identity development. They suggested that the process of racial/ethnic minority development is similar to the process of sexual minority identity development. For example, both processes involve moving the reality of the experience of oppression from unconsciousness to consciousness, followed by addressing the issues raised by a changed awareness of oppression. In the following section, three women's identity development models are critiqued in relation to their contribution to McCarn and Fassinger's model of lesbian identity formation and its relevance to the present investigation.

Peck (1986) proposed a model of women's self-definition that describes a dialectical relationship among the many forces in a women's life that shape her identity, rather than a series of stages or tasks that linear models describe. Peck's model addresses gaps identified by Gilligan (1977, 1982) and Jean Baker Miller (1976), who emphasized the need to study adulthood in a way that reflects the realities of woman's experience and more specifically focuses on the role of relationships and attachment in women's adult lives. The model considers the effects of sociohistorical time, with a feminist approach that emphasizes the importance of relationships and caring, leading to an emerging core self-definition. The sociohistorical dimension is perceived as the social, emotional, and political context within which a woman defines herself at any given point in time. Peck refers to the sphere of influence consisting of the sum of the relationships a woman is involved in that include spouse/lover, children, family of origin, friends, and work. A woman's identification with a particular group (e.g., lesbian) plays a central role in her self-definition in this model. The process of self-definition is portrayed as occurring in a constant spiraling motion. This suggests that a woman must constantly monitor her own growth and change and its influence on the relationships she values. There is a need to modulate personal growth against possible
negative effects upon key relationships in the process of self-definition. Within this framework a woman’s relationships can either foster or impede the clarity and certainty within which self-knowledge may develop. Self-definition is described as an internal knowledge of oneself in the world, a knowledge gained through connectedness, not through separateness. Peck’s model contributes to lesbian identity development by highlighting the interplay of external and internal forces. For example, a particular sociohistorical time defines the context for establishment of an oppressed identity, and depending on the flexibility or rigidity in relationships, the determination of a lesbian identity that is embraced or repressed. In the present study, external and internal forces that influence lesbians’ occupational success are explored. For example, have the women in this study changed jobs or geographic location because of their sexual orientation? In addition, how have relationships impacted their careers?

Downing and Roush (1985) presented a model of feminist identity development for women that is based on Cross’s (1971) theory of Black identity development. The model consisted of five stages: passive acceptance of discrimination against women; revelation of contradictions being avoided; embeddedness-emmanation (i.e., the beginnings of an openness to alternative viewpoints and to a more relativistic versus dualistic perspective) in close connection with other women and caution with men; synthesis of positive aspects of womanhood, gender role transcendence, and evaluation of men individually; and commitment to a role-transcendent future through personal action. The model is based on the premise that women must first acknowledge, then struggle with, and repeatedly work through their feelings regarding the prejudice and discrimination they experience as women in order to achieve a positive feminist identity. This model is useful in understanding lesbian identity
development because of its attention to the uniquely intimate relations between subordinate and dominant group members that exist for lesbians in relation to heterosexual family members. In addition, this model emphasized political identity change, suggesting that it may be easier for feminist than nonfeminist women to develop lesbian identities because of the valuing of woman-identified choices. Thus, it may be important to explore the influence of a feminist identity on lesbians' occupational success, and the role of subordinate and dominant group members (e.g., heterosexual colleagues) in lesbians' lives.

A similar model is proposed by Ossana, Helms, and Leonard (1992) that is also based on Cross's (1971) theory, and focused on the development of “womanist” identity, defined as movement from external to internal standards of gender identity. In contrast to the Downing and Roush (1985) model, this model does not emphasize a feminist political orientation. The four stages of the model are: (a) pre-encounter, where a woman conforms to societal views about gender and a constricted view of women's roles; (b) encounter, a time when a woman begins to question the accepted values and beliefs; (c) immersion-emersion, a period of active rejection of male-supremacist definitions of womanhood and a searching for a positive, self-affirming definition of womanhood coupled with intense affiliation with women; and finally (d) internalization, when a woman incorporates a positive definition of womanhood based on personal attributes into her identity and is not bound by external definitions of womanhood. Employing a measure of womanist identity attitudes, Ossana, Helms, and Leonard found relationships among womanist identity, self-esteem, and environmental gender bias in a study of 659 undergraduate college women, suggesting the usefulness of the model in empirical studies, particularly as a conceptual alternative to more politicized notions of women's development.
A strength of these theories of women's identity development is that previously devalued qualities of women (e.g., caring, relating, nurturing) are valued and women's experiences and process of development are understood in their unique, complex way. These theories help understand how women challenge traditional patterns of socialization. However, a limitation in these theories is that they do not fully consider the sociocultural context. The theories are based on the experiences of White, middle-class, heterosexual women and neglect to consider the diversity of women and the effects of class, race, culture, and sexual orientation on women's identity development. To date, little is known about lesbians' experiences of identity development compared with experiences of heterosexual women in general; particularly, whether the issues lesbians face in developing both a lesbian identity and women's identity influence their occupational success?

**Summary**

Few research studies and no substantive theory have been developed that are specifically focused on lesbian occupational success. Recent attempts to apply lesbian career development to career theory have provided promising descriptive accounts (e.g., Dunkle, 1996; Fassinger, 1996; Mobley & Slaney, 1996; Morrow et al., 1996), however, it is clear the unique issues that lesbians face in the workplace have not been incorporated into traditional or more recent theories of women's career success. The sparse empirical work that has been done has focused on barriers (e.g., discrimination, being out in the workplace, coping strategies in the workplace, lesbian identity development) that may influence the occupational success of lesbians. Notably absent are studies that examined facilitative factors (e.g., support, feminist/political orientation) that may contribute to occupational success. Only one unpublished study (e.g., Hollingsworth et al., 1997) has begun to examine the work
experiences of successful lesbians in order to construct a theoretical model of occupational success for lesbians.

Thus, the purpose of this research is to move beyond description towards theorizing in order to begin to understand the process of how lesbians' attain occupational success. This study is guided by the central research question, “how do lesbians become successful in their occupations?” The resulting description of this process is grounded in the data and developed directly from the interviews and experiences of the participants.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research approaches are suitable for studying understudied populations because of the “discovery orientation” of such methods (Hoshmand, 1989, p.20), and they can be used to make sense of phenomena for which there is very little information (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A qualitative approach, specifically employing the grounded theory method, was appropriate for studying lesbians’ occupational success because very little is known about the process of how lesbians become successful in their occupations.

The overall aim of grounded theory is theory development through the use of specific data gathering and analysis procedures. Moving away from Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) early work, Strauss and Corbin (1998) discuss theory as consisting of description, conceptual ordering, and theorizing, all of which build on one another and culminate in an overarching explanatory scheme. They note that describing involves depicting and telling a story, whereas conceptual ordering involves classifying events and objects along explicitly stated dimensions, without necessarily relating the classifications to one another in order to form the explanatory scheme. Concepts are the building blocks of theory and are named and developed in open coding. After naming concepts, the researcher defines and develops categories (i.e., concepts grouped under a more abstract higher order concept), based on their ability to explain what is going on. Thus a midrange theory is the result of constructing an explanatory scheme that integrates the various categories through statements of relationship.

Pidgeon and Henwood (1997) specify a range of research goals (i.e., taxonomy development, local theoretical reflection, and “fully-fledged theory”) that may be achieved through grounded theory work that is similar to Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) differentiation
between description, conceptual ordering, and theory development. They contend that there are different goals for grounded theory work and that these goals should be determined after considering one's resources, experience, and time constraints. Local theoretical reflection represents an intermediate stage of analysis following initial coding that focuses and localizes theoretical reflection. Local theoretical reflection involves stimulating conceptual development with a limited sub-set of related categories, focusing on defining categories and beginning to understand possible relationships between categories. This is comparable to what Strauss and Corbin refer to as conceptual ordering, a process of organizing data according to properties and dimensions, without necessarily relating these loosely ordered and organized concepts into a larger theoretical framework.

Similar to Pidgeon and Henwood (1997), Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest that many issues need to be considered in order to determine the goal of grounded theory work. For example, accessibility to participants may be limited or difficult. The knowledge and experience of the researcher along with the resources available for comprehensive data gathering and analysis also determine the goals of grounded theory work. Given that my sample size was limited due to accessibility of participants, my limited experience as a grounded theory researcher, the complexity of the phenomenon being investigated, and the ensuing difficulty in selective coding (to be discussed later), the goal of this grounded theory work became conceptual development and ordering (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) rather than developing a substantial explanatory theory. Considering all of these issues, the aim of this study was to explore the work experiences of a diverse sample of successful lesbians, in order to stimulate conceptual development or ordering of the concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) related to lesbians becoming successful in their occupations.
This approach is expected to reveal new concepts and processes in lesbians’ experiences in the workplace. The use of grounded theory method results in the development of concepts that originate in the experiences of lesbians, rather than from the dominant group on whom existing theories are based (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The method allows exploration of the full experience of participants from their own point of view and provides data rich with meaning leading to a description and preliminary conceptual development of the process of how this particular group of lesbians became successful in their occupations. This method of investigation has its roots in the symbolic interaction framework (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934), a framework used to understand social psychological phenomena.

In this chapter, I provide a brief summary of my assumptions of the study, a brief overview of the history of the grounded theory method (i.e., symbolic interactionism), a description of the grounded theory method and the data collection procedures used in this study, and a discussion of the criteria used for judging the rigor of this study.

Assumptions

Ontological assumptions refer to the question: “What is the nature of reality?” Similar to the constructivist beliefs about truth and reality, I believe that there are multiple constructions of social reality and there is no “single truth” or “reality” that can be known. Reality and truth are subjective and the result of perspective (Bruner, 1986; Schwandt, 1994). Therefore, my purpose as a researcher is to understand lesbians’ occupational experiences from their perspective, and to explore and understand meanings that are assigned to the experience of becoming successful in their occupations. Epistemological assumptions refer to the study of the nature of knowledge or what can be known. Epistemological assumptions also refer to the relationship between the researcher and the person being researched. I
assume that the researcher and participant are interrelated and influence one another (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). It became apparent during the interview that each person influenced the communication that occurred. In addition, the participant is the primary “knower” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), and therefore is the expert.

Wuest (1995) suggested that there are some common epistemological underpinnings of feminist theory that are consistent with the grounded theory method. These principles were applied to this study. First, participants are the experts about their unique experiences and their experience present valid data and legitimate sources of knowledge. This is consistent with the basic tenet of symbolic interactionism that reflects respect for a person’s subjective interpretation of social experience as a source of knowledge. Second, Wuest contends that another commonality of feminist epistemology with grounded theory is the contextual and relational nature of knowledge that is developed from the data, which is usually a mix of interview and observational material. Although observational material was not systematically utilized in this study, it did inform the analysis. For example, many of the interviews with participants occurred in their work setting, and thus I was able to observe them in a work context. My reflections and interpretations of observations (e.g., art shows, pride parade) were recorded in my field notes. This focus on contextual influences is evident in the grounded theory method that employs a constant comparative analysis to develop core concepts and address questions about existing social structures. Finally, feminist perspectives, similar to grounded theory method, recognizes that researcher bias influences the research process (i.e., research questions and analysis). Thus, I acknowledge that I did not merely report the viewpoints of the lesbians studied, but had an interpretive role throughout the investigation (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).
Finally, the theoretical underpinning of the grounded theory method is a perspective similar to the feminist perspective that is dynamic and process oriented rather than static and structural (Wuest, 1995). Keddy, Sims, and Noerager Stern (1996) discuss how grounded theory can be used in a creative and constantly evolving manner for feminist research. They suggest that grounded theory allows for complex analysis of complex questions.

Through the process of attending to the data and looking for interactive components, that is, the participant’s symbolic interaction with her familial and social nexus, including what is called the primary investigator, connections can be made among the many themes, culminating in a multifaceted, compact, integrated theory, that rings true to the members (p. 451).

Keddy et al. emphasize the researcher living with the data and revising the analysis by checking in with participants or “allowing our own values, intuitions and hunches to permeate the process” (p. 451), a process that leads to the development of feminist grounded theory. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I immersed myself in the participants’ worlds and experiences. I allowed my own intuitive abilities as well as my discipline in following the grounded theory method to guide follow-up questions with participants and the ensuing development of the concepts related to the process of lesbians becoming successful in their occupations.

Symbolic Interactionism

Blumer (1969) was influenced by the ideas of George Herbert Mead (1934) who laid the foundation for the symbolic interactionist approach to research. Symbolic interactionism is based on three major premises. The first premise states that people act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for the person. Second, meaning is derived from the social interaction the person has with others. Third, an interpretive process is involved in meaning making (Schwandt, 1997). The methodological implications of these
central features of the symbolic interactionist’s view (Blumer) are clearly evident in the grounded theory method and a feminist perspective (Keddy et al., 1996; Wuest, 1995).

Symbolic interactionism as a methodological approach is “designed to yield verifiable knowledge of human group life and conduct” (Blumer, 1969, p. 21). Blumer advocated that the researcher examine the empirical social world, the “world of everyday experience” (p. 35), a world that is unique to various groups of people, that consists of the actions and experiences of people as they are in a variety of situations. The researcher must gain first hand knowledge of the area of social life under study by employing a direct naturalistic examination of the empirical social world in order to know what is going on. Blumer stated that it is only in this way that the researcher can truly understand the meaning experiences have for participants.

Symbolic interactionists view social interaction or group life as a process involving interaction and interpretations by people (Blumer, 1969). The methodological implications of this premise recognize the importance of a formative process involved in social interaction. This fluid process involves people defining and interpreting each other’s actions. Thus, the researcher must determine the form of interaction that is taking place, rather than impose a predetermined form on it. It becomes a focus of discovery rather than being fixed in advance of the investigation.

Symbolic interactionists view social action as “the individual and collective activities of people who are engaged in social interaction” (Blumer, 1969, p.54). By observing social action, categories are derived that enable the researcher to give conceptual order to the social makeup of a group (e.g., successful lesbians). These categories are based on the meaning the participants make and the process employed to construct meaning.
In summary, symbolic interactionism as a methodological approach requires a direct naturalistic examination of the empirical social world, and the procedures associated with symbolic interactionism include extensive exploration and inspection of that empirical social world. Exploration involves the investigation of a sphere of social life in such a way that the direction of inquiry, data, and analysis, remain grounded in the empirical data. The successful researcher in this tradition must be able to shift and adopt new points of observation as the study progresses and move in new directions as more data are uncovered. The focus of the study begins with a very broad perspective that progressively narrows as the investigation proceeds. For example, literature in this tradition focuses on a broad topic (e.g., Richie et al.'s 1997 study of women's career development of high achieving Black and White women) and narrows as the investigation begins to identify important concepts (e.g., stress and coping, coming out).

Inspection or analysis of the empirical social world is flexible, requires creativity and imagination, the freedom to take new directions, and satisfies the basic requirements of an empirical science. These requirements include a direct examination of the empirical social world to gather data and carefully examine it in order to begin to identify relations between categories of data, facilitating the formulation of propositions that lead to a conceptual ordering that is further examined in the empirical data. Thus, symbolic interactionism forms the underpinnings of grounded theory method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998).

Locating the Researcher

The grounded theory method is a process of discovery and is influenced by the researcher. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), the researcher takes an active role in the research process from data collection and analysis to developing and ordering concepts and
writing theory. For example, I collected data through the use of interviews and due to my training in counselling psychology and experience as a therapist, found myself easily establishing rapport with participants. Establishing rapport quickly facilitated the depth of disclosure I received from participants regarding their personal lives and work experiences. Throughout data analysis I continuously compared data, constructed categories, and interpreted and followed hunches about possible connections between categories, leading towards the development and ordering of concepts related to lesbians becoming successful in their occupations. My insider perspective contributed to the generation of deeper, more intimate meanings that might have been uncovered by a heterosexual interviewer.

Being recognized as an out lesbian simplified my ability to gain access to and understand participants as they responded to me personally. However, this insider point of view may also have limited my ability to gain more in-depth explanation. For example, I made assumptions regarding language (e.g., gay friendly, homophobia), symbols (e.g., rainbow flag) and their meanings that were mutually understood by myself and the participant, which may not be as readily accessible to those not immersed in gay and lesbian culture. Consequently, I found myself having to go back to the data or back to participants to gain clearer and more detailed explanations of their stories. Finally, as a lesbian, I found that I was living my analyses (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In addition to the interviews of participants, my own experience became an important component of the analysis as I compared and contrasted my own work experiences with the participants. My own daily living as a lesbian in a gay and lesbian community provided many further opportunities for me to test my emerging hunches with friends, colleagues, and lesbians informally (e.g., coffee shop, dinner parties, lesbian events). These informal conversations offered me the
opportunity of collecting information about others' experiences, but also helped me explore
my own experiences and develop and refine ideas with them. Appendix D provides a further
description of the researcher context, as it is clear my personal experiences, professional
knowledge, and attitudes bring a unique perspective to the study.

Grounded Theory Method

The grounded theory method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was chosen to describe and
develop the concepts related to lesbians become successful in their occupations. Grounded
theory is a comprehensive method of data collection and analytic procedures aimed at
developing concepts and ultimately theory that is grounded in the data and developed directly
from participants' experiences (Charmaz, 1995). In doing so, the grounded theory method is
true to Blumer's (1969) desire to ensure the researcher directly examine the empirical social
world or the world of everyday experience and to the feminist perspective that suggests
women's experiences are legitimate sources of knowledge and therefore allows for their
voices to be heard (Keddy et al., 1996; Wuest, 1995). Data collection, analysis, and
conceptual development are intertwined because as new theoretical concepts are identified
they must be constantly verified by the data. By using the grounded theory method in this
study, I was able to offer insight, understanding, description, and development of concepts
relating to lesbians becoming successful in their occupations; thus, laying the groundwork for
future theorizing.

Symbolic interactionists' use the terms "exploration" (Blumer, 1969, p. 40) and
"inspection" to describe the process of understanding the social world one is investigating.
Exploration requires creative imagination and flexibility, whereas inspection demands careful
and honest probing and an ability to test and recast one's views. Similarly, Strauss and
Corbin (1998) describe grounded theory procedures as both science and art and suggest that a balance between science and art is necessary in order to establish research rigor. This is achieved by grounding analysis in the data (i.e., analysis drives data collection) combined with the creative thinking required for naming categories, asking questions, and making comparisons. Although a set of procedures are involved (e.g., constant comparison, theoretical sensitivity, theoretical questioning, theoretical sampling, concept development), Strauss and Corbin recommend that researchers remain flexible and open, employing procedures creatively rather than being rigid and dogmatic throughout the research process. The procedures are meant to provide the researcher with a set of tools fostering new vision and understanding. I maintained an open, creative perspective by paying attention to the multiple influences on lesbians becoming successful pervasive in our environment. For example, I immersed myself in lesbian literature, lesbian magazines (e.g., Gay Parent Magazine), gay and lesbian newspapers (e.g., Xtra West), live performances (e.g., Vancouver Lesbian choir, art shows, Kiss and Tell), television shows (e.g., Ellen), films (e.g., The Matthew Shepard Story, Better than Chocolate), documentaries (e.g., Fiction and Other Truths: A film about Jane Rule), television news highlights on gays and lesbians (e.g., spousal rights for gay and lesbian parents, 1999), gay pride parades (e.g., Pride 2000), and newspaper articles (e.g., Gay-book sellers win Supreme Court Case, 2000), as a way to gain further insight into gay and lesbian culture, the process of lesbians’ succeeding, the changing social context, and gay and lesbian pride.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest that concepts or ideas be explored fully and from as many different perspectives as possible. Any hypotheses and propositions derived from data must be constantly verified against incoming data and subsequently modified, extended,
or deleted as necessary. Sampling is thus closely linked with and guided by data analysis. To promote maximum variation and meaningfulness within the emerging theory, data sources may be expanded as the study progresses. Data sources in this study included nontechnical literature such as resumes, autobiographies, newspapers, media (e.g., television, movies, biographies) gay pride parades, live performances, materials that supplemented the interviews and field observations I made that stimulated my thinking about the properties and dimensions of concepts that are developed from the data. Properties are the general or specific characteristics of a category, and dimensions represent the range along which general properties of a category vary (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The constant interplay between the researcher and the research act results in the researcher being shaped by the data and similarly, the data being shaped by the researcher (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Keddy et al. (1996) suggested that grounded theorists who employ a feminist perspective must consider their own subjective experiences as data. Reflexivity refers to the process of reflecting upon or critically examining the research process (Wuest, 1995). I kept memos on my own subjective experience and the effects this study had on me. As categories were developed and refined, I became aware of easily recognizing my own career process in the emerging description.

Reflexivity is comparable to what Strauss and Corbin refer to as sensitivity, that which is required to capture meaning in the data and discover the connections between concepts. They suggest that it is stimulated by familiarity with the extant literature, professional and personal experience, and by the analysis itself. I made explicit my own preconceived notions about this phenomenon by reviewing the literature prior to data collection and analysis and by outlining my context. I attempted to remain free of biases by
maintaining skepticism towards early categories, by validating and refuting these tentative categories, by ensuring that I followed grounded theory procedures (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and by checking my analyses out with my grounded theory research group.

The grounded theory research group consisted of a core group of five doctoral candidates conducting studies using the grounded theory method at the University of British Columbia. It was headed by an expert in the grounded theory method, and who has 25 years of personal experience in conducting, publishing, teaching, and reviewing grounded theory research. Students brought their own research to this group and I was able to gain objective, practical, and emotional support in doing my grounded theory research. The group helped me guard against potential biases and created opportunities for the development of new insights and enhanced theoretical sensitivity. Finally, the procedures of making comparisons, asking stimulating questions, and sampling based on evolving theoretical concepts helped me to remain grounded or embedded in the research during data analysis.

**Sampling Procedures**

Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest that data collection should be conducted in a manner that will maximize the opportunity to discover as much variation as possible among concepts and to solidify categories. In the next section, I describe the process of data collection in the initial stage of the study.

**Initial Sampling**

Strauss (1987) contented that initial sampling should be based on locating individuals who are the most informed about the phenomenon under investigation in order maximize eliciting its aspects and that this criterion be set prior to the study beginning. Therefore, as the phenomenon of interest in this study was how lesbians' become successful in their
occupations, initial sampling included lesbians who were successful in that they were identified as leaders in their fields, and who were willing to volunteer for this study. During recruitment, contact was made with potential informants by mail, phone, or e-mail. Informants were nominated by others who felt they were successful in their fields. In my initial contact, I introduced the purpose of the study, clarified the nature of the interview, and answered any questions. When the women agreed to participate, they chose the date, time, and location for the interviews to be held. All interviews happened either in my home, the participant’s home, or the participant’s workplace.

The initial selection criteria for participants included the following: (a) lesbians who are successful (i.e., identified as leaders in their fields, have influenced their field, community, or society); and (b) women who identify as being lesbian (i.e., they may or may not be open about their sexuality in the workplace). Volunteers were recruited from within the lesbian community in the greater Vancouver area. Gay and lesbian organizations were asked to nominate successful lesbians from a variety of fields. Appendix E contains a draft of the solicitation letter to lesbian-affiliated organizations. Letters requesting nominations were sent to the following organizations: Community Legal Assistance Society, Freedom Socialist Party, Gay and Lesbian Educators, Lesbian and Gay Provincial Government Association, The Lesbian Show, AIDS Vancouver, Positive Women’s Network, a Vancouver Women’s Chorus, Kinesis, Out on Screen and Integrity. However, no participants were nominated as a result of the recruiting letter, rather all of the participants were attained through word of mouth, a strategy known as “snowball sampling” (Morse, 1991, p. 130), hearing of this study from friends and individuals from the gay and lesbian community. All of the women who volunteered were interviewed for the study. Four women were initially interviewed prior to
conducting theoretical sampling. An additional 11 women were interviewed, 4 because of theoretical sampling, and the remaining 7 because they were nominated as the study progressed.

Description of Sample

Fifteen volunteer participants (age range 35 to 69 years, average 48) were recruited from a variety of occupational fields (e.g., athletics, education, law/politics, business, arts, police, dentistry, and medicine). Demographic characteristics of these women are found in Table 1. The majority of these women made several (two to seven) occupational changes throughout their careers. Most of these changes were made because of new opportunities, however, three women changed occupations because they were fired and several chose to move to work environments they perceived as gay friendly.

The racial and ethnic diversity within the lesbian community was represented in this study (e.g., First Nations, Asian). The majority (80%) of these women were in relationships, most of them were out at work (87%) at the time of their interviews, and many of them considered their present work environment as gay friendly (87%). Participants' current annual salary ranged from $40,000 to $175,000 with the average being $86,000. The majority of these women were considered “privileged,” because of their personal or family’s economic status and their personal level of education and employment. For example, this highly educated group consisted of four participants who achieved Ph.D’s (1 honorary), three with Master’s degrees, one with a law degree, one with a medical degree (also attained Masters), two who attained undergraduate degrees, three working towards undergraduate degrees. In contrast two had only a high school education. Participants' parents were not as well educated. The majority of their mothers (70%) completed a high school education or
Table 1

Participants’ Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Out</th>
<th>Activist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hygienist</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police officer</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>relationship</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>outing</td>
<td>quiet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>relationship</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>relationship</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>outing</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>relationship</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>quiet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realtor</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychologist</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>relationship</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>selective</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>relationship</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>First Nations</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>relationship</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writer</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>widow</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissioner</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>relationship</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>relationship</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physician</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
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<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>relationship</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>outing</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
less. Three mothers accomplished undergraduate degrees and two achieved post-secondary diplomas or degrees. As well most of their mothers (60%) were homemakers when participants were growing up, while other occupations held by mothers included a business woman, accountant, and psychologist. Similarly, the majority of fathers (53%) completed a high school education or less. Three fathers achieved undergraduate degrees, and four post-secondary degrees. Participants’ father’s occupations included owning their own businesses, minister, lawyer, pilot, and several trades positions.

Theoretical Sampling

In grounded theory, sampling or data gathering is driven by concepts derived from the emerging theory and based on the concept of making comparisons. The purpose of theoretical sampling is to compare events or incidents to decide how concepts vary in terms of their properties and dimensions. By comparing concepts along their properties for similarities and differences, the researcher is able to “densify categories, to differentiate among them, and to specify their range of variability” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 202). As the investigation progressed, theoretical sampling became more specific as I was guided by the emerging concepts. Theoretical sampling was done in this study in order to achieve rich descriptions and comprehensive concepts, and to ensure that the developing categories were representative of the phenomenon (i.e., lesbians becoming successful in their occupations). An example of theoretical sampling involved the investigation of the category that later became known as “taking risks and being out.” I had data from women who had experienced working “in” silence or concealing their lesbian identity in the workplace for fear of discrimination, but wanted to know about others experiences of being “boldly ‘out’ spoken” at work. Thus, I sought out several visible out lesbians from varying occupations. Some
occupations were considered more open and accepting of lesbians (e.g., hair dressing, artist). I also noticed that most of my participants were older (i.e., > 45) and thus I purposely sought out younger (i.e., < 40) participants. In addition, I sought out one participant who appeared "femme" because the majority of my participants were more stereotypically "butch" or more androgynous in appearance. These women had experienced the hardships of too much visibility, and often found it was impossible to be invisible as lesbians. Theoretical sampling led me to sample 2 ethnically diverse women. Overall, theoretical sampling allowed me to seek participants whose varied experiences helped me push conceptual limits, and to clarify the dimensions of emerging categories.

**Interviewing Procedure**

The women who participated in this study shared very intimate information about their personal and work lives. For those women who were not visible lesbians in the community, the risks may have been perceived as significant. Consequently, it was of utmost importance to pay attention to issues of confidentiality. As I began each interview, I reviewed the purpose of the study, the participant consent form (Appendix A), and answered any questions prior to beginning the interview. In addition, demographic information (see Appendix B) was obtained. Participants were informed that code names would be assigned to them or created with me in order to protect participants' right of privacy by maintaining confidentiality and anonymity and for the purpose of transcribing and storing interviews. I was the only person who had access to signed consent forms, field notes and memos, transcripts, and audiotapes that were stored in a locked filing cabinet. Participants were made aware that transcripts of their interviews would be shared with supervising professors and the grounded theory research analysis group I was a part of at the University of British Columbia.
for the purpose of analysis. All data will be destroyed 5 years after the end of this study unless participants agree to allow their transcripts to be used for further analysis.

A number of the participants asked me to come up with a code name for them, whereas others enjoyed the creative process of coming up with their own. The primary instrument for data collection was in-depth, audio-taped interviews lasting 1 1/2 hours. The initial 15 interviews were conducted between February 2000 and May 2001.

These interviews were open ended in nature and were guided by the research questions, which focused on the process of lesbians becoming successful in their occupations. The initial interview questions came from theoretical sensitivity and were formulated from a brief review of the literature and my experience with the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These initial questions were designed to begin to identify concepts that represent lesbians’ occupational experiences and were open-ended and broad enough to allow the participants’ varied experiences leading to success to emerge (see Appendix C). Open-ended questions were used to avoid imposing existing concepts and to facilitate probing deeper to uncover new dimensions of the process of lesbians becoming successful. Later interviews became more focused in order to explore particular concepts to determine their inclusion in the emerging description of concepts relating to lesbians becoming successful in their occupations (see Appendix F).

Follow-up interviews were conducted with 6 participants to present the emerging description and conceptual development of lesbians becoming successful and to see if participants’ stories fit this description. I asked participants to comment on the developing categories and add or correct anything that was unclear or did not fit for them. The participants cooperated willingly and expressed their satisfaction with the process. A few of
their suggestions were included in the analysis. For example, initially I had described these women as taking risks and coming out leading to two paths, a “path of least resistance” and a path of “finding benefit.” My discussions with several participants resulted in co-constructing three paths, “working ‘in’ silence,” “working quietly,” and the “boldly ‘out’ spoken” path. Six participants were chosen because they represented a variety of experiences in the continuum of being out at work (e.g., working ‘in’ silence and boldly ‘out’ spoken). All 6 of these women saw their own stories fit with the developing model. In addition, follow-up emails with 3 participants provided additional clarification and confirmation for categories. All participants were invited to participate in a group in order to be presented a summary of the findings, however, because only two responded, a summary was mailed to all participants.

At times I felt it was challenging to remain in the role of an interviewer when I felt inclined to use my counselling skills. This happened when participants were sharing intimate and profoundly upsetting experiences in their lives (e.g., loss of partner of 45 years, fired for being a lesbian). My counselling background in these instances helped me; however, I sometimes found it difficult to move in other directions as an interviewer, rather than remaining empathic and in the moment with the participant as they recalled these painful incidents. Many participants provided feedback to me at the end of interviews that they enjoyed the interview and that this was the first time they had talked about their experiences as lesbians in the workplace.

**Data Analysis**

The basic principles and procedures of the grounded theory method were used to analyze the developing concepts related to lesbians becoming successful in their occupations.
Interviews were transcribed for the purpose of data analysis. I transcribed 12 of the audiotapes of first interviews, all of the second interviews, and reviewed the remaining 3 that were completed by a transcriptionist. Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) grounded theory method involves several steps, which may occur concurrently with data collection. Three major types of coding procedures were used: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, each level progressively represented the gleaning of a more abstract view of the data.

Open Coding

Early in the analysis of the transcriptions open coding was employed. The text was broken down into discrete parts (e.g., words, sentences, phrases, or paragraphs) and examined closely. Through this close examination of the text, code names (i.e., concepts) were generated that reflected the essence of what was articulated by the participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This was done by using the participants’ language to name a code in order to remain close to the substance of their experience. Examples of code names that were developed during open coding included: “getting fired,” “selecting a life of secrecy,” and “injury into strength.” This early analysis of the text was done in order to elevate my perspective on the text and help me understand its meaning.

I used memos and journals that described the research analysis process. In order to enhance the trustworthiness of the transcripts, I attempted to accurately reflect non-verbal communications, emotional content, long pauses, distractions, tone, pitch, impressions, and the rapport between myself and the participant by making notes to the right of the transcription or by bracketing directly within the text (e.g., pauses, laughter, crying). In addition, memos were written to myself immediately after the interview, reviewing audiotape, and reading the transcription to capture the dialogue in the transcription as closely as I
experienced it during the interview. In this study, open coding was done after each interview, prior to conducting the next interview. These initial data guided the following interviews (i.e., theoretical sampling) and marked the beginning of the process of data analysis.

**Axial Coding**

After completing open coding of three transcripts, I began to systematically group code names that seemed to relate to the same phenomenon under a more abstract level (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These code names were compared with one another for similarities and differences and then were grouped into categories. Axial coding was employed to determine relationships among the code names identified in open coding and to group them into higher order key categories. A category refers to a pattern of behavior, theme, or process evident in the data. Categorization elevates the level of abstraction with which the text is being analyzed (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The process of axial coding led me to start developing categories, which in turn, generated more questions and further data collection and analysis. Axial coding is thus the process of relating categories to their subcategories on the basis of their properties (characteristics) and dimensions (location along a continuum). By specifying properties and dimensions I began to formulate patterns along with their variations. Axial coding involved hypothetically relating subcategories and categories by using statements articulating the relationship between them. Axial coding was purposeful in discovering potentially salient features as soon as possible. For example, “working ‘in’ silence” was a subcategory of the category “taking risks and being out” that was developed in relation to the code name “selecting a life of secrecy” and captured the path taken by many participants when they feared discrimination in the workplace because of their lesbianism.
The conceptual ordering was developed through the constant comparative analysis process of interview transcripts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). During this process, I was constantly asking questions, an analytic device used to help understand the meaning of events and to sensitize myself to potential properties and dimensions in the data that remain undiscovered. Comparisons were made of (a) differences among participants (e.g., views, situations, experiences), (b) data from the same participant with themselves at different points in time (e.g., follow-up conversation, at a later date reviewing the interview already done), (c) data with category, and (d) categories with categories. Data were systematically categorized and coded responses of each participant were constantly compared to those of other participants, until provisional categories were developed. As categories were identified and defined, the central categories became more comprehensive. The categories, their properties and dimensions, were constantly tested by going back to old interviews and by asking new participants for validation or refutation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Selective Coding

As the concepts that emerged from the analysis became more and more cohesive, I employed selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Selective coding involved the process of integrating and refining categories. Categories were integrated along the dimensional level to form a description and ordering of the concepts related to lesbians becoming successful in their occupations. During selective coding, categories are positioned for their places in a provisional structure, which is then validated against the data. At this level of analysis, I was focusing on concepts and relationships that seemed core to the experience. My challenge was to find the relationships among the categories and subcategories and the sequence in which they appeared. For example, I identified the subcategories “handling homophobia” and
“fighting for social change” and in selective coding determined that these subcategories led to “holistic integration.” “Striving for holistic integration” was eventually developed as the core or central process in selective coding, however, it became apparent that my proposed model did not represent well-developed categories that were fully related and could be used entirely to explain or predict lesbians becoming successful in their occupations. Saturation, or the point in category development whereby no new properties, dimensions, or relationships emerge in the data, and the analysis has accounted for much of the potential variation, was not attained. Therefore, the findings of this study are presented as conceptual ordering or development (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997), as data has been ordered according to steps or phases that are aptly described. However, what is missing from this description is the larger theoretical scheme that explains what drives “striving for holistic integration,” that is, the conditions that explain fully how, when, where, and why these women moved from one phase to another.

I initially analyzed the data on my own (i.e., open coding), and shared this work with my supervisors and a grounded theory analysis research group. This group interaction was helpful for practical reasons, that is, it facilitated my adherence to grounded theory procedures. In addition, the group was instrumental in challenging my analysis and thus useful in contributing to the development of the central concepts related to lesbians becoming successful in their occupations.

Memos and Diagrams

Memos were used from the beginning of this investigation and contained the products of coding, they guided theoretical sampling, and facilitated my ability to sort out ideas and issues as they arose. Memos assisted me in specifying lesbians becoming successful in their
occupations in regard to conditions that promoted it, the context in which it occurred, action/interactional strategies involved in its development, and consequences resulting from its process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). Diagrams were used to illustrate the relationship among concepts in selective coding. I created many diagrams of plausible relationships among categories and subcategories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As the memos and diagrams evolved throughout the investigation, they grew in complexity, accuracy, and density as the research process continued (see Appendix G).

Criteria for Judging Rigor

Pidgeon and Henwood (1997) posited that the criteria for evaluating grounded theory projects are dependent on the stated goals of the grounded theory work. In conducting this study, I made efforts to meet the criteria for rigor and credibility based on the specific goal set out for this study, conceptual ordering and development of the process of lesbians becoming successful in their occupations. Pidgeon and Henwood proposed several relevant criteria based on the stated goal of conceptual development: (a) keeping close to the data--fit, (b) theory integrated at diverse levels of abstraction--reflexivity, documentation, (c) theoretical sampling, (d) respondent validation, and (e) transferability.

In conducting this study, I made a concerted effort to meet the criteria for rigor. In the early stages a few participants were contacted by email or telephone for further questions or to clarify statements they made during their first interview. At the final phase of data analysis, 6 participants were interviewed for a second time and were introduced to a summary of the description of the categories relating to lesbians becoming successful in their occupations so they could comment on and validate the fit of this model with their own experiences. Second interviews with participants ensured the developing conceptual ordering
was consistent with what these lesbians considered most vital in their experience of attaining occupational success. In addition, the developing categories relating to lesbians becoming successful were explained to 8 lesbians who had not participated in the study. All of these women found the description made sense and resonated with their own experiences (i.e., fit, respondent validation).

When I was conducting my data collection and analysis, I participated in the grounded theory analysis group described earlier. My participation in this group facilitated the adequacy and rigor of my research. In addition, memos were written to explain decisions that were made to account for the research process and to facilitate dependability of the study (i.e., documentation). As well, memos were made defining key concepts and summarizing why concepts were labeled as they were (i.e., fit). I continually engaged in a process of verification by collaborating with dissertation committee members and group members. The group also served to challenge my potential bias by providing multiple perspectives to the analysis. They also challenged me wherever possible to falsify working hypotheses and to choose participants for their disconfirming potential (e.g., theoretical sampling). My own self-reflective memos were recorded in a journal that described my thoughts on the research process and the effects the research had on me personally and professionally (i.e., reflexivity). Finally, I described the contextual features of this study (e.g., lesbians living in a metropolitan city on the west-coast of Canada, successful women), thereby suggesting its relevance and application. Therefore, by maintaining an awareness of my own biases, by seeking the validation of participants, peers, and supervisors, and by adhering to the methods and procedures of the grounded theory method, my study was conducted in a rigorous manner.
Summary

This study utilized the grounded theory method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to explore how lesbians become successful in their occupations. The underlying assumptions of this method emerged from an interactionist philosophy as well as from the traditions of naturalistic field research. The data in this study were collected primarily via semi-structured interviews with lesbians who were identified as successful in their fields. Analysis of the data followed the process of constant comparison (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding were conducted throughout the analysis. The result was the conceptual ordering and development of the concepts related to lesbians becoming successful in their occupations. This preliminary work lays the groundwork for further theorizing in this area.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The interview transcripts (i.e., 21 interviews) of 15 women were analyzed using the grounded theory method in order to stimulate conceptual development of the concepts related to these lesbians becoming successful in their occupations. In addition, the media (e.g., documentaries, film), books, newspaper articles, memos, observations (e.g., art show, gay pride parade), and interviews within the homes and workplace environments of participants influenced my interpretation of the data and helped me more fully understand the participants stories. An overview of this conceptual ordering is represented in Figure 1.

The findings are conceptualized as a process of “striving for holistic integration.” The code names for developed concepts and processes are first presented in quotation marks, and after that incorporated into the text. The conceptual ordering of this process is reflected in the manner participants’ strive for “holistic integration” in their work lives. The specific ways the women “manage their lesbian identities in the workplace” is the beginning of this endeavour and is represented within the circle at the bottom of Figure 1. Next, all participants engaged in “taking risks and being out” in the workplace. Although a few participants initially chose a path of “working ‘in’ silence,” a continuum of subcategories representing being out in the workplace emerged that also included “working quietly” and the “boldly ‘out’ spoken” path. Certain events (e.g., getting fired) and conditions (e.g., gay friendly work environment) resulted in participants moving along the continuum over time.
Figure 1. Participants reflection on the process of "Striving for Holistic Integration": A conceptual ordering.
Working “in” silence was a path taken by a few participants who feared that they may lose their jobs or be discriminated against in the workplace because of their lesbianism. These women employed elaborate strategies to conceal their lesbian identity at work (e.g., avoiding social events ‘passing’). Working quietly was a path several participants chose and involved strategies that enabled them to work within the system in such a way that facilitated advancement and change to occur in a quiet way (e.g., changing the definition of spouse to include same sex partners) without overtly acknowledging their lesbian orientation unless confronted. The boldly “out” spoken path was chosen by the majority of participants at some point in their work lives and involved participants being open about their lesbianism despite the potential cost to their careers. In their careers, participants initially fell somewhere along the continuum of working “in” silence, to working quietly, to being boldly “out” spoken and over time this changed due to changing conditions (e.g., gay friendly work environment) that reflected participants’ feeling of safety to be out at work.

“Facing ongoing fear” was the next step in this central process of striving for holistic integration and was experienced by the majority of participants. A few women that took the boldly “out” spoken path at work did not mention facing ongoing fear. As the majority of the women in this study came out in their various work contexts, they gained a sense of freedom and openness as they acknowledged and accepted their lesbianism in the workplace. These participants felt a sense of relief as they experienced a new found freedom and they no longer felt they had to expend a great deal of energy hiding their lesbian identities, and began to integrate their lesbian and work worlds. However, for most of the women who experienced facing ongoing fear, additional energy and often unpredictability were involved as they engaged in a continuous process of managing their lesbian identities in the workplace. The
uncertainty associated with unexpected negative encounters with individuals who were
unaware of a participant’s lesbian identity created a context in which many participants were
on guard and continually deciding whether it was safe to come out. Facing ongoing fear led
to participants’ committing considerable effort and energy to creating work environments
that were safe to be out in and free from homophobia. Salient properties of facing ongoing
fear are represented in the subcategories: handling homophobia, and fighting for social
change.

Facing ongoing fear by “handling homophobia” and “fighting for social change” led
to holistic integration. Holistic integration was a dynamic, interactive process that occurred
on both intrapersonal and interpersonal levels for the women in this study. On an
intrapersonal level, holistic integration was a transformational process that involved holistic
healing through personal growth activities and living a balanced lifestyle. Interpersonal
holistic integration represented participant’s “bringing two worlds together” as they
integrated their lesbian and work worlds. The process of striving for holistic integration
enabled participants’ to be genuine and feel whole and thus facilitated their process of
attaining occupational success as their lesbian selves became integrated into their work
worlds.

The conceptual ordering of the process of striving for holistic integration consisted of
the development of categories that are affected by and enacted within the following
contextual conditions that surround these categories: (a) changing social times; (b) personal
background; (c) serendipitous conditions; (d) love and support; and (e) a gay friendly work
environment. The basic process was affected by the changing social times that exerted an
influence on participants’ personal background and serendipitous conditions, which in turn,
affected the current context of participants' lives that included love and support and gay
friendly work environment conditions. These changing conditions interacted synergistically,
continuously influencing the basic process of lesbians striving for holistic integration.

In the following sections, I first summarize the participants' personal
conceptualizations of occupational success. This is followed by a description of the
development of the concepts relating to lesbians striving for holistic success and the
conditions that influenced this process. Findings are described in detail and quotations from
the participants are used to illustrate aspects of the concepts, thus attempting to convey the
richness of the data. Quotes have been edited to complete sentences and italics have been
added to indicate a participant's emphasis of her words. Participants are identified by
pseudonyms. Similar to Richie et al. (1997), responses are discussed according to the
following descriptors: (a) the words "generally," "most," "often," "the majority," "typically,"
"many," or "the women in this study" indicate a response characteristic of the majority (10 or
more) of the participants; (b) the words "some," "a number of," or "several" indicate
responses from 4 to 9 participants; and (c) the words "a few" indicate responses from 3 or
fewer participants; more specific wording (e.g., "all," "one") is used occasionally.

Occupational Success

The lesbians who participated in the present study were considered successful in their
occupations and were selected from a variety of fields. The criterion for success was that the
women were identified as leaders in their fields; that is, they had influenced their field,
community, or society at large. The broad research question that guided concept development
and ordering was, "how do lesbians become successful in their occupations?" also generated
the meaning of occupational success for these participants at this time in their careers. The
content of participants’ understanding of occupational success is infused in the description of
the process of lesbians striving for holistic integration that is presented in depth following
this discussion of occupational success.

Participants were asked to define their occupational success and to consider whether
they felt successful. Although the majority of the women in this study considered themselves
successful, a few were uneasy with the term success and consequently were reluctant to
identify themselves as successful. It became apparent in the interviews that most participants’
definitions of occupational success at this time in their careers included few traditional,
extrinsic measures of occupational success (e.g., financial rewards, promotions), but rather
occupational success was conceptualized on a much broader level and encompassed many
subjective, intrinsic indicators. Participants’ definitions of occupational success included
primarily subjective criteria (e.g., working to make a difference, connecting with people) that
are reflected in the description of the process of striving for holistic integration.

What is Occupational Success?

Some of the participants resisted the assumptions prevalent in the traditional,
gendered, objective criteria for occupational success. Kathleen claimed she was uneasy with
the term success as it suggested “status and money and other things,” such as “reputation.” A
few other participants were uncomfortable answering the question, stating that at this time
they seldom think about success and are indifferent to it. Karla voiced her criticism of using
objective criteria to define occupational success:

I’m always critical of those criteria and critical, for example, of the very masculinist
assumptions that have over years and years been embedded in those criteria. So that
you maybe have an objective standard for everybody but it assumes that you might
have a wife and someone who does all your shopping and cleans your house for you
and so on. You know those kinds of things. I’m very critical of and kind of constantly
on guard about measures of success, because they exclude certain people, they’re made up by certain people for themselves. They don't apply to everyone equally. That’s why success to me is a very subjective kind of term. It’s sort of meant to be objective. It’s not very objective. Therefore, I kind of pooh-pooh it as a word.

Extrinsic Success

Several participants discussed the importance of meeting financial obligations and not feeling stressed economically. However, most participants indicated that financial success beyond meeting financial obligations was not the most significant priority for them at this time in their lives. A few indicated it was important for them to get paid well for the work they were doing, and a couple of participants in business expressed a desire for financial success that would allow them the luxury to pursue other interests. For example, Stella explained the importance making money had for her:

I work to play. I’ve made the medallion club, which is the top 10% of realtors in the lower mainland, so I’ve done really well. I don’t care about the levels of achievement. That’s never been my goal. My goal has just been for me to make some money and get the things that I want. It’s my turn.

A few participants referred to setting goals for themselves and how achieving goals was an objective reflection of their success. The women talked about goals that included completing projects, creating work environments where co-workers felt happy and satisfied, and reaching a certain level of expertise in their chosen fields that was often reflected in their current hierarchical position. Jan reflected upon her career as a writer, “I’ve set certain goals for myself and I’ve achieved them and that feels good.”

It was evident that to the majority of these women achieving extrinsic indicators of success was not their priority at this time in their careers. Although all of the participants have achieved a high level of competence and recognition in their respective fields, traditional extrinsic measures such as financial gain and hierarchical positions were clearly
not currently the driving forces behind these women. Rather, the majority of participants emphasized the importance of feeling internally satisfied, which was often reflected in their passion for relating with and working cooperatively with others in the workplace.

**Intrinsic Success**

Participants' definitions of occupational success typically included a sense of feeling happy and satisfied with their work. This involved feeling competent at what they were doing, which was often demonstrated by having proven their skills and being recognized by colleagues as capable. Many participants discussed the importance of enjoying and trusting the people they were working with, and feeling needed, valued, and respected by peers.

Consequently, these women felt fulfilled, happy, and relaxed in their work:

> It has more to do with an internal sense of satisfaction. You know the feeling of doing your job well and a sense of *connection with people*. I mean I’m successful if I’m in a milieu that I’m comfortable in or working with good people makes me feel happier and more relaxed and I like to be able to trust the people I’m working with. (Lisa)

> Many of the women emphasized the importance of feeling passionate about their work and remaining engaged, interested, and challenged. They talked about loving their work and the importance of doing a job that they believed in and that served some social benefit. Working to make a difference in the lives of others was a passion for many women in their careers:

> It’s really important for me that my mind *stays alive*, that it’s *engaging* and that I feel okay with what I’m doing. In some way it’s this sort of *serving the greater process*. It’s always got to have some redeeming social value to it. I think that sense of being conscionable with what I do in that it serves some social benefit. (Artemis)

Intrinsic success was clearly an important measure of participants’ evaluation of their own occupational success. The majority of the women felt satisfied and happy with their jobs and
emphasized their relational style at work as being an important contributor to their happiness. These women felt challenged in their careers and passionate about work they believed in that served a greater social purpose.

Changing Priorities

A number of participants described how the meaning of occupational success has changed over time for them as they reflected on their entire careers. Although many participants may have began their careers focused on extrinsic indicators of success (e.g., money, position), intrinsic criteria (e.g., balance) became more important to them over time. Many participants stated that material gain was now secondary to quality of life and emphasized the importance of feeling healthy and centered, maintaining a sustainable pace, and being balanced in their work and personal lives. In addition, many women described the feeling of relief they had as they felt “true to themselves” because they were being honest and truthful in the workplace. Haze described her experience:

Actually it was a breath of fresh air. It’s unbelievable. Hiding is all gone now and it just allows me to be who I am and it allows me to put a ton of energy into the job that I’m doing rather than hiding. It’s all about truth. Maybe that’s where some of my success is coming from.

Cowgirl illustrated this shift in priorities as external recognition that she had earlier sought in her career no longer had the same value to her as seeking internal satisfaction in the present:

I suppose I’m successful in that I’m not stressed economically, I have a good business. I have a community of both friends and acquaintances where I feel liked and respected and supported and I’m healthy. I have a lot of support from my family so you know things feel integrated and this is maybe a change over 20 years because I would have thought success was achievement. That’s where I was for the first big part of my life and I don’t feel like success is achievement anymore because achievement carries with it all kinds of the things that you have to be pretty singularly focused to be, to have achievement. Now I feel much more balanced but there are still lots of achievements in my life and they’re subtler.
Because the women were encouraged to consider their conceptualizations of occupational success, responses included how success manifested itself in these women’s careers. Many women expressed an appreciation for a quality of life whereby they felt more balanced and integrated and had a focus on self-care (e.g., physical, spiritual). Others reported more external measures like receiving awards and recognition (e.g., being promoted or recruited) and having future opportunities because of their success. Wadamga discussed occupational success from the perspective of how others saw her and by her future business opportunities and occupational security:

Part of it is how people see what you’ve done to this point. I mean it’s all of the things that have allowed me to get to this point and the relationships that I’ve established and the business aspect and the creative aspect working together. I think it’s about what I’m doing right now but mostly it’s about having the opportunity in the future so that everything that I’ve done keeps moving and that space and that opportunity in the future is always there. If I wasn’t successful I guess the future would be tentative.

Other ways participants described themselves as living success included gaining flexibility in work hours that often included the freedom to do the things they have always wanted to do. Dad talked about how important this flexibility was to her at this point in her career, “it’s become apparent to me that it is important. I want to be able to go skiing in Switzerland this winter, so having that flexibility.”

Jan commented on her experience of success that included “very subjective” standards like being a good and responsible person and appreciating life and all its gifts.

I think that because for me the standards are so different as to be just not relevant that it’s a matter of indifference to me how my success is measured. I feel in myself that I’ve set certain goals for myself and that I’ve achieved them and that feels good. Beyond that it’s really a matter of indifference to me, that success really hasn’t anything to do with a good life. It can enhance it. It can destroy it. The measure of my life is really day by day. Am I still useful? Am I still taking pleasure? Am I taking responsibility by being as good a person as I can be? I mean it does seem to me that
being born at all is winning the greatest lottery in the world and particularly if you were born into a culture like this that has as much to offer as it does and it would seem awful not to enjoy it and use it with gratitude.

Nina was reluctant to identify herself as successful, despite winning awards for her work, however, she readily was able to identify a lesbian in the community whom she perceived as successful. Her description aptly exemplifies personal qualities and contributions apparent in many participants, which include being intelligent, working to make a difference, and remaining “true to herself” by speaking out on important issues:

She is successful because she’s such a brilliant thinker, a really inspirational person to the community, to a lot of different communities. I think she’s also just really stayed true to herself too. In difficult times she’s always spoken out on issues that other people may not feel as willing to consider.

Influence of Being a Lesbian on Occupational Success

Many participants discussed the influence being a lesbian may have had on their occupational success. Kathleen suggested that being a lesbian has meant she has not been motivated to please men and has found the strength to be herself. She described how she has not felt dependent on men or intimidated by their positions of power:

Being a lesbian certainly means that my motive, whatever I’m doing is not to please men. I’m not because I don’t have any experience of feeling dependent on a man. I have just never had that sense of having to compromise who I am or having to dress or perform or in any way be somebody who men would approve of. Therefore, I think as a lesbian that has been an important strength and has freed me up to be who I am.

Many participants shared Kathleen’s view that being lesbian has freed them to be honest and true to themselves. Leona says, “my skeleton was no longer in the closet, my closet was wide open and therefore if someone wanted to make an issue about that, there really wasn’t an issue to make.” Aggie felt her lesbianism had no bearing on her career success as the large majority of people she worked with did not know she was a lesbian. She chose not to come
out in a work environment which she perceived would not support her lesbianism, however
came out selectively to one or two colleagues. Similarly, Jack, chose not to come out of the
closet at work and continued to fear potential discrimination because of her lesbianism. The
consequence of being a lesbian for her was that it motivated her to work harder.

Haze reported that being a lesbian has given her more confidence and strength and a
passion and conviction in the life that she chose. Similar to many other participants, she
suggested her lesbianism contributed to her level of honesty and thus success in her career,
however being a lesbian is only a part of who she is and what she has accomplished:

By being truthful and forthright in my life, it breaks down barriers and allows me to
be me and do what I need to do to become successful. It allows me to pour my energy
into my life and work. And if you’re in the right environment and people see that
you’re out and understand that, they look at you a little bit differently, not like you’re
a dyke or something. They look at you and go, “wow, I’m a little bit impressed here,
you know that she’s out and she’s a good person.” If nothing else maybe you’ve
taught somebody something along the way. I don’t want to be thought of as a lesbian
first. I want to be thought as someone who does her job and does it phenomenally
well that just so happens to be a lesbian.

Several participants commented on how being a lesbian brings a uniqueness to the job
that others may find attractive. Mia reflected upon her experience of discrimination based on
several characteristics of herself and how that experience may have facilitated her success:

I don’t want to suggest that I got my job only because I am a lesbian, which has been
suggested. But I think I do bring into the position a very unique combination of skills
as a woman, as a visible minority, as a lesbian who knows what it’s like to be
discriminated against.

Similarly, Dad discussed how unique she is in the entertainment business and how being a
lesbian may facilitate her career success:

I love that I have done things that just routinely don’t get done by women, never mind
lesbians. It’s kind of cool and that sort of motivates me to do stuff that hasn’t been
done before. Maybe being outside of the box allows you to sort of do things
differently just almost by design. You’re not conforming anyway and there’s no mold that needs to be broken, you broke it a long time ago.

For several participants, being an out, visible, lesbian was a condition that positively influenced their career success because they provided a service or had an audience among lesbians. For example, Jan reported that being a lesbian and a writer gives her books “a ready made audience which is wonderful right around the world.” Stella and Wadamga run businesses that gay and lesbian clientele frequent. Artemis and Lisa spoke of their large client base of lesbians they saw in their private practices. In addition, Karla and Kathleen reflected upon students who seek out their courses because they are known as lesbians and are searching for gay and lesbian content. Kathleen noted, “lots of gays and lesbians take my courses, they come in from other departments. They know there’s going to be curriculum that pertains to them.”

In summary, occupational success for some of the lesbians in this study was something they rarely thought about and they were uneasy with the traditional extrinsic indicators of occupational success. Many of these women felt their work was dependent on working co-operatively with others, and thus were uncomfortable taking credit themselves. Many of the women in this study had already advanced to the top of the hierarchy in their fields and thus they were no longer motivated by achievement and external recognition. In addition, the majority of these women were secure financially, and thus financial rewards were no longer a focus. However, external motivation did play a role for a few of the women. Those who were more externally (e.g., financially) motivated in their careers were younger participants who were business women and were more passionate about making money than making a difference in the lives of others.
For the majority of the lesbians in this study, occupational success meant connecting with people and being valued and respected by peers. Generally, being passionate about work and ardent about making a difference in other women’s lives was an important element in career success. Moreover, occupational success held different meanings at different times in the careers of the women in this study. As many of the women neared retirement, their priorities shifted with their changing developmental life contexts. Occupational success evolved to finding balance and integrating parts of lives that had previously been neglected (e.g., spirituality, exercise, hobbies). The meaning of success shifted from focusing on external indicators (e.g., achievement) to internal criteria (e.g., holistic integration). In addition, a component of occupational success included finding (e.g., gay and lesbian bookstore) or creating work environments (e.g., owning your business, working with other lesbians) that were accepting and supportive of lesbians. In this way, participants felt happy and satisfied with the work they were doing and able to feel genuine and true to themselves.

For some participants, their occupational success seemed to have little to do with being a lesbian and they likely would have been successful regardless. The majority of the women in this study felt their lesbianism positively contributed to their career success. Participants reported that their lesbianism may have influenced their career success for a variety of reasons. One participant claimed being a lesbian meant she did not have to please men and that not compromising her lesbian self provided her with a strength and determination that freed her to be herself. For another participant, being a lesbian meant working harder to prove her competency, for fear of discrimination. Some women saw themselves as unique and felt they were recruited for positions because they were different and because of their capability in their respective fields. They described themselves as
possessing personal characteristics such as strength, honesty, and independence, characteristics that they felt contributed to them attaining occupational success. The meaning occupational success had for the lesbians in this study is further depicted in the following description of the process of striving for holistic integration.

The Process of Striving for Holistic Integration

Influencing Conditions

There were “conditions” that affected the process of lesbians becoming successful or set the stage and created the context for the process to unfold. These conditions are portrayed as surrounding the process of striving for holistic integration (see Figure 1). The conditions that contributed to this process for lesbians are: (a) changing social times; (b) personal background; (c) serendipitous conditions; (d) love and support; and (e) a gay friendly work environment.

Changing social times conditions were pervasive as the women lived and worked through social times (i.e., 1930s to present) that reflected different societal attitudes and beliefs about women, gays, and lesbians. The most salient properties of this condition were the barriers and opportunities faced by these women due to the social times they were living and working in (e.g., sexism, homophobia, acceptance) and many participants’ persistence and pioneering work to ensure equality for women and lesbians in the workplace. Whereas the changing social times had a negative impact on the careers of some participants at different times, in general, these women experienced positive effects over time. For example, many of the participants reported working during times (i.e., 1950s to 1970s) when they kept their lesbianism secret because they feared discrimination (e.g., in the 1960s it was illegal to be a lesbian, there was no workplace protection). These women had an entirely different
social and political environment in which to consider taking risks and being out. Lesbianism was not discussed in public and was looked upon as sexual deviance. In the present, this view has changed and generally society is more tolerant and accepting of gays and lesbians. As this silence has been broken, cultural barriers have also been broken that have had a transforming impact on the lives of lesbians. As times changed (e.g., legal protection) and certain work environments (e.g., education system adopts workplace protection policies) and geographic regions (e.g., Vancouver, large cities) became more accepting and supportive of lesbians, many participants found the courage to be out in the workplace. Being out in the workplace facilitated participants’ occupational success by mobilizing their strength and determination to speak their truth about their lesbian identity, and the accompanying feeling of freedom they had to truly be themselves at work. Further, a few participants expended a great deal of energy beyond their work responsibilities and became social change agents and were actively involved in making positive changes for gays and lesbians in the workplace. This pioneering work has contributed to others perceptions of these women being identified as leaders in their respective fields.

Personal background conditions provided the unique context that participants’ lived and worked in, and is represented next in Figure 1. Salient properties and dimensions of personal background conditions include abilities participants described themselves as being born with, combined with having privileged personal backgrounds that enabled them to actively use these talents in their personal and work lives. For example, many of the women characterized themselves as androgynous women who were strong, capable, resilient, inextricably bound up with other people, intelligent, independent, versatile, non-conforming, honest, caring women. In addition, the majority of participants described the important
impact their childhood had on their present occupational success. Growing up in families and environments that encouraged and valued education and supported participants' choices was paramount for these women. Having access to opportunities (e.g., education, travel) was most often attributed to their privileged family backgrounds. Personal background conditions provided many participants with strength and courage and the resiliency to survive obstacles. Many of the women in this study faced homophobia and discrimination in the workplace (e.g., getting fired) and attributed their 'thick skin' and the ways they chose to handle these negative situations (e.g., legal battles, seeking support) as personal factors that influenced their occupational success.

Serendipity has been defined as “the faculty of finding valuable or agreeable things not sought for” (Webster, 1979). Many of the women in this study reported finding valuable work opportunities that they were not seeking and referred to the serendipitous nature of their career paths. These opportunities often came to participants who were pursuing their passions (e.g., humanitarian work) and found that they had the right connections. Many participants found that contacts with others (e.g., feminist network, gay and lesbian community) provided them with occupational opportunities that they may not have intended on pursuing. Serendipitous conditions were prevalent in the stories of most participants as they recalled instances of being in the right place at the right time, and the role serendipity played on their paths to becoming successful in their occupations. In addition, serendipitous conditions were evident as several participants changed career paths when they encountered discrimination in the workplace because of their lesbianism, or learned valuable lessons from the obstacles they encountered that furthered their careers. Although these situations were often traumatic
and career altering (e.g., loss, changing fields), the opportunities that appeared when doors closed were viewed as serendipitous and meant to be.

Love and support conditions continually influenced the central process of striving for holistic integration. The most important properties of love and support conditions were the levels of support participants felt they received from others that enabled them to handle difficult situations. Many participants described being unconditionally loved by partners and families and how this love held them up and helped them face and conquer fear and achieve success in the workplace. All participants reflected upon the overwhelming amount of support they felt they received from significant others, colleagues, and co-workers, which gave them the courage to pursue their work.

Love and support involved emotional support in the form of feeling understood by loved ones that empowered participants to embrace their lesbian identities and inspired them to reach their potential in their careers. Different levels of love and support were evident as participants described variation in the intimacy they experienced with partners, families, colleagues, and the community. Love and support, in its various forms was a continual force in several women’s lives that helped them find the strength to overcome obstacles and learn and grow from painful experiences. In contrast, a number of participants who did not experience obstacles in the workplace (e.g., fired because of lesbianism, fear of discrimination), reported that their supportive relationships with others facilitated them finding the courage to disclose their lesbian identity in the workplace.

Many participants described community support as an important factor influencing their career success. Community included the gay and lesbian community, the feminist community, and/or a community of like minded others who worked together or were often
fighting for social change. For a few participants, community support was financial (e.g., gay and lesbian clients) and for others it involved being a visible community spokesperson and activist. As well, a few participants talked about identifying with a group (e.g., gay and lesbian community, feminist community) as contributing to their security and comfort as lesbians living and working in a heterosexist society. The women in this study reported both receiving support and giving support to others as they described mutual, reciprocal relationships with colleagues, friends, family, and partners based on sharing, honesty, and respect. Love and support conditions were instrumental in providing the safety and love that facilitated these women becoming successful in their occupations.

Gay friendly work environment conditions complete the outermost circle in Figure 1 and exerted influence on the process of lesbians' striving for holistic integration. Many of the participants discussed the importance of working in a gay friendly work environment. This term encompassed participants' perception that the work environment was welcoming and supportive of gays and lesbians. For some participants this meant working in a business that catered to gay and lesbian clients (e.g., therapy, gay and lesbian bookstore). For others, a gay friendly work environment was evident when other gays or lesbians were openly out and accepted and supported in the work milieu (e.g., university professors, police officer) and workplace protection against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation was in place. One participant described being hired as the first same sex "spousal hire" in a fairly male dominated discipline in a university and how the gay friendly environment facilitated this, "the academy is one of the better places for queer, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, people."
It was not uncommon for a participant to change jobs or seek employment in order to find an environment that was more accepting of lesbians. For example, one participant began her career as a lawyer in a rather conservative, large law firm that she perceived would not be open to her lesbianism. She chose to create her own law firm with others whom she was out with and accepted and supported her lesbian identity. Several other participants chose positions that were considered gay friendly (e.g., hair dressing, commissioner) or created businesses for themselves that contributed to them feeling comfortable being themselves. Nina reflected upon her occupational path and explained the importance of being in a gay friendly work environment:

I’ve chosen to go out for some parts because the production company was gay friendly. The majority of theatre is pretty gay friendly and I think that really makes a difference. . . working somewhere where issues of being lesbian or gay are important. . . I wouldn’t work in a place that was homophobic if they paid me a million dollars, it wouldn’t be worth it to me.”

For the majority of lesbians in this study, working in an environment that they perceived as gay friendly was a condition that positively influenced their occupational success. The environment contributed to their feeling of safety being out as a lesbian and thus their ability to reach their potential in their work.

The Central Process of Striving for Holistic Integration

The process of striving for holistic integration is enacted within its surrounding conditions and is represented inside the double circle in Figure 1. The conditions continually exert influence on this process and thus surround the circle. The key categories and subcategories in this process, which are explained and illustrated in Figure 1 are as follows: Managing Lesbian Identity in the Workplace, Taking Risks and Being Out, Working “In” Silence, Working Quietly, Boldly “Out” Spoken, Facing Ongoing Fear, Handling
Homophobia, Fighting for Social Change, and Holistic Integration. In the next few sections, I present these central categories and their subcategories with their properties and dimensions and describe the circumstances and conditions under which these properties exist.

**Managing Lesbian Identity in the Workplace**

The first step in this process of striving for holistic integration was the specific ways the women in this study managed their lesbian identities in the workplace. For many participants this involved appraising the situation to determine the potential for threat, harm, or loss regarding revealing their lesbian identity in the workplace. For example one participant described her appraisal of the consequences of being a lesbian in the workplace as, “living in a tortured world of the well of loneliness.” Another felt she was “selecting a life of secrecy.” For many participants their appraisal led them to consider being out in the workplace as too risky initially. However, others perceived managing their lesbian identity in the workplace as a challenge rather than the potential for threat, harm, or loss. These participants were truthful and open about their lesbian identities and became advocates for other lesbians by fighting for social change. Taking risks and being out was a subcategory of managing lesbian identity in the workplace. The preceding conditions influenced participants risk taking behaviors in the variety of ways they were out at work. For example, a woman who perceived that she was working in a gay friendly work environment in the year 2002 (e.g., artist), and felt strongly supported by loved ones and colleagues may have chosen the boldly “out” spoken path. In contrast, a woman working in a male dominated field in the 70s (e.g., police force) may have chosen to remain closeted or the working “in” silence path for fear of discrimination. The salient conceptual elements of this process of taking risks are represented by the following subcategories that lie on a continuum that reflect the dimensions
of being out at work ranging from Working “In” Silence to Working Quietly, to the Boldly “Out” Spoken path.

Taking Risks and Being Out

The majority of the women were out at work (i.e., 13 out of 15 and 2 selectively) at the time they were first interviewed. In the present study, participants were asked about their process of being out at work throughout their careers. Being out at work was feared by some and considered risky for others (e.g., the loss of jobs, and potential rejection by colleagues and family). Taking risks and being out at work was influenced by changing social times, personal background, serendipitous conditions in participant’s lives, love and support, and gay friendly work environment conditions.

As these conditions continually influenced participants’ work lives, they managed their lesbian identities in the workplace by initially following one of three paths: Working “In” Silence, Working Quietly, or the Boldly “Out” Spoken path. However, over time participants shifted along the continuum of paths as conditions changed (e.g., societal attitudes towards gays and lesbians, choosing to work in a gay friendly work environment, being outed). For example, Jan taught at a university and had her first lesbian novel published in the 60s when it was considered illegal to be a lesbian. Because of the social times and the risk of her losing her university position, Jan described how she dealt with this issue, “as long as you were decorous and didn’t make a fuss and were good at your work, people turned a blind eye.” This strategy to work quietly enabled her to write what she chose to write despite living and working in a social context where criminality and lesbianism were considered synonymous. Later in her career she recalled her difficult decision to be boldly “out” spoken with a piece of lesbian non-fiction she was being asked to write and its ensuing
consequences. Having the love and support of family was a condition that facilitated Jan’s
decision to go ahead and write the book that she considered her official public outing:

I thought this is going to blow the cover for everybody who is going around saying
murder mystery writers are not necessarily murderers. It was convenient for a great
many people, not just my parents, but all sorts of people just to pretend H and I were
friends living together. That would stop. I mean there would be no way out of it. I also
thought this affects my parents, if affects my siblings, you know it’s a different kind
of public statement. So I talked with my parents about it and said this is a different
kettle of fish and it’s a different kind of public space and my father said “so you’re
worried about how it would affect us” and I said “yes I am” and he said “well I think
you have to know that’s our problem not yours.”

In contrast, Karla, the youngest participant (i.e., 35 years old), reflected on how
lesbians are perceived in a positive light in the new Millennium, therefore making younger
professionals feel safe and supported and eager to choose the boldly “out” spoken in their
chosen fields:

I mean it’s almost hip to be a lesbian or to be gay. This would have been much harder
30 years ago, 10 years ago it would have been harder. So many people have been the
pioneers on the front line and have done a lot of this work and so institutions are more
up to speed. So again the academic institution has been kind of coached and
socialized into notions of difference and accommodation and so on.

The media contributes to these women’s perceptions of the social context and reflects
societies changing attitudes towards more acceptance and support for gays and lesbians. Dad
stated her thoughts on the positive cultural influence television and film has on the
psychological well-being of gays and lesbians:

I’ve got to believe that 75% of television has a gay or lesbian character in it. As silly
as Will and Grace can be, it matters. The reason that it matters is for us to see our
own images there. For straight society to see images of gays and lesbians integrated
into regular old jobs and friends and work settings. It’s really important.
Similarly, Leona expressed her view on the effect the media has on changing society’s view of gays and lesbians and referred to the positive effect the highly publicized Gay Pride Parade has on gays, lesbians, and society at large:

If you had told me that in my lifetime the city of Vancouver would have gay parades and host the gay games, and the mayor would walk in the parade and the police chief would walk in the parade, I would have thought you’d lost your mind. By the way, I did that too. I walked in the pride parade in August. Yes I was there and I was almost in tears walking down the street.

The perception of whether or not a particular work environment was gay friendly was an important consideration for participants’ decisions regarding taking risks and being out at work. A few participants reported being in occupations that are perceived by others as gay friendly. For example, Stella was a hairdresser at the time she came out and said, “but I was a hairdresser and we were allowed to be whatever we wanted to be.” Similarly, Wadamga claimed “artists are allowed to be whatever they want to be,” and Dad described the entertainment business, “I suppose it’s the entertainment business, it’s just completely you know open, gay people and Jewish people.” Many women sought to create work environments for themselves that were accepting and supporting of lesbians and thus facilitated them taking the boldly “out” spoken path. As times changed and certain work environments and geographic regions became more accepting and supportive of gays and lesbians, many participants found the courage to take risks and either work quietly within the system or boldly be “out” at work.

Working “In” Silence

Working “in” silence was a path chosen early in the careers of several participants who feared they might face discrimination in certain work environments and social times because of their lesbianism. The main properties of this path were “being silenced” and the
coping strategies participants employed to maintain their secrecy as they felt their only choice was to hide their lesbian identity at work. For example, it was extremely important to maintain a separation between their professional and personal lives. Artemis described how non-existent her personal life was from her work life, “It’s not even there. I mean no part of my personal life would come in.” Leona also claimed, “I’d have to quit if that ever came up,” and despite developing close relationships with her co-workers, “they never once asked me about my relationships at home.” When Aggie began her occupation as an educator, she felt it was not okay to be out because of the social climate at the time, “I just think that it would be perceived as to be unacceptable. It was sort of in overall society wasn’t acceptable.” She recalled early in her career that colleagues perceived she was straight as she was seen at district events with “boyfriends” and that passing as heterosexual did not hurt her career at all. However, later in her career when Aggie was in a committed relationship with a woman, she described her strategy to separate her personal and professional spheres:

But a lot of people don’t know anything more about me than I have a computer and a cat, that kind of thing. I think that’s the down side. And I’m very honest about that in that I chose not to have my social sphere as a part of my work sphere and that was specifically because I was not prepared to be out and I felt that there would be a negative consequence if I was.

Even though Aggie felt she had no choice but to separate her work and private life she reflected upon her career and the negative consequences of making that choice:

I think that it cost me because I didn’t establish some relationships with people within my work sphere that I would have. For example, going out for dinner and including partners, that kind of thing. I chose not to do that.

Similarly, Cowgirl remained closeted and avoided talking about her personal life in the early years of her Olympic athletic and coaching career as she received threatening messages from her coach that being a lesbian could jeopardize her success as an athlete:
It was about the time where an assistant coach was saying “you hang out with C and M a lot and you know they don’t like boys.” And there was a lot of sort of slanderous stuff happening at the same time as I was developing this whole social scene. So a lot of torment around that for a 19 year old. Yeah lots of warnings from the establishment and also that I was a kid with lots of talent but you know I could be led astray. I was even told “don’t hang out with those basketball kids, you know a lot of them are lesbians,” and that I was a good kid.

Cowgirl found herself in a sport milieu with other lesbians who were not out, and managed her lesbian identity by working “in” silence and feeling the unspoken support of her lesbian team-mates, “there was some kind of supportive club, kind of.” This silence was not uncommon within the lesbian community. Cowgirl recalled a conversation she had with a lesbian coach from another city much later in her career:

I remember saying like how come nobody talks about it here because at least in the clubs in Vancouver people would talk internally, you’d have your group and you’d acknowledge it to each other and then you wouldn’t be out. So there was this kind of sense of two worlds.

This sense of two worlds was reiterated by Leona who referred to learning two languages (i.e., gay and straight) as a strategy to cope with and hide her lesbian identity in the workplace. The cost of having to separate her worlds is described by Leona as she recalled coming out to her colleague and explaining to him how difficult it was to separate her personal life from her work world:

I’ve been through three divorces, without the benefit of support services, employee assistance program, counselling, or being able to talk to anybody about it. Nobody wants to hear that I’ve just split up from my lesbian partner. I have not socialized with my friends in a public setting for 17 years. I said, the rest of you get to go out dancing. I don’t go out dancing. I have to go to another country to go dancing.

Several participants began their careers in the early 70s, a time Leona described as “a deeply underground life in those days when people snuck around after dark and didn’t tell anybody what they were doing.” Fear of sexual orientation discrimination and antigay
harassment led a few participants to hide their lesbian identity at some point along their career path. Leona recalled the social context when she began her work:

In the mid 70s it was a big secret for this whole society. So at the age of 18 when I decided that was the way I was going to go. Follow my heart instead of my head. I thought at that time I was selecting a life of secrecy, not that I wanted to, but that was what would happen.

Similarly, Jack chose not to tell colleagues or clients about her lesbian identity because of her fear of discrimination and consequently was working “in” silence and driven to work hard and prove herself:

It’s because of discrimination, I don’t particularly want to be discriminated against because of my sexuality and I don’t think it’s any of their business what sexual orientation I am. I don’t care about theirs. That makes me want to succeed even more. It makes me want to be much more successful in my career. It’s kind of wanting to prove yourself because you know that you could very easily be discriminated against. You want to be in a position where whenever it happens, you can say look okay, tell me where I’ve gone wrong in what I have done professionally.

Haze discussed her fear of being out both personally and professionally in the 80s, and described a strategy she used to make her partnership invisible to the outside world (i.e., pretending to occupy separate bedrooms):

I didn’t tell anybody for a really long time, you know that whole fear thing, it was in the 80s for God’s sake. But we still ran a two bedroom house for the longest time. It wasn’t until we had the puppies, 6 years ago we went down to a one bedroom house. It was like who gives a shit. It was like it doesn’t matter if the guys come over to fix the heat. He can think whatever he wants you know. It’s that fear, and I don’t know what we were afraid of.

A number of participants who began their occupations working “in” silence, shifted along the continuum of taking risks and being out because of various circumstances that outed them in the workplace. A property of this path were the catalysts that acted to catapult participants out of the closet at work. For example, Cowgirl initially chose the working “in” silence path and after being fired from her position as head coach of a National team
followed the boldly “out” spoken path, acting as a gay and lesbian spokesperson in the community. Cowgirl recalled her painful loss in sport after she was fired and consequently her decision to be out that led to an opportunity to tell her story on National television:

So in 1984 I’m invited to be on a panel about women’s participation in the 1984 Olympics and they asked me, have I ever been discriminated against in sport. I said well I was fired because I was a lesbian. Well of course they see that that’s slandering so they end up voicing over it. Meanwhile in Vancouver I had this big coming out party because I was coming out on CBC, which was great. I mean we had live, four TVs and 50 people, everybody watching it. So it, that turned into a celebration, but that was from 1982 to 1984 and by 1984 I was getting involved in the gay games and starting to do real affirmation stuff.

In a similar manner, the negative rumors that evolved around Leona’s lesbian identity and involved criminal activity, acted as the catalyst for a pivotal turn along her occupational path as she chose to be out at work. Coming out to people she cared about forced Leona and her colleagues to address the issue of homophobia (e.g., harassment in the form of rumors). To her surprise, Leona received support as she began disclosing her lesbian identity to those she cared about that facilitated her coming out to many colleagues:

If there was someone I cared about, and I cared about what they thought about me, then I would speak with them directly. So I ended up coming out to probably 40 people, men and women, deputy chiefs down to constables. People that are, were just so important to me that it mattered to me what they thought. I did not want them thinking that I was a criminal. As I said to the Chief at the time, I said sir, if nothing else, those of us who for the last 17 years have been avoiding this issue, are going to have to decide which side of the fence they are going to stand on.

Haze spent many years working “in” silence and was outed by her partner’s illness. She recalled the dreaded conversation with her boss, “I don’t know if you know or have any kind of understanding about the lifestyle I live, but I’m gay and my girlfriend has just been diagnosed with a brain tumor.” Similar to Leona, coming out for Haze was a turning point in her career as she felt tremendous support, and no longer felt she had to expend a considerable
amount of energy living a secret life. Rather, coming out for Haze represented an opportunity to be truthful about who she was and focus her new found energy on her work, “it allows you to be able to live your life rather than hide it and be scared of it.”

Karla similarly was closeted when she began her first job and described her strategy to hide her lesbian identity as “impression management” as she was concerned about upsetting her parents and hurting their reputation. Moving to a city she perceived was gay friendly (i.e., Vancouver) and eventually feeling supported by her partner, friends, family, and colleagues provided the conditions necessary for Karla to take the boldly “out” spoken path as an out professor at a university.

Working “in” silence was a path followed by participants who felt they had no other choice. In general, these women were driven by a fear that they would be discriminated against in their unique work environments because they were lesbian and a few women worked harder to ensure they would be respected for their contributions. As well, many of them devoted an extraordinary amount of time to work as they were perceived to be single and devoted solely to their jobs. Some of their occupations were considered more homophobic (e.g., police force) than other occupations (e.g., hair dressing), and certain social contexts (e.g., 70s) were less supportive of lesbians. Thus, these women felt their only safe choice at the time was to remain closeted at work.

In summary, working “in” silence involved participants employing elaborate coping strategies to conceal their lesbianism at work. These strategies predominately included separating their personal and professional lives and avoiding participation in work-related social functions and discussions that could implicate their lesbianism. This silencing of their lesbian identities resulted in some participants feeling like they were living in two worlds or
speaking two languages as they experienced a distinct separation between their personal and work spheres. In addition, working “in” silence had negative consequences on the careers of some participants as they were outed by a variety of events (e.g., rumors, being fired). However, these women eventually experienced positive effects of being out on their careers as some changed career paths, others felt they were able to focus energy on their work that previously had been expended concealing their lesbian identities, and many felt relieved because they were able to be honest and free to be themselves at work. In addition, as some of the participants came out they were able to act as advocates for lesbian and gay rights in the workplace and a few went beyond the work context and became political advocates for lesbians and gays generally (e.g., Cowgirl, Jan, Nina).

**Working Quietly**

Working quietly was a path chosen by several participants and its main property involved working quietly within the system, in a way that did not draw attention to their lesbian identity and thus cause embarrassment for these women or their colleagues. By following the status quo, some of these women were able to move into positions of power that allowed them to make positive changes for women, gays, and lesbians. A number of the participants felt that others knew about their lesbian identity, however, it often remained unspoken. They suggested that although they did not try to hide the fact that they were lesbian, they did not bring it up when it was not relevant to the task or topic at hand. For example, the psychologist usually did not bring up her lesbian orientation with heterosexual clients because it was irrelevant or could possibly be detrimental to her therapy with them: “if it comes up or seems appropriate I’ll do that, otherwise no, because it’s not an issue and it also then introduces an issue in the room, and that’s not what the person came here to deal
with.” In a similar vein, the educator who has primarily been working “in” silence, now sees herself as working quietly as she does not go out of her way to avoid the lesbian issue.

The police officer who experienced boldly coming out to her close colleagues after facing rumors, described how she chose to quietly handle the rumors and recalled the beneficial consequences of not waving her rainbow flag (i.e., gay and lesbian pride symbol) and announcing her lesbian status:

It’s true that I went the quieter way, and it’s true it had some major potholes in it, but I never would have been comfortable just leaping out in the middle and waving my flag no matter what happened. By handling the rumors quietly, I believe I earned even more respect instead of running and screaming to human rights. By not embarrassing the executive, by not embarrassing my fellow officers, I just dealt with it.

Some of the participants also suggested that over time they felt more comfortable with themselves and thus felt less inclined to flaunt their lesbian identity. Cowgirl summarized this developmental shift that coincides with movement on the taking risks and being out continuum from working “in” silence to boldly “out” spoken, and now working quietly:

It was like this feedback loop that went back and forth from working “in” silence to boldly “out” spoken and now it’s almost like I work quietly now. It’s simply who I am. But the acknowledgment of my partnership, my sexual orientation, is so continual. It’s almost on a daily basis that I don’t have to build this great crescendo to crash through people’s stuff anymore. Because I’m in their face all the time, I can drop the charge. For me I don’t have to strut my lesbianism. But I don’t modify it and I spent a great deal of my life modifying it. I just am and then people react or don’t react and that’s freeing as well.

Overall, the women who worked quietly in their careers did so for various reasons. Some felt their lesbianism was irrelevant to their work and chose not to bring it up and risk facing discrimination, rejection, or any disruption in the status quo. The psychologist described how the context is an important consideration in this decision and that her clients’
needs are paramount. Others suggested that over time they no longer felt a need to conceal their lesbian identity, or on the other hand, to flaunt it. Many women reported selectively coming out to co-workers and staff that they liked and trusted, however, they did not feel compelled to tell others to whom they were not as close with. Several of these women felt they were able to make changes within the system for gays and lesbians by taking a quiet, less threatening approach, which facilitated positive changes on both personal and political levels within their work context.

Boldly “Out” Spoken

The participants’ level of ‘outness’ was apparent on a continuum (i.e., from working “in” silence to boldly “out” spoken), and was influenced by conditions (e.g., changing social times, personal background) that exerted a continual influence on participants’ lives. This shift over time was due to the multiple changing conditions and several catalysts that acted as conditions that facilitated some participants boldly coming out at work. The majority of women were primarily boldly “out” spoken at work at the time of the interviews. The foremost property of the boldly “out” spoken path was characterized by participants being open about their lesbian identity at work. In addition, these women were concerned and active in regards to addressing gay and lesbian issues generally in the workplace. They typically did not try to hide their sexual identity from colleagues or clients, rather, they reported that it was important for them to be out at work.

Several of the participants noted that they were boldly “out” spoken about their lesbian identity from the beginning of their careers and indicated the conditions that facilitated this. For example, the professor, who has been involved in social change her entire life, recalled the context that facilitated her coming out as a natural consequence of her
political environment, “I was in a very privileged environment for coming out. I just proceeded in a real gay friendly environment, the University of California, it was a lesbian Mecca in the early 70s.” Although she claimed she doesn’t make a ritual out of coming out to people in her present workplace, she noted, “when there’s anything pertaining to gays or lesbians, I jump right in.” For example, she recalled talking with a student who was dealing with her own coming out as a lesbian and described herself in those instances relating to the experience, “well, people like myself who are lesbians,” however, she reported, “I don’t make an announcement to the class, I just speak of it in a casual way.” She discussed how important she feels it is for women to find the courage to be boldly “out” spoken at work in the present context where legal protection for gays and lesbians is common place:

I would like to complain about any woman in any job where her rights to be herself are in any way protected, which is to say almost anybody working in Canada and almost anybody you’d be likely to talk to. I want to say that I have no patience with people who conceal their lesbian identity. I cannot imagine a more cowardly thing to do. And it makes me furious when I think about all the young people struggling with sexual identity. If we’re in love with a woman and we still don’t think of ourselves as a lesbian why would we hide who it is we’re in love with unless we’re really cowardly or in a job or some place where we could really be harmed.

Similarly, Stella was boldly “out” spoken at work as soon as she recognized her lesbianism. In addition to being in what she perceived as a stereotypical gay friendly work environment (e.g., beauty salon), and claiming that she would never work in a job where she felt she had to be in the closet, Stella described how her personality demanded her forthrightness: “because of who I am, I tell it like it is . . . no bullshit, no secrets.” Wadamga also felt she was in a gay friendly profession working as an artist and jeweler and consequently she felt she was able to be whatever she wanted to be. She reflected on the
importance of love and support she received from her family and native village as a young
lesbian and how that acceptance facilitated her boldly “out” spoken path:

I always brought lots of girls to the village (laughing). It was kind of funny and it
would turn into this little lesbian fest . . . when I would go back and a lot of the
women liked it. You know they would come out and dance with us and just, you
know, it wasn’t a problem. I never heard anybody say anything. I think because
families are so darn important and you’re not going to say you’re not my daughter
anymore because you’re a lesbian, it’s the way you are.

Dad, the lawyer, described her process of coming out that involved being herself and
not pretending to be heterosexual: “coming out, okay so I never thought I was straight, never
pretended I was straight, so coming out for me wasn’t sudden, it was always knowing and
just always, you know, just dealing with life on that basis.” However, she recognized her
work environment as becoming progressively more gay friendly by choosing and creating
work environments where she felt supported as a lesbian, and thus has become more boldly
“out” spoken over time, without necessarily being political:

I think there’s a significant difference between what I would consider to be my style,
which is, you know, I’m not very political. I don’t insist that the guys I work with be
really politicized about my lesbianism. The model that has worked for me forever,
and it wasn’t really a conscious decision, it just seemed to me the only way that I
could actually stomach it . . . which is the process of just being who I am. So if I have
a girlfriend, I bring the girlfriend to the functions, and, I also have been doing it for so
long it’s almost unconscious, it’s almost like breathing.

Several of the women in this study had visible occupations that had extensive
influence on their level of being boldly “out” spoken at work. These participants discussed
the experience of having their visibility propel them further out, as they became more
publicly known for their work as lesbians. Due to the nature of some of their occupations, the
success of some of these women resulted in their appearing in the international, national,
Several of these women have had prominent roles working as political activists and spokespersons for the gay and lesbian community. For example, Jan, the writer, has been proclaimed a leader, a spokesperson, and an advocate for gay and lesbian rights. Her work as a writer outed her on the international scene and reached an even wider audience as her work became a successful movie. As Jan’s work became more visible, she found herself being sought by the media for interviews because of her lesbianism, and thus chose to use that to her advantage: “I know every time the CBC wanted to do a documentary on gays and lesbians, I was targeted. Well if you find that you’re going to be interviewed as a lesbian not as a writer then be interviewed as a lesbian and use it.”

Nina’s career took a pivotal turn as one of her occupational roles included being a media spokesperson for the gay and lesbian community because of a lengthy legal battle for gay and lesbian rights. Her visibility as an out lesbian became national, provincial, and local news on a regular basis over 15 years. Mia’s occupational position with human rights often involved fighting for the rights of gays and lesbians. She discussed the importance of being boldly “out” spoken and challenging stereotypes in her work:

I think it’s very important for me to be visible and to be out. Because I think that if we still have stereotypes of who gays and lesbians are, that needs to be challenged. I think people are challenged when they see an Asian lesbian and I think people are challenged when they see a woman, a lesbian in a professional capacity or in a senior capacity who is out. I think that especially for young people too. I think it’s important to have people who can be visible and I wish one day everybody could be out and not feel that if they were out that they’d be harassed. I think it’s really important for kids to be able to see that there are people out there that are like me and they’re not sick or they’re not the stereotype images of who gays and lesbians are.
On a local level, Lisa, a medical doctor, chose to be out from the beginning of her career in the early 70s. However, she felt it was not safe to come out in medical school because of the social climate at the time that was not open to gays and lesbians and just beginning to accept women:

*I certainly couldn't come out at school.* In the medical class it was bad enough to come out as somebody who had taken LSD or something like that but it was anomalous enough as well to be a woman in medicine at that point. It was just the beginning of increasing the proportions of women in medical school.

However, as Lisa began her career she felt it was far too difficult to continue to “pretend” that she was heterosexual and claimed that her early exposure to the feminist community and the social milieu at the time provided her with the conditions that facilitated her taking the boldly “out” spoken path. She recalled her early days as a boldly “out” spoken physician:

What happened for me so early was that I was so visible and there were so few women doctors for one thing then, and a lot of people in the community basically knew. And there was the fact that whenever I was in a work situation I made it pretty clear pretty quickly. It’s like *its part of the picture and I don’t negotiate.*

Many participants discussed how fortunate they were to be born into a ‘privileged’ family, society, and country with a certain intelligence, personality, and unlimited opportunities. For example, Dad noted how her gifts (i.e., being born with emotional strength) helped her endure and beat breast cancer without interrupting or delaying her career, “when I went through the breast cancer thing and people were just shocked at how strong I was about it, I kind of got that from my grandmother, but I also was just given it at birth.” Lisa described herself as having a sense of resiliency, or a feeling of “being capable of surviving.” This concept was perceived by several participants as a powerful factor that helped them cope with difficult circumstances throughout their careers and contributed to
their determination to be boldly “out” spoken at work. Lisa described how her family background provided her with a sense of resiliency, entitlement, safety, and confidence:

Well we talk about resilience and where it comes from and it comes from early childhood I think. I think on the whole I’ve had a fairly strong sense of myself as capable of surviving. I guess what I’m getting at is that sense of entitlement. A sense of having a right to be where I am in the world and not feeling as if I’m in danger. I was always given the sense that I have the right to be where I am. It’s probably just that sense of confidence.

The majority of participants noted how important being ‘true to themselves’ has been along their career paths and facilitated their ability to follow the boldly “out” spoken path. This often involved taking risks and being open about their lesbianism or simply speaking their minds on important issues they passionately believed in. The psychologist described her experience of choosing to be boldly “out” spoken with her husband, family, and colleagues when she first came out as a lesbian and was no longer able to live a lie, “having the certainty glow, being personally grounded and clear is really helpful in proceeding with what’s important to me and where I want to go.”

In summary, the boldly “out” spoken path is a path a few participants chose from the beginning of their careers. These women did not try to hide their lesbian identity from colleagues or clients. They reported that it was important for them to be true to themselves by being honest and out in the workplace. Some of these women suggested that their personalities, privileged family backgrounds, and love and support were conditions that facilitated their choice to be out. Many worked in occupations or work environments they considered gay friendly, and suggested that the social times (e.g., women’s movement) exerted a powerful influence that energized and empowered them to stand up for their rights as women and lesbians. Alternately, several participants experienced being outed (e.g., fired,
rumors) and consequently their level of outness shifted along the continuum, moving from working “in” silence to being boldly “out” spoken. In addition, due to the nature of some of the participants’ careers and their visibility, they came out beyond their immediate work context to the public at large. Finally, although some of the participants initially experienced homophobia by being outed at work at a time they were not prepared to be out, all of the participants reported many positive consequences of being boldly “out” spoken at work, which included feeling supported, being true to self, feeling integrated, and feeling empowered. For some, energy that previously had been used concealing their lesbian identity was no longer holding them back from reaching their potential in their careers.

Facing Ongoing Fear

As the women in this study managed their lesbian identities in the workplace by taking risks and being out, most of them discussed their experiences of “facing ongoing fear (see Figure 1).” Facing ongoing fear involved an element of uncertainty and threat, as participants were aware in a subtle way of the potential for negative reactions from others in the work environment because of their lesbianism. In addition, facing ongoing fear was a reiterative process whereby participants continually had to make decisions regarding being out to different people in different work contexts. This ongoing fear is portrayed well by Dad’s analogy, “Even the most confident of us feel that we are missing a limb of some sort. It’s what being Black probably feels like. In most cases it’s fine, but you never know what you might encounter.” Leona aptly summarized how she faced her fear as a consequence of being outed by rumors at work. She moved along the continuum from working “in” silence to boldly “out” spoken to working quietly and was able to experience the positive effects of
facing her ongoing fear that had silenced her for many years. Feeling safe and accepted in her work environment as a lesbian facilitated her facing her ongoing fear:

You lose the fear of being *ridiculed, humiliated, embarrassed, persecuted*. It just isn’t there. Everything is so right that it’s comforting. I’ve lost the worry I used to have about someone else’s discomfort. You don’t lose fear until you feel safe. There’s a direct relationship. So for fear to go away needs to come trust or belief that where you are is a safe place. Losing fear allows you to be *true to yourself*, allows you to *stand up and be counted*, allows you to trust that the truth will win out. When we get to the losing fear part we *walk on out and carry on*.

For a few participants facing ongoing fear because of being a lesbian did not seem to be evident as part of their process of becoming successful in their occupations. For example, Stella, one of the younger participants (i.e., 44) noted how working in occupations that were considered gay friendly (i.e., hairdressing, real estate), passing as heterosexual, and boldly being out in a social context that was more accepting of lesbians contributed to her confidence and fearlessness. She also emphasized the importance of having love and support and how that may have provided a shield from facing ongoing fear for her as others normalized her lesbian identity. Similarly, Wadamga (age 43) felt she did not face ongoing fear because she felt supported by others because of her honesty and openness, rather than trying to hide her lesbian identity. She also recalled being involved in activities (e.g., sports, arts) that facilitated her becoming part of the community she lived and worked in. Contributing to the community seemed to facilitate her confident and fearless manner in which she managed her lesbian identity in the workplace.

Two older participants (i.e., age 62, 53) decided to be boldly “out” spoken from the beginning of their careers and were activists who fought for social change and were considered pioneers in their work in this regard. This early politicization may have been a factor that explained their routes to occupational success as void of facing ongoing fear.
Kathleen discussed how she had the protection and safety of a large activist community that empowered her to be fearless in her work as an out lesbian:

I expect my story to be different than almost anybody. I was in a very privileged environment for coming out, for being different in any way and also I was a very worldly person. I was an activist that worked against those people. They were very specific people, that was the right wing and it was a nuisance. I was surrounded by friends and we would call for a rally and there would be 500 of us. That doesn’t take much courage to go out with 500 fabulous people and tell Anita Bryant that she was goofy and why doesn’t she go someplace else.”

Likewise, when Lisa began her career as a physician, she was in a social milieu that facilitated her involvement as a feminist and activist for women’s rights. This early politicization combined with her prestigious position in the community may have contributed to her confidence and unwillingness to be driven by fear on route to her occupational success.

In contrast, several participants lived through painful circumstances and felt rejected when they took risks and were out at work and thus facing ongoing fear was very much a part of their experience. These women were able to face ongoing fear by turning “obstacles into usefulness” by the way they dealt directly with the problems they encountered. Salient properties of facing ongoing fear are included in the following subcategories: (a) “handling homophobia,” and (b) “fighting for social change” that help explain how these women faced ongoing fears as lesbians in the workplace and became empowered and transformed in spite of them. This transformation happened as these women took responsibility for their own role in being out lesbians and stood up for their rights. The women who did not experience facing ongoing fear were out and directly involved in handling homophobia and fighting for social change along their path to holistic integration.
Handling Homophobia

One of the consequences of facing ongoing fears for many of the women in this study was handling homophobia. This term encompasses the ways in which participants recognized and handled prejudice or bias in their colleagues that were reflected through their attitudes and actions that participants perceived were because of their lesbianism. Homophobia in this study can best be encapsulated in Kathleen’s definition that she so aptly articulated. She used the term “lesbophobia” to define her view of homophobia specific to lesbians. Kathleen described how lesbophobia is expressed and ultimately can lead to discrimination:

In my usage, lesbophobia (fear of and hatred toward lesbians) is expressed in attitudes and actions based on prejudice. Widespread prejudice translates into social/political/economic discrimination, whereby dominate groups benefit at the expense of minority groups, which is institutionalized prejudice.

Many of the women in this study faced lesbophobia that was expressed in attitudes (e.g., rumors, harassment) and actions (e.g., loss of friends and family, hate mail, workplace being bombed), some of which led to discrimination (e.g., being fired, financial ruin, censored books for lesbian content). In addition, a few women reported that they feared discrimination and thus their expectation of homophobia silenced them. However, generally, the women in this study addressed issues of homophobia directly, by challenging the source. For example, two participants were fired from their jobs in the early 1980s, a time when they had no legal recourse because gays and lesbians were not yet protected under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. However, both participants chose to stand up for themselves and challenge their employers regarding their discrimination. The manner in which one of these participants handled her situation involved consulting her uncle who was a judge for legal advice that led to threatening her employer that she would sue. By taking action and pursuing
legal action this participant was able to settle her dispute out of court. Although the social
times were such that legal protection for gays and lesbians was not in place, by standing up
for herself, this participant handled this situation successfully. She described how personal
background conditions may have facilitated this action: “That empowerment comes with a
real privilege in the history, in the background that I have, of people who have said, “no
that’s not right’.”

Similarly, the Olympic coach faced discrimination in the early 1980s after being fired
from her head coach position of a National team, a time when she had no legal recourse.
However, as a consequence she became boldly “out” spoken about this discrimination (e.g.,
on National Television) and became a community activist. She became involved in feminist
organizations and fought for social change. Feeling loved and supported by her mother who
accepted her lesbian daughter was a condition that further facilitated her handling
homophobia. She recalled the unexpected acknowledgement and validation her mom
provided her with during her darkest times:

My mom reaches across the kitchen table, takes my hand and says “I’ve thought
you’ve been a lesbian for a long time,” and like she’s using the L word and I’ve been
trying to avoid it. So then suddenly it was out there. My mom did wonderful things in
that first year when I was still really trying to recover in many ways. She would do
things like if people said, “How’s your daughter? Is she married yet?” my mom
would say, “she’s doing really well and she’s a lesbian.” She’d say this city is divided
up, the people who would never talk to her again and the people who would say “oh
tell her to come on over for coffee.”

Another participant filed a complaint against her employer requesting same sex
benefits in the 1990s, a move that was perceived by her colleagues and friends as potentially
career limiting. Her case was successfully challenged and won, a sign of the changing social
times that reflected the progress that has been made toward equality and freedom for gays
and lesbians. Other participants went to the source to challenge homophobic rumors (e.g., rumors that implicated their lesbianism in pathological ways), and, if that was unsuccessful, utilized power by going to the top to help deal with the problem head on. These women eventually occupied positions of power themselves and recognized how power and being successful can be a way to insulate oneself from homophobia.

The sexuality thing still remains an issue and has to be dealt with day after day within the context of the work environment. In my case it’s no longer an issue in the work environment. In fact I have to slow my brothers down, they keep trying to drag C and I out to events. I am working in an extremely gay friendly environment but I’m a high ranking police officer. The rank if anything gives me a little insulation because if some constable in the far corner has a problem with me being gay, it’s a long way from reaching me. (Leona)

Many participants’ occupations involved advocacy and thus they made direct efforts to educate society on a broader level and others on a more individual level about homophobia. Kathleen discussed her role as an educator:

As a university professor, I’ve got a lot of status, that’s another thing that if you’re so called successful in a career and you already have the reputation and so people who are homophobic are going to leave you alone but then they’re going to discover that you’re not weird, that you don’t discriminate against them, and in fact I’m sure that I have in my person helped a lot of people overcome their homophobia and demystified what it is to be a lesbian.

Several of the participants described handling homophobia by being open and honest, yet respectful of others’ feelings when dealing with situations. One participant employed a strategy whereby she chose not to take people seriously when they were not being consistent with her values. Others have been unrelenting about educating people and have used humor to diffuse situations. Jan described the positive benefits of handling homophobia, “a lot of the places of negative judgment, of silencing in fact turned out to be places where you could hone your skill and your nerve and your courage and insight.” Many other women chose to
reframe a negative event by “creating something positive.” For example, participants who were fired from their positions commented on the wonderful new opportunities that opened up for them as a consequence of experiencing discrimination.

Leona too was able to find positive value out of the waves of rumors that circulated in her workplace and talked about the value of persevering in the face of adversity:

And the third wave was that I had been seen driving around Stanley Park with a kid in my car. So the three waves of rumor hit and I had to survive them all and just keep working, just get through it. And so I am kind of proud to tell this story today because I think that, by the way we handled it, we probably opened more doors than we even know for gay women and I hope in time that will mean gay men, because there is a big difference in the acceptance rate here.

Mia’s strategy to reframe the situation prevented her from limiting herself:

What has helped is not limiting myself, I mean this is another thing that my mother had said to me, you know society is going to limit what you can do anyway because of your gender or because you haven’t got a university degree so don’t limit yourself, like try your best. If you set your mind to it maybe you’ll achieve it and so I think that has been very helpful not to let the lack of credentials or the lack of something get in my way and try and see whether I could do it anyway.

Similarly, Artemis was able to see the bright side of the high cost of coming out on her career, despite the loss she experienced, “well it caused interruptions and delays in that I’ve lost the clinic that I had founded, so that has been extremely expensive,” as well as the pain of a custody battle that she ultimately won. However, she acknowledged the positive side of coming out:

The analogy that I kind of lived with at that time was like coming out of a world of black and white vision and moving into color vision. You know there was just therightness, the accuracy, the intactness of it. So there was the part about being alive that was very fresh and very real.

Several women described painful work experiences that they were able to endure, survive, and overcome because of the abundant emotional support provided by others that
gave them the strength, confidence, and determination to continue striving in the face of adversity. The majority of the women in this study were involved in long-term relationships (i.e., 5 to 45 years) that provided them with the love and support they needed to handle difficult situations in their work lives and become successful in their careers. The writer described her recently deceased partner of 45 years, “she was enormously supportive and a good scholar and wonderful teacher; intrepid, fearless, and just marvelous in every way. So I’ve had great good luck and great blessings.” The police officer recalled the support, understanding, and strength provided by her partner during hard times at work:

This gal is my backbone. I could come home, I could cry because things upset me and she helps me understand that it’s okay to cry. I can share with her my frustration, but mostly she keeps me grounded. She helps me work through things and she listens to what I have to say.

Expanding community was another way participants handled homophobia by seeking and/or receiving support from others that enabled them to face their ongoing fears and overcome them. The women expanded their community of support as they came out to co-workers and developed more intimate, authentic relationships based on honesty and respect. In addition, many women expanded their community support by seeking support from the gay and lesbian community and other professional organizations. Cowgirl discussed her experience of expanding community and developing skills after being fired from her National coaching position:

It’s the best thing that ever happened to me because I totally expanded my community and became known in other communities as somebody that you could connect with to do stuff. I was using the same skills that I had in sport but I was learning different processes that weren’t so aggressive. I was learning better communication skills.
Nina’s experience of being a visible spokesperson in the gay and lesbian community also resulted in expanding her community and recognizing her pride in being part of this community:

I just am a voice for a community that’s been really supportive. You know nothing could have happened in this court case without having a phenomenal amount of people who have all participated in volunteering, helping, working towards this. Many testified without being paid because they felt it was such an important issue and they wanted to be there. To be supportive and to articulate their history, their opinions, their ideas. *I was there to watch this incredible portrait of a community be drawn. It just had the diversity of who we are and what we are.*

A few women reported that they had not encountered homophobia at any time during their lives. These participants did not perceive homophobia in situations by not taking them seriously or personally. Wadamga said, “I don’t really notice it, that is barriers. I’m kind of oblivious to it. I’m aware that if something isn’t working then I need to change it but it’s not going to stop me.” Mia felt that she had not been discriminated against as a lesbian because she passes as heterosexual, “people don’t think there are Asian lesbians so maybe it is a privilege of people assuming that I’m heterosexual.” Dad’s persona of confidence and assertiveness and as she says unwillingness to “sit at the back of the bus” may have protected her from personally experiencing the effects of homophobia. However, despite these women not experiencing homophobia personally, they were active in handling homophobia in the work context (e.g., responding to lesbian jokes, fighting for lesbian and gay rights).

In summary, many of the women in the present study experienced a range of experiences of homophobia in the workplace and coping strategies they used to handle homophobia. All of the participants who discussed their experiences with homophobia described how important seeking love and support was from partners, families, friends, and colleagues in helping them handle these situations. A few participants acknowledged that
they had not personally encountered homophobia and suggested that they simply did not notice it, did not take it seriously, passed as heterosexual, or their personality was able to prevent it from occurring and escalating. However, these women actively handled homophobia in their work lives in a more general sense. Several participants described facing ongoing fears around homophobia by taking action and directly challenging the source. Others employed cognitive reframing strategies that enabled them to find strength in the face of adversity and create something positive in their careers out of the negative. Finally, a few participants chose to be more public in their battle against homophobia and discrimination and pursued legal action, fighting for gay and lesbian rights.

**Fighting for Social Change**

Facing ongoing fear involved the women in this study fighting for social change for women, gays, and lesbians in the workplace. The interaction of the conditions (e.g., gay friendly work environment, changing social times, love and support) with being out in the workplace resulted in facing ongoing fear that facilitated and motivated participants fighting for social change in their own unique ways. Some participants bypassed facing ongoing fear and moved directly to fighting for social change. These women were involved in fighting for social change for most of their lives and careers and often grew up politicized. Fighting for social change involved participants working to make a difference for women, gays, and lesbians by being passionate about improving life for them within the workplace and in their lives. Fighting for social change can be considered in the present study from an individual level to a broader, societal perspective. It was often transformational for participants who moved from working “in” silence to speaking out and working to make a difference for gays and lesbians in the workplace. This sense of giving to the gay and lesbian community left
participants feeling proud about the contributions they could make to initiate change in the workplace. Participants fought for social change and made a difference in a variety of ways, including public advocacy, running for public office, volunteering time and money to gay and lesbian organizations, serving as role models for younger women and lesbians, being in positions that can influence change in the workplace, and working directly with lesbian clients.

Kathleen demonstrated a desire to ensure justice prevailed and a passion for helping all of humanity throughout her occupational path. She has been an advocate for women, women in prison, and lesbians, and has been a community activist for as long as she can remember. Recently, Kathleen was awarded a prestigious prize for humanitarian works, an international award that recognized her personal integrity, dedication, humanity, and for the important contribution she has made to her society. Nina and Jan have also won several international awards related to their writing contributions. Kathleen discussed the impact she has had as a professor working with young adults in more recent years:

I’ve been successful in teaching literally thousands of students how to take more power in their own lives, especially young women I would say, certainly I’ve given a tremendous amount of courage to a lot of young lesbians.

Like Kathleen, other participants who are very visible in the community, found they were able to develop expertise, advocacy skills, and an understanding of women’s issues by their involvement in various movements (e.g., women’s movement, gay and lesbian movement). Mia described her experience in the early part of her career:

I sat on women’s rights committees at the union so I was developing my knowledge and awareness of discrimination, sort of, from a more technical sense. Not just from lived experience but technically what is discrimination and how many different ways is it legally defined. So I started learning a lot of the terms and was either educated
with my involvement through the union movement, the women’s movement, or self education.

Similarly, Cowgirl “took this fast train to the left,” getting intensely involved in feminist, leftist, and gay and lesbian organizations, where she learned new skills for dealing with harassment, discrimination, and homophobia. Jan recalled her early roots in feminism when she was involved in the formation of the women’s movement in the early 1970s. She went on to become a leader and spokesperson for gays and lesbians and noted, “well I certainly have worked hard against homophobia and I think I’ve worked pretty hard in terms of social justice in a wider sense, human rights is a passion.” Lisa commented that the social milieu at the time provided her with opportunities to be involved in social change as she recalled her role in the abortion movement:

I was very much active as a spokesperson for the abortion choice movement. We all had to fight very hard to make sure that we had members out and that abortion rights within at least the limited way that they were provided at that time were maintained. So I was quite comfortable in the milieu and was involved in different action groups.

A few participants fought for social change in a more subtle, quiet way. For example, the educator reported being an advocate for women, gays, and lesbians; however, she was not comfortable fighting in a more visible manner. She described providing opportunities for employment for individuals and saw herself as a role model for younger teachers. Stella felt a sense of responsibility to younger lesbians and chose to be out as a ‘feminine’ lesbian to break the stereotypical “dyke” image. Dad did not fight for social change in any sort of macro way however noted that by being out she has been able to change people’s attitudes about lesbians and their acceptance of lesbians, “I think one of the best things that you can do is just to be honest with everybody about who you are.” In a similar way Cowgirl described herself making a difference by being honest and open about her lesbian identity. She reflected
on the change that has taken place along her occupational path over time that changed from being a gay and lesbian activist to presently living her integrity daily in her personal and work life:

There was a period where I thought there’s a party on the left, politics makes a difference and you go and fight that route and make a difference. Well now I actually think that the political system is so entrenched in what you fight against that working inside doesn’t really do it and I’m not motivated to do this. You come back to where you can live your integrity. Well you can live it in your own life, you live it with your family, your neighbors, and your work interactions.

The police officer used her “quiet strength” and her position of power to engineer social change:

There is a big difference in the acceptance rate here and from 7 years ago to today, here’s what’s occurred. Several women I know have been encouraged by their units to bring their partners to the social events and do so. We now, in recruit training have a panel of gay and lesbian police officers who come to speak to, and transgendered who come and speak to the recruits about life as a gay officer. The definition of spouse has been changed to include same sex partners. We have rewritten our workplace harassment policy to specifically include transgendered persons, which is ahead of and beyond what human rights do. Our parental leave is about to include spouse.

(Leona)

The physician and psychologist described working to make a difference as being ultimately service or clinically oriented. The physician described how she has worked to make a difference in the lives of her lesbian patients:

I like to make a difference. The things that I’ve been happy about making a difference with are projects or service oriented or something that a number of people do together that ultimately is clinical service of one kind or another. I believe it is probably one to one or in small groups or eventually over time that you can provide safe milieus for people and they can sometimes rescue themselves.

Wadamga employed art form as a way to express her political views and influence social change. For example, she designs jewelry (e.g., commitment rings) for many gay and lesbian clients that combine her own Native culture with input from the individual and their
life experience. Wadamga’s more recent ventures include designing furniture that highlight her Native culture in a very contemporary manner that allows people to see these Native motifs not as central, but as part of the world we live in. She commented on her perception of the creative energy that is igniting lesbians to transform change by doing something different in the lesbian community:

I like your title “Striving for Holistic Success: How Lesbians Come Out on Top,” that’s kind of cool. I think I see a lot of energy in the lesbian community. There’s a lot of creative energy now and its cool because a lot of people have overcome some kind of adversity to get where they are and it allows them that little bit of ignition to go out and do something different. Not mainstream, it’s kind of cool, yeah everything is part of an awakening.

To summarize, many of the participants decided to face their ongoing fears and uncertainties related to being an “out” lesbian at work by actively becoming involved in fighting for social change. Fighting for social change was often transformational as participants fought for changes for gays and lesbians in the workplace. In addition, a number of participants did not recount facing ongoing fears, however, a few of these women grew up politicized and were activists for most of their careers. A couple of the younger women also circumvented facing ongoing fears. These women may have reaped the rewards of the innovators who fought for gay and lesbian rights and thus made it easier for younger generations to boldly be out and fight for social change in their unique ways. Many participants’ reported working to make a difference on a daily basis by having the courage to be open about their lesbianism at work. Several others have been activists for human rights, women’s, and gay and lesbian issues. A number of the women have educated people and students through a variety of forms (e.g., art, education system). One participant ran for political office and others have been involved directly in changing workplace policies
regarding gays and lesbians. Finally, a few of the women in this study have been recognized publicly for their contributions to society at large.

**Holistic Integration**

The consequence of facing their ongoing fears for the women in this study led to holistic integration. Holistic integration was a transformational process because it involved participants integrating their work and lesbian lives, as many of them moved from feeling fragmented to feeling whole and complete. Cowgirl accurately described this fragmented life, "there was this kind of sense of two worlds," a life whereby participants were living two separate lives, a work life, and a lesbian life as a way of surviving in a society and work world that was perceived to be heterosexist and homophobic. Many participants experienced years of silencing their lesbian self, or as Leona recalled, "selecting a life of secrecy." She reflected on how being out at work facilitated personal healing and transformed her work life:

> As I look back I realize that having "the conversation" was part of my healing, not just about the rumors, but after 17 years of not being totally honest with people I cared a lot about. Finally being able to tell them my dark secret and having most of them assure me it made no difference. That opened up a whole new world. To put it in my bosses words, I became a much happier and openly genuine person.

Several participants experienced homophobia in the workplace and the consequential pain and loss that led them to engaging in holistic healing practices (e.g., yoga, meditation) that further empowered them to integrate all aspects of themselves in the workplace. As these participants felt safe, found their voices, spoke their truth, and embraced their previously cut off lesbian identities, they experienced holistic integration on many levels. For those participants who did not feel that their work and lesbian lives were separate, holistic integration was experienced early in their careers. These women did not experience many obstacles in the workplace and thus their experience of striving for holistic integration
appeared smooth and natural. Many of these women, however, were determined to use their courage to fight homophobia and work to make a difference for those less fortunate. Kathleen illustrated how her experience of being an out lesbian was a positive choice and articulated her view of how the gay and lesbian community working together is in itself a process of healing:

Being a lesbian is itself a healing experience for women who suffered the pains of being straight. I felt and do feel blessed to have had that choice. Thanks to lesbian outlaws of previous generations who came out and left their mark in some way. Thanks to lesbians who have campaigned for legal and social policy changes for decades, with significant success, and thanks to athletes and cultural workers (musicians, etc.), we built strong communities. It’s the pioneers who suffer. Building and belonging to a community is de facto healing.

The process of striving for holistic integration for all of the participants was influenced by the ever changing conditions (i.e., changing social times, personal background, serendipitous conditions, love and support, and gay friendly work environment conditions) that interacted synergistically in a dynamic manner as these women became successful in their occupations. The process of striving is captured by Kathleen who noted, “there is no end . . . we are talking about a life time process which can never be concluded.” Holistic integration in this study was a continuous process as the conditions in participants lives changed and new environments (e.g., gay friendly) and social times (e.g., 1960s to 1990s) informed their decisions about how to manage their lesbian identities in the workplace. Holistic integration was experienced by these women on both interpersonal and intrapersonal levels.

Interpersonal Level

The majority of participants reported that being out at work gave them a sense of freedom to interact with co-workers that allowed them to be themselves. For several women
integrating their lesbian and work worlds was the result of being outed, however, eventually with positive consequences. For example, when Haze was outed by her partner’s illness she found her relationships with colleagues to be much more honest, and commented, “it allows you to be able to live your life rather than hide it and be scared of it.” Leona discussed how her work and personal life changed dramatically, “the right keeps getting righter,” and noted how integration has positively influenced her relationships, “integration of the acceptance I have here at work and the support of my family has made this life something I would have never believed possible.”

A number of the women were out immediately in their occupations and therefore experienced integrating their lesbian identity with their work world early in their careers. Lisa commented on how she felt integrated by acknowledging her lesbian identity at work:

For me I don’t find myself in a lesbian world or this world. I talked to people about being a lesbian in the first place because I couldn’t do anything else. For me I have been who I am and it sounds sort of arrogant but I feel integrated. I do feel integrated and when they buy the package here, that’s what they buy. Basically it has been a given since the time I told my people at the clinic that I was lesbian that it was all going to be there and that there wasn’t going to be a distinction.

For several participants, holistic integration involved feeling integrated in society and not just seeking support from the gay and lesbian community. Dad commented on her experience:

In the social support area I’ve spent a lot of time with straight people. Over the longer term I think that you feel more integrated if your life doesn’t just revolve around gay people. If you have friends that are other than gay and lesbian, if you have straight friends that are really integrated into your life I think it makes a difference. It makes you feel less like you know you’re having some sort of a secret society over there in the corner.

Intrapersonal Level

The women discussed striving for holistic integration on an intrapersonal level by participating in a variety of activities that focused on personal growth and healing.
Commonly mentioned outcomes of this personal work included: accepting and feeling comfortable with their lesbian identity; finding strength and courage; developing coping skills that included relaxation activities and self-care, and integrating all aspects of self. Often participants mentioned the importance of accepting one’s lesbian identity as a part of self and being open and honest about it in the workplace:

I think when you are a lesbian, you come out in the 70s you learn how to project yourself in as comfortable mode as you can. So people when they saw that I was a lesbian, that they knew that I wasn’t uncomfortable with it, that allows you to be really honest about who you are. (Wadamga)

Stella also commented on how her lesbianism is not all of her: “it’s part of me, you know like I don’t discount it as a part of me but it’s not all of me.” Artemis expanded on this idea and suggested being a lesbian is just a part of the core of her beliefs and values and a “core place to rest in and move from” in the world:

I think being a lesbian is part of that you know. I see that an important component of self. Being a lesbian is just part of that. It’s just part of the core of what’s truth and when I didn’t have that piece it was like there was this sort of empty zone. It’s more complete. I think in terms of growing and developing and moving ahead it’s like standing on all feet rather than just hopping on one leg and trying to proceed into the future.

Being true to self was expressed by several participants as having the ability to stand up for what they believed in and feeling proud of who they are. Nina described this influence:

I would say I’m a lot of things and being a lesbian is part of what makes up who I am. It’s certainly given me a lot of history and a lot of things that have drawn out aspects of myself that maybe I’m not sure that they would have been as prevalent. But I do think it’s made me proud of who I am and unwilling to compromise the issues of what defines me around my sexual orientation. I think it’s made me really stand up for things I believe in.

Many of the women reported that their lesbian identity influenced their strength and courage to be themselves along their occupational path leading to success. Jack chose to
work harder as a shield against potential discrimination and says, “in the end you feel that you are stronger in the face of discrimination to counter any of their claims.” Haze conveyed the feeling of confidence she gained by being open and honest and how that broke down barriers, “it ends up giving you confidence, giving you passion and conviction in the life that you have chosen, by being truthful and forthright in your life, it breaks down barriers.” Lisa described how feeling different from others because of being lesbian led her to develop independence and strength:

Being a lesbian has in a sense allowed me to be and forced me to be more independent and I’ve never had the sense that I could ever rely on anyone else to support me. But I think that if a person sees herself as other in some way or different than other people, one way or another we have to contend with that sense. And what that may mean is that you know for me what it’s meant, it’s almost as if it’s painted on my face. There’s nothing I can do about that. That means I am stronger.

The psychologist articulated her view of how being marginalized in society has traumatized many lesbians and how she has worked with clients to help them transform their injury into strength:

We are looking at a community which has been largely marginalized. There are a lot of systemic injustices that have been part of that. A lot of traumas and so I am working from that premise. Working with people in their lives and how they can transform injury into a strength, into some wisdom instead. To be able to stand with that and to be able to move forward with that.

Many of the women in this study sought to find balance in their lives because they recognized their work had consumed most of their adult lives. In addition, several participants had overcome major obstacles in their careers (e.g., being fired), and turned to activities and people that nourished their bodies and souls and gave them the strength and courage to persist in their work. Participants mentioned striving for a higher quality of life by participating in counselling, exercise, proper nutrition, spirituality, loving relationships, and
pursuing interests and hobbies outside of work. Some of these activities have been ongoing throughout many participant's lives and others have only recently found the energy and time to pay attention to their personal needs. Aggie asserted the importance of her soul work:

I do a lot of soul work. It’s nurturing for my soul. The other thing that I’ve gotten into in the last few years is doing some work in terms of meditation, Buddhist philosophy and I’ve taken some classes. And I have my own sort of meditation practice which has been very successful for me because it’s allowed me to take the time, to actually take time and that’s helpful.

In addition, the developmental phase several women were living involved “shifting priorities,” as they neared retirement and wanted to explore components of self and interests that had long been neglected. Leona commented on her career winding down:

I don’t know if I’m as driven now in my career as I used to be because I’m going to retire in about 2 years. I’m not going to work until I’m 102, after 28 years here I’ve given all I’m going to give here and I’m going to go and give the rest to myself and C. I have an awful lot I want to do. Our goal is wanting it to be right and the right is balanced, healthy, it’s alive and awake enough to do good things. I’m not there yet in terms of physical shape but hoping to get there.

In summary, holistic integration for many participants was the consequence of being out in the workplace and facing their ongoing fears. For these women, this process became transformational as they began to feel safety in the workplace that facilitated them “bringing two worlds” together, their lesbian and work worlds. Several of these women experienced gaining strength and courage as they recovered from past painful experiences in the workplace and began to feel integrated. For a few other participants, holistic integration occurred earlier in their careers because they naturally integrated their lesbian and work worlds together. These women were boldly “out” spoken as their careers began and consequently moved directly to holistic integration as they came out at work. This process
was influenced by the conditions (e.g., love and support, a gay friendly work environment) that continuously interacted in a dynamic manner in participants’ lives.

The process of striving for holistic integration was evident on an interpersonal level and an intrapersonal level. Holistic integration on an interpersonal level involved feeling free to interact with co-workers in an honest manner based on being open and out as lesbians. Although this did not necessarily happen immediately in all participants’ work lives, participants indicated their desire to be working towards this type of openness in the future. Holistic integration included participants integrating their lesbian and work “worlds,” worlds that for many participants had previously been fragmented. This integration was associated with participants feeling comfortable being “out” lesbians in the workplace. For some it meant bringing their partner to work-related social functions, for others it meant not having to hide their lesbian identity for fear of discrimination. The consequences of bringing the two worlds together included a sense of support from co-workers who accepted them for who they are. Holistic integration on an intrapersonal level often involved personal growth activities, finding balance (e.g., between work and recreation), and enabled participants to feel integrated on many levels that had been previously neglected (e.g., physical, spiritual, emotional).

Summary

This exploratory qualitative study stimulates conceptual development and ordering of the process of lesbians becoming successful in their occupations. The illuminated process of striving for holistic integration is posited to involve a complex process of change that occurs on an individual level with broader social implications. The process varied considerably for participants because of their unique personal and work contexts, however, all of these women
were passionate about their work and began the process of integrating their lesbian and work worlds in their various work environments as they acknowledged their lesbian identities.

The process of striving for holistic integration involved a dynamic, synergistic interaction between the influencing conditions (i.e., changing social times, personal background, serendipitous conditions, love and support, and gay friendly work environment conditions) and the unfolding of the process of women managing their lesbian identities in the workplace. Throughout this process women took risks and were out at work along a continuum that represented women working “in” silence, working quietly, and being boldly “out” spoken. As participants were out in the workplace it became evident that many of them continued to experience uncertainty in the work environment because of their lesbian identities. These women faced ongoing fears regarding homophobia and recalled having to decide whether or not to come out to additional people in changing work contexts. On the other hand, some participants moved directly to handling homophobia and fighting for social change on their path to holistic integration. The manner in which participants handled homophobia and fought for social change both on an individual and broader social level empowered many of these women. On a personal level, many participants found their voices and spoke their truth, acknowledging their previously denied lesbian identity. On a broader social level, several participants were instrumental in changing workplace protection policies and were activists fighting for the rights of gays and lesbians. As participants’ experienced a continual process of taking risks and being out at work, and facing ongoing fears, they experienced holistic integration as their lesbian identities became integrated in their work lives. For some participants this process happened from the beginning of their careers, and for others the process occurred gradually over time and is still happening.
On an interpersonal level, many participants were open and honest with co-workers about their lesbian identities and thus felt they were able to be themselves. On an intrapersonal level, these women experienced a variety of personal growth activities that facilitated integration and personal development. Facing ongoing fear involved participants’ feeling safe enough to disclose their lesbian identity in the workplace. This safety facilitated participants’ ability to maintain their dignity without compromising themselves and denying their lesbian identities.

The process of striving for holistic integration is continuously influenced by the dynamic, ever changing conditions prevalent in these women’s lives. Due to changing life and work circumstances, many of the participants re-experienced the process of taking risks and being out at work invariably throughout their careers. Thus, the process of striving for holistic integration involved intrapersonal and interpersonal interactions that are continually evolving.

“When I dare to be very powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid”.

Audre Lorde, Black, Mother, Lesbian, Poet
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The last step in formulating a grounded theory is to establish its usefulness and relevance. Two parameters that warrant discussion in this regard are (a) the effectiveness of using the grounded theory method in conceptual development and ordering that extends beyond extant theoretical perspectives in the area of lesbian career development and lays the groundwork for further theorizing, and (b) the contribution of this conceptual ordering of the process of lesbians becoming successful in their occupations to the existing knowledge in this area. In this chapter, I begin with a brief examination of the effectiveness of employing the grounded theory method in this study. Second, I examine study findings and compare them to relevant literature in the areas of women’s and lesbian career development and success. The extant literature previously reviewed in Chapter 2 has been reinterpreted in light of this study’s theoretical findings. In addition, new literature is also introduced that is relevant to the description of the process of striving for holistic integration. Third, I discuss the strengths and limitations of the study. Finally, implications for future research and practice are discussed.

Effectiveness of Grounded Theory Method

In this study, I explored the psychological process of how lesbians become successful in their occupations and conceptually developed and ordered this process. In order to elucidate this experience from the perspective of the participating women, the investigation began with a broad question, “how do lesbians become successful in their occupations?” The conceptual ordering of the process of striving for holistic integration was developed in answer to this question.
The grounded theory method was appropriate for studying lesbians' occupational success because very little is known about the process of how lesbians become successful in their occupations and no theory presently exists to describe or explain this process. This approach was able to reveal new concepts and processes regarding lesbians becoming successful in the workplace. Utilizing this method, the theory addresses some of the limitations of the extant literature in this area by (a) describing and developing a conceptual ordering that lays the groundwork for theory development that is specific to lesbians' work experiences leading to occupational success, (b) describing a process that allows exploration of the experience of participants from their own point of view, (c) describing the experience in context rather than as an isolated phenomenon, and (d) elucidating the experience of how lesbians become successful as a process and identifying relationships among its different properties and conditions. The findings of this study represent lesbian's experience of occupational success as a complex, psychological process that has not been illuminated in previous research.

The central process that is described in this study specifies common aspects (e.g., "taking risks and being out") of the experience of lesbians becoming successful in their workplace, however, it is broad enough to allow for individual differences (e.g., "working 'in' silence" versus "boldly 'out' spoken" path). Employing the grounded theory method in this study allowed me to develop concepts that originate in the experiences of lesbians, rather than from the dominant group on whom existing theories of women's career development are based. In this sense, the grounded theory method has allowed me to reveal a process that is grounded in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).
Contribution to the Extant Literature

Similar to several of the women’s career development theories, the conceptual ordering of the process of lesbian occupational success, “striving for holistic integration,” includes both individual and environmental influences that affect occupational success (Astin, 1984; Farmer, 1985; Fitzgerald et al., 1989; Gottfredson, 1981). Three empirical studies of women’s career development (Gomez et al., 2001; Poole & Langan-Fox, 1997; Richie et al., 1997) are especially relevant to the present study because of their focus on the career success of several diverse populations of women. The frameworks developed in all three investigations are dynamic, interactive person-environment models that consider personal background, personal characteristics, and social, cultural, and contextual variables in the career development and success of diverse populations of women.

Most recently, Gomez et al. (2001) employed grounded theory method to investigate the career development of 20 notable Latinas. Similar to the findings of Poole and Langan-Fox, 1997 and Richie et al. (1997), Gomez et al. proposed that Latina career development is influenced by sociopolitical, cultural, contextual, and personal variables.

The results of the present study illuminate individual conditions (i.e., personal background conditions, love and support conditions), environmental conditions (i.e., gay friendly work environment, serendipitous conditions), and cultural and contextual conditions (i.e., changing social times, discrimination, homophobia) that dynamically interact and influence the central process of striving for holistic integration as participants become successful in their occupations.
A difference between the results of the present study and the existing literature (e.g., Gomez et al. (2001), Richie et al. (1997), and Poole and Langan-Fox (1997) lie in the women's personal backgrounds and contextual factors. The lesbian participants in the present study experienced unique work experiences by virtue of their lesbian identities that were different from heterosexual women. For example, managing their lesbian identities in the workplace was a crucial consideration that often involved purposeful decision making and initiated the process of these women striving for holistic integration. For some women, the decision to be out was made for them as they were outed in the workplace and had to cope with the consequences of being outed. The decision to be open or conceal one's lesbian identity was a complex issue that was influenced by multiple conditions and often required careful strategizing and planning.

The process described in this study extends personal and environmental models of women's career development by considering the influence of purpose and meaning in the unique context of these lesbians' lives as they took risks and were out in the workplace. The lesbians in this study often employed elaborate coping strategies to conceal their lesbian identities as they feared discrimination in the workplace. Throughout their careers, additional coping strategies were identified that facilitated many lesbians being open about their lesbian identities in the workplace. For example, participants often found meaning in the face of adversity (e.g., discrimination) and appraised benefit from undesirable circumstances. As some participants let go of untenable goals due to homophobic circumstances, they were able to formulate new goals that ultimately created positive opportunities. Many of the women in this study developed advocacy skills for handling homophobia and became politicized as they fought for social change within their work environments and sometimes on a broader
social level. Facing ongoing fear by handling homophobia and fighting for social change led to holistic integration. The process of striving for holistic integration facilitated participants attaining occupational success as they integrated their lesbian and work worlds. In the following pages, I discuss this central process of striving for holistic integration in light of the extant literature and illuminate new findings that contribute to the field.

Being Out at Work as a Psychological Process of Change

The present study describes lesbians who were mostly out at work (i.e., 13 were out and, 2 were selectively out). Several of these women began their careers concealing their lesbian identity (i.e., working “in” silence), however, over time all of these participants were out at work to varying degrees. Although there is a paucity of research that investigates the psychological effects of coming out at work, studies have found a strong relationship between being open about one’s sexual orientation, greater levels of support, and job satisfaction (Ellis & Riggle, 1995; Jordan & Deluty, 1998; Morrow et al., 1995). The findings in the present study are consistent with these results. The women in this study increasingly noted that they were dissatisfied with remaining hidden at work, and had a desire to become more and more open. Being open about their lesbian identity in the workplace helped them feel like they were being true to themselves and as well they felt more supportive of other lesbian women (e.g., role models for younger lesbians).

Two unpublished studies in the United States employed the grounded theory method and investigated the career experiences of a diverse sample of highly successful lesbians, and thus their findings have more relevance to this study. In both of these studies, participants were selected from an initial pool of 275 lesbians who were identified by the media or through nomination by lesbian-affiliated professional organizations. Hollingsworth et al.
(1997) interviewed 26 women who were identified as highly successful lesbians. In addition, Tomlinson (1998) explored the coping behaviors of 22 highly achieving lesbians who were also primarily out in their professions. In the Hollingsworth and Tomlinson studies, approximately 90% of the women were out at work, comparable to this study where 87% of the women are presently out at work. Many of the participants in the Hollingsworth and Tomlinson investigations identified highly positive and influential effects of coming out on their careers, as did the women in the present study. The women in the present study discussed feeling happy and satisfied at work and a sense of relief after disclosing their sexual identities, which enabled them to feel genuine in their relationships with colleagues as they were not hiding their lesbian identities. Their ability to handle homophobia, however, emerged as an important component in the process of being out at work, and empowered them in their work. For the majority of these women, being out in their careers involved social and political advocacy as they fought for social change and worked to make a difference in the lives of other lesbian and gay people.

As participants in this study were out at work and subsequently became more open and authentic about who they were, they reported enhanced work performance and relationships with colleagues. Similar to the findings reported by Morrow et al. (1995), Hollingsworth et al. (1997), and Tomlinson (1998), the lesbians in this study discussed the importance of no longer hiding in the closet, but rather a desire to become more open about their lesbian identity in the workplace. Congruent with the limited previous theory and research, the more out (i.e., working quietly or boldly "out" spoken), honest, and open the participants in this study were in the workplace, the happier they were. Being out in the workplace may be risky as well. The women in this study were well aware of the potential for
discrimination or harassment because of their lesbianism. Nevertheless, remaining silenced and invisible was perceived as more costly to them personally and professionally (e.g., negative emotions associated with nondisclosure, unhappiness, pain, conflict). The potential for job loss or discrimination was real for these participants, however, the majority of them felt that they had proven themselves in their work, had chosen or created gay friendly work environments for themselves, and were surrounded by loving and supportive people in their lives that helped them face ongoing fear and continue to take risks and be out at work. In addition, some of the participants who wereouted in the workplace decided to stay at their jobs rather than hiding and often chose to come out to additional co-workers. Others who were outed and fired created new opportunities for themselves in gay friendly work environments.

As the participants in this study took risks and were out at work, some of them encountered homophobia along the way. Consistent with the literature, the current findings suggest that discrimination or fear of discrimination is pervasive among lesbians in the workplace (Croteau, 1996). Croteau identified three specific types of discrimination including formal (e.g., getting fired), informal (e.g., harassment), and fear of discrimination (e.g., anticipated discrimination). Participants in the current study reported predominantly formal discrimination and fear of discrimination. Empirical investigations have primarily focused on coping strategies (e.g., denial, avoidance) lesbians employ at work to conceal their lesbian identities because of the negative status attributed to being lesbian or gay (Cody & Welch, 1997; Shachar & Gilbert, 1983; Waldo & Kemp, 1997). This study went beyond coping strategies employed for concealing one’s lesbian identity and identified facilitative strategies for coping with a lesbian identity. For example, the manner in which the women in
the present study handled homophobia involved employing a variety of coping strategies to manage their lesbian identities in the workplace. The most common way participants dealt with homophobia was directly, by challenging the source. This ranged from participants pursuing legal battles to initiating direct conversations that assertively dealt with the situation at hand. In addition, many of the women used cognitive reframing strategies that focused on finding a positive way out of a negative situation, a coping strategy that has not been revealed in the extant literature.

The ways in which these women handled homophobia is congruent with traditional coping theory. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) emphasized the role of appraisal and coping. Appraisal has to do with an individual’s evaluation of the personal significance of an event and the adequacy of the individual’s resources for coping. Primary appraisal includes the appraisals of threat, harm, loss, or challenge (i.e., the opportunity for mastery or gain). Secondary appraisal involves the extent to which the individual feels they can control or change the situation. It is the appraisal process that influences the subsequent coping behavior in this model. Moreover, greater control is associated with coping such as direct action to solve a problem. Less perceived control, in contrast, is associated with higher levels of avoidance or seeking of social support.

When the participants in this study began the process of managing their lesbian identity in the workplace, an appraisal was made regarding the potential for threat, harm, or loss (e.g., getting fired, being discriminated against), or in some cases challenge (e.g., educating others, being true to self). Taking risks and being out led to a continuum representing several paths (e.g., working “in” silence, boldly “out” spoken) regarding the disclosure of their lesbian identity in the workplace. For the women who felt they could
change the situations they were in, congruent with this theory, they chose coping behaviors that directly challenged the source head on. In contrast, participants who worked “in” silence reported avoiding gay and lesbian issues, evading social contact, and seeking social support to deal with the feelings of fear they had regarding disclosing their lesbian identities.

Folkman and Greer (2000) discuss a third type of coping, meaning-based coping that comes into play when there are events with unsatisfactory outcomes. Meaning-based coping helps the individual relinquish untenable goals and formulate new ones, find meaning in what has happened, and appraise benefit where possible. In addition, this type of coping generates positive affect and motivates further coping. Many of the participants in this study who initially chose the working “in” silence path were catapulted out of the closet in their various work environments. Although these events were initially viewed as having unsatisfactory outcomes (e.g., getting fired), all of the participants who experienced such loss and pain found meaning and benefit that sustained them and equipped them with further coping resources. For example, participants changed occupations or work environments in order to more easily integrate their lesbian identities into the workplace, which subsequently contributed to their happiness and satisfaction at work. Others experienced a new found honesty by coming out that influenced their work and work relationships on a deeper level, enhancing job and personal satisfaction in ways they had never imagined.

Although there is little empirical research regarding the coping behaviors of lesbians, Friend (1990) described “crisis competence” as a unique response that gays and lesbians have experienced that may be similar to this notion of meaning-based coping that facilitates further coping. He suggested that lesbians acquire a crisis competence that enhances their capacity to deal with difficult situations associated with loss of friends, family, and jobs. This involves
developing advocacy skills for managing heterosexism and gaining positive attitudes and emotional resources in the process of reconstructing a lesbian or gay identity as positive. Many of the women in this study may have developed a crisis competence that improved their ability to deal with pain and loss and empowered them to fight for their rights as lesbians. As these women were out in the workplace, they experienced many positive effects associated with acknowledging their lesbian identities.

Pearson and Bieschke (2001), in their investigation of well-established African American women, found that experiences with discrimination and racism heightened their level of determination in their careers and the extent to which they effectively attended to and coped with racism. The stories of the women in this study were remarkably similar to this concept. Several of the women in this study were outed at work and faced homophobia and discrimination as they lost their jobs, friends, and families. However, despite these obstacles and setbacks, they engaged in healing practices and political advocacy that allowed them to develop a strength and capacity to cope effectively. Their ability to reframe negative experiences and gain a broader positive perspective equipped them with unique coping resources that prepared them for dealing with homophobia in the workplace and in society at large.

The findings of the Gomez et al. (2001) investigation were congruent with previous research (e.g., Richie et al., 1997) that found that high achieving women posses strong coping skills that they employed in their immediate contexts to combat the innumerable challenges they faced. Salient coping skills included cognitive reframing, maintaining perspective, religion, spirituality, denial, humor, and self-soothing talk. Similar to the women in the Gomez et al. study, participants in the present study successfully and consistently used
cognitive reframing to reconceptualize potential negative events as positive ones. Barriers were viewed as opportunities and many participants recalled times where they were able to reframe negative situations into positive challenges. In addition, the women in the present study discussed the importance of using humor in difficult situations and participating in personal growth activities that fostered balance and relaxation. Many of the women noted the important role their spiritual beliefs (e.g., Buddhist philosophy) had that allowed them to gain perspective and stay grounded as they dealt with discrimination and homophobia in the workplace.

The manner in which the women in the present study handled homophobia extends literature because it adds a dimension of social and political advocacy. Fighting for social change occurred on an individual level with broader social implications. Many of the participants in this study actively used their lesbian identities in the workplace to address societal homophobia and discrimination. By being out and fighting for social change, these women became empowered as they found their voices and the courage to fight for legal and social policy changes within the workplace and in some cases on a broader societal level. By actively engaging in and pioneering change in the workplace (e.g., workplace policies regarding gay and lesbians), many of these women have been instrumental in building and belonging to a gay and lesbian community, a process that in itself has been healing and transformational on an individual and community level. For example, on an individual level some participants moved from working “in” silence to boldly being out in the workplace. The positive effects of making this shift transformed their lives as they began to feel integrated in their work lives. On a community level, transformation was evident as lesbians fought for
social change and experienced the positive effects of societies changing laws and attitudes regarding gays and lesbians.

Although there is no existing career development theory that includes the construct of holistic integration, Juntunen et al. (2001) described the meaning of career for American Indians and included the concept of “living in two worlds.” Participants described having to learn to live in two worlds, a Native and a White culture. Separate worlds left participants feeling misunderstood and often disconnected. Returning to their Native culture was a way to regain connectedness with their Indian community. In the same way, the lesbians in this study who lived separate private and public lives, described feelings of denial. They often sought refuge in their personal lives and for some in the gay and lesbian community where they felt more authentic, validated, and understood. Juntunen et al. found that participants moved along a continuum from living in two worlds, to moving between two worlds, to evolving to a holistic third world whereby they were able to appreciate their own culture and integrate those pieces of the majority culture that they accepted. Similar to the American Indian participants, the lesbians in this study who moved along the continuum of being out leading to holistic integration experienced an expansiveness that opened them to new possibilities in the work world and exciting connections with people from whom they had previously distanced themselves (e.g., heterosexual colleagues). Participants described themselves as feeling authentic and whole as they no longer felt they had to hide a part of themselves and thus experienced a renewed energy that was available for work and relationships.

Although the present study did not find that lesbian identity development had a detrimental effect on participants’ career development and success (Fassinger, 1995b, 1996),
the category holistic integration has some striking similarities with Cass’s (1979) model of gay and lesbian identity development. In Cass’s model, an individual moves through six stages to fully integrate a positively valued identity of gay or lesbian into their overall concept of self. Movement from stage to stage is motivated by the incongruency an individual feels about being gay or lesbian, as well as the perception they have that others perceive them as different. In this study, managing one’s lesbian identity in the workplace often required serious deliberation as the women had to consider the work environment (e.g., gay friendly), the social times (e.g., work place protection), their own personal resources (e.g., coping resources), and the love and support available to them if and when they chose to disclose their lesbian identities. For example, if a participant felt that she would be discriminated against in the workplace if she was out and she had no legal protection, she may have chosen the working “in” silence path. In this situation, the participant would choose to maintain separate public and private self-images (e.g., Cass, stage one to three).

Stage six is described as identity synthesis and is characterized by clarity and acceptance as the individual accepts one’s lesbian identity as one aspect of their personal identity. Stage six parallels in many ways the construct of holistic integration in the present study. The women who experience holistic integration, describe themselves as feeling comfortable at work as out lesbians. They no longer feel they have to hide their lesbian identities but rather feel free to be themselves, and are able to focus their energy on their work and open relationships with their colleagues. The effort and energy many participants expended concealing their lesbian identities and avoiding social contact at work, for fear of being found out and being rejected, is released and transformed as participants experience holistic integration in the workplace.
Influencing Conditions

The findings of this study suggest that the process of lesbians becoming successful in their occupations involves a dynamic, synergistic interaction between influencing conditions (i.e., changing social times, personal background, serendipitous conditions, love and support, and gay friendly work environment conditions) and the central process of striving for holistic integration. The central process of striving for holistic integration can be understood in the context of the surrounding conditions that set the stage for this process to unfold.

Gay Friendly Work Environment Conditions

There is very little research that examines the impact of coming out at various developmental stages of a lesbian’s career development. Fassinger (1995b) suggested that different stages of career development could reflect very distinct experiences for lesbians. To my knowledge that are no published studies that examine the impact of coming out after having an established career. The current findings suggest that lesbians who are primarily well established in their careers made decisions to be out at work that were influenced by a synergistic interaction between external factors (e.g., gay friendly work environment conditions, changing social times conditions) and internal factors (e.g., personal background conditions, love and support conditions). For example, many participants chose to conceal their lesbian identities in the 1970s and 1980s, a social time they perceived as gay unfriendly and, as well, a few of these women worked in occupations that were considered to be homophobic (e.g., police force, school district). As conditions changed over time (e.g., love and support, changing social times, gay friendly work environment) and these women became established in their careers, they found the courage to take risks and be out in the workplace. Being out for some women was not a choice as they were outed by undesirable
circumstances. For these women, some of them smoothly integrated their lesbian identities in the workplace and others experienced a tumultuous process that led to changing work environments. The women who experienced a greater struggle were in occupations that have been known for their homophobic and sexist views.

This finding suggests the importance of the occupation, the work environment, and the social context as either facilitative or oppressive with regard to lesbians being out at work. In addition, these findings indicate the importance of lesbians considering the safety of the work environment and the larger social context for facilitating their process of being out at work and integrating their lesbian and work worlds on their paths to occupational success.

Changing Social Times Conditions

Gomez et al. (2001), Poole and Langan-Fox (1997), and Richie et al. (1997) found that, in their models of women's career development, sociocultural/political conditions were important influences on the success of the participants in their studies. Gomez et al. described contextual variables as macro- and micro-environmental factors that can either limit or facilitate vocational behaviors and are helpful in understanding the unique social and political context in which participants operate. They found that notable Latina women experienced challenges, barriers, and support systems specific to their Latina cultural background. As well, political movements (e.g., Chicano and Women's Movement) strongly influenced and supported the career development of many participants.

In a similar vein, many of the women in this study were influenced by political movements (e.g., Women's movement, gay and lesbian movement, labor movement) and lived and worked through social times (e.g., 1960s, 1970s) that reflected tumultuous social change. Several participants experienced a progressive climate whereby they were out as
lesbians and radicals simultaneously and were committed to social change work. A number of the women claimed their involvement in leftist organizations educated them on advocacy, provided them with knowledge regarding human rights issues, taught them effective communication skills, and motivated their passion for making a difference in the lives of other women and lesbians. Therefore, despite facing barriers (e.g., sexism, heterosexism) in the workplace, the social times equipped them with the skills they needed to fight for social change and gave them a strong sense of collective empowerment as they were dedicated to helping others and to making the world and workplace a fairer place to be.

The socio-historical political moment proved to be an important influence in the lives of the women in this study. Some of these women were pioneers in this work and were at the heart of consciousness raising groups (e.g., 1970s) who were getting organized to fight against the abuse of human rights. These forerunners paved the way for the younger women who recognized the benefits they were able to reap because of those that came before them who fought for justice and human rights. Examining the experiences of participants who were born in different decades, and thus entered the workforce at different times, reflects the potent changes in societal views of lesbians and gays. Clearly the present time is more supportive of lesbians in the workplace and in society in general. For example, the first Canadian premier to attend a Gay Pride Parade was the premier of British Columbia who suggested,

I believe we need to move into the 21st century. This is not about special rights for anyone. This is about equal rights for all British Columbians and all Canadians. By parading in this pride parade, I'm saying gays and lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered people are people, too. (Vancouver Sun, August 7, 2000)
In the present study, being out in the workplace in different social times embodied a diversity of meanings that influenced the paths women chose leading to holistic integration. As society has become more progressive in their attitudes and laws regarding gays and lesbians, the workplace has also been more supportive and open to lesbians. Although many of the women in this study must still face ongoing fears regarding their lesbian identity at work, most of the participants feel safe to be out and thus feel more integrated and successful in their occupations.

Personal Background Conditions

The relationship between personal background conditions and women’s career development has been extensively researched. Sociopsychological models (Astin, 1984; Gottfredson, 1981), individual differences models (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Farmer, 1985; Fitzgerald et al., 1989), and social cognitive frameworks (Hackett & Betz, 1981; Lent et al., 1994) all identify the critical influence of personal background factors on women’s career development. For example, Farmer (1985) found that career motivation was strongly predicted by an interaction of background factors (e.g., sex, social status, race), personal characteristics (e.g., independence, values), and environmental variables (e.g., support).

The findings of the present study are consistent with these theories in that personal background conditions are paramount in understanding the process of lesbians becoming successful in their occupations. In the present study, personal background conditions include personality characteristics the participants felt they were born with, combined with family backgrounds that afforded them opportunities and privilege to pursue their occupational dreams. The women in this study characterize themselves as passionate, hard working, independent women, who are intelligent. A strong sense of efficacy (self-confidence) resulted
in many of them taking risks, being open, and speaking their minds. Moreover, they were highly motivated to be the best they could be. The majority of participants describe themselves as having a feminist orientation (e.g., belonging to feminist groups, fighting for the rights of women and lesbians) and wanting to make a difference in the lives of others.

This study extends previous research with heterosexual women and identifies background experiences and characteristics that may be unique to lesbians. For example, several women in this study perceived themselves as different than other women, as “the tomboy I never grew out of,” as “being outside of the box,” as non-conforming, and as having androgynous traits (e.g., assertiveness, caring, self-confidence, independence) they felt often provided them with the strength to carry on and become successful in their occupations. In addition, the majority of the women are strongly connected to other people and share humanitarian values and beliefs and value working cooperatively and collectively with others. Brooks (1981) found that lesbians generally value androgyny and exhibit more gender nonconforming behaviors than do heterosexual women.

These findings suggest that personal background conditions provided participants with the strength and courage to be true to themselves by being open about their lesbian identities, the resiliency to survive obstacles, and the power to take risks and be out in the workplace, factors that contributed to these women becoming successful in their careers.

Serendipitous Conditions

Recent empirical investigations are just beginning to suggest that serendipity plays an important role in career development (Betsworth & Hansen, 1996; Gomez et al., 2001; Guindon & Hanna, 2002). Betsworth and Hansen defined serendipity as “events that were not planned or predictable, but that had a significant influence on an individual’s career” (p. 93).
Similarly, Guindon and Hanna (2002) suggested that synchronicity, or unpredictable instances of meaningful coincidence can play a significant role in career opportunities. Betsworth and Hansen explored the incidence of serendipitous events influencing the career development of 237 older adults and developed categories to describe these events. Their results indicated that 63% of the men and 57% of the women (i.e., nearly two-thirds of the participants) felt that their careers were influenced by serendipitous events.

In the present study serendipitous conditions were prevalent and influential in the careers of these women on their paths to becoming successful. Serendipitous conditions in this study that contributed to the process of striving for holistic integration included being in the right place at the right time, unexpected connections and networking, and outside powers that often contributed to non-linear occupational paths.

Most of the women found that their connections with others provided them with occupational opportunities that they were not necessarily seeking. One participant describes a sense of “having fallen into things” because of networking with others and the influence of the social milieu at the time that facilitated these connections. Others describe having luck and timing that allowed them chances that they felt they would not have ordinarily had. Many participants who experienced obstacles along their occupational path switched gears and changed career paths that led to unexpected career satisfaction and advancement. A number of the women describe their personal spirituality and beliefs in higher powers as contributing to the serendipitous nature of their careers. Finally, many of the women recount their non-linear career paths that were influenced by these serendipitous conditions.

This finding is concordant with Gomez et al. (2001) whose model of Latina women’s career development found that participants career-life paths were nonlinear and unplanned
and influenced by serendipity and will. Most of the women in their study attributed their
career trajectory to serendipity or "a created, encountered, or offered opportunity" (p. 291).
Participants in the present study also specify a combination of serendipity and will. For
example, many participants describe opportunities being presented to them and the agency
and will involved in choosing what path to take.

The findings of this study provide support for the perceived influence of serendipitous
conditions on lesbians' occupational success. This study adds to this understanding by
illustrating the dynamic interaction between serendipitous conditions and other conditions
(e.g., love and support) that exert continual influence on the process of lesbians being out at
work and becoming successful in their careers.

Love and Support Conditions

Love and support conditions continually interact with the previously described
conditions (e.g., changing social times, gay friendly work environment) and influence the
central process of lesbians striving for holistic integration in this study. Similar to recent
studies of career development and success of women (e.g., Gomez et al., 2001; Richie et al.,
1997; Yewchuk et al., 2001), the present sample of lesbians is relationally oriented and
strongly connected to other people. The women had reciprocal supportive relationships with
partners, friends, families, colleagues, and communities (e.g., feminist, gay and lesbian).
These different levels of interconnectedness played key roles in providing love and support
for participants throughout their careers and facilitating their success.

The category of love and support has similarities with the findings of Schultheiss,
Kress, and Manzi (2001) who examined relational influences in career development and
found that relational support was multidimensional in participants' lives. Schultheiss et al.
discussed five functions of social support as identified by Cutrona (1996) and Cutrona and Russell (1990): emotional support, social integration or network support, esteem support, information support, and tangible assistance. Emotional support (i.e., love, empathy, concern, nurturing) was clearly evident in these findings. All participants describe experiences of emotional support, emotional closeness, and encouragement as influential factors in relationships primarily with their partners, but often with families and friends. Social integration (i.e., feeling part of a group with people who hold similar interests and concerns) was evident with many participants. For example, many of the women belonged to feminist groups or were actively involved in the gay and lesbian community where they shared similar passions and desires for making a difference in others' lives. Esteem support (i.e., boosting another's self confidence through respect for the other's qualities, belief in other's abilities, validation of thoughts, feelings, or actions) was identified in the majority of participants' relational experiences with their partners and close friends. Informational support (i.e., advice, guidance, appraisal of the situation) was most often provided by partners, colleagues, and mentors. Finally, tangible assistance (i.e., instrumental assistance with tasks or resources) was primarily evident in relational influences from partners. A few participants discussed family or close friends being actively involved with them in career tasks.

The findings in this study suggest that many participants experienced homophobia and/or discrimination in the workplace. Having supportive, loving partners and close friends was instrumental in these women's ability to successfully manage their lesbian identities in the workplace and eventually take risks and be out. For many participants, seeking the support of others (i.e., partners, friends, families, colleagues, gay and lesbian community) was an important coping strategy to deal with this workplace stress. These findings are
congruous with Tomlinson (1998), and Schultheiss et al. (2001) who found that relationships not only provide emotional support and closeness but also function to reduce the stress experienced when confronted with challenging career tasks and decision making. Many participants in this study described several incidents where they relied on partners and close friends to endure homophobia and discrimination in the workplace. Making decisions regarding taking risks and being out at work often required considerable planning with partners, friends, and supportive colleagues. These relationships facilitated participants feeling safe, loved, and supported and thus influenced these women's decisions to face their ongoing fears and boldly be out at work.

Blustein (2001) has recently suggested that little is known about the overlap between work and relational experiences. He further noted that the role of relationships in facilitating work has only recently been explored in the domain of vocational behavior. There is an emerging literature on the inter-connectedness of career and the quality of relationships in one's life. In contrast, Phillips and Imhoff (1997) suggest in their review of women and career development over the last decade that women's work behavior is clearly seen in a social, relational context. The present study contributes to the extant knowledge by illustrating the key role love and support plays in facilitating career development, adjustment, and success. It adds to this understanding by demonstrating the value of love and support in personal and work relationships with lesbians as they navigate the unique obstacles that exist in their careers. Relational support in this study was associated with enhanced coping with workplace discrimination. In addition, the presence of love and support was related to positive being out at work experiences that influenced the process of lesbians becoming successful in their careers. The findings of this study are important in revealing the web of
relational connections in which lesbians work lives are embedded in a more holistic and meaningful way.

**Summary**

The process of lesbians striving for holistic integration is a complex process determined by an interaction of internal factors (e.g., personal background conditions) and external factors (e.g., changing social times conditions), the richness of which is not adequately captured by existing career development theories. In light of the scarcity of empirical research in the area of lesbian career success, this study contributes significantly to the accumulation of knowledge in this area. Specifically, this study’s contribution to extant literature is in elucidating conceptual development and ordering of the process of lesbians becoming successful in their occupations that is grounded in the data and helps us understand this process more fully.

The findings of this investigation, along with a growing body of literature (e.g., Gomez et al., 2001; Poole & Langan-Fox, 1997; Richie et al., 1997; Yewchuk et al., 2001) suggest that successful women share many characteristics. In all of these studies, the women were relationally oriented, passionate about their work and making a difference for others, internally motivated, effective at coping, and relied on support systems. The present study contributes to this knowledge of successful women by identifying new concepts that are unique to the experience of lesbians in the workplace (e.g., taking risks and being out, fighting for social change). This investigation helps to establish not only the commonalties among lesbians striving for holistic integration but also the differences.

The conceptual development and ordering offered by this study illuminates the process of change as lesbians manage their lesbian identity in the workplace by taking risks
and being out. Being out, visible lesbians positively influenced the career success of the majority of participants. Being open about their lesbian identities broke down barriers and allowed participants to focus their energy into their work. As many participants neared retirement they found their priorities shifting from external indicators of success (e.g., hierarchical position, money) to internal indicators (e.g., happy, passionate, balance). The manner in which these women took risks and were out in the workplace by facing ongoing fears, or by taking a more direct route to handling homophobia and fighting for social change, led to holistic integration, a unique contribution to extant literature.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

The pioneering nature of the present study provides a valuable contribution to the existing literature on women's and lesbians' career development. The literature on lesbian career development is extremely limited, and there is virtually no conceptual development or theory that incorporates lesbian career success at the present time. The applicability of women's career theories has been questioned in relation to lesbians, who experience unique challenges in the workplace. Therefore, this study's focus on conceptual development and ordering of the process of lesbians becoming successful in their careers provides a significant contribution to the literature. In addition, qualitative research methods, more specifically the grounded theory method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was appropriate for studying lesbians' occupational success because very little is known about this phenomenon. This method revealed new concepts and processes that originate in the experiences of the lesbians who participated, rather than from the dominant group on whom existing theories are based.

There were several additional strengths of this study. The women who participated in the present study were self-aware and comfortable discussing their experience and were able
to articulate their thoughts, beliefs, and feelings about the phenomenon with clarity and ease. All of these women were enthusiastic about participating and it was clear that for most of them, their stories had significance beyond their personal experience (i.e., the personal is political). These women were passionate about their work and most were determined to make a difference for gays and lesbians and saw this study as an opportunity to do so. This may well have been a limitation as well. Because several of these women were concerned about social change, with that agenda, some aspects of their experience may not have been discussed.

Throughout data collection and analysis, I employed theoretical sampling that enhanced data sources that would allow me to challenge and confirm working categories and provisional hypotheses. Another strength of the data collection process for this study was that I returned to 6 participants for further interviews in order to present the developing process of lesbians becoming successful in their occupations and to verify that this process fit their personal experience. In addition, all participants were sent a summary of the findings and asked for their comments.

There are several limitations to this study that need to be identified. The sample size (i.e., 15) is a limitation because it affects the transferability of the findings. Although the participants in the current sample represented a range of ages, cultural backgrounds, and professional fields, the limited sample size did not permit greater variability (e.g., lower social-economic status, with lower levels of education, non-professional occupations, younger women), which may have modified the findings (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). However, 13 occupational categories were represented, including several in which lesbians are more likely to be closeted (i.e., police officer, educator). In addition, although this study included
two women from diverse cultural backgrounds (e.g., Asian, First Nations), the study reflects a bias towards Western culture. The women in the study were predominately out at the time of the interviews (i.e., 13 out of 15), therefore the experience of women who are presently closeted and successful is limited. However, because many of the participants described times in their past when they were closeted, the findings do represent a range of experiences in regard to being out or closeted in the workplace. All of the women in this study were living in a metropolitan city on the west coast of Canada at the time of their interview. This region is noted for being gay friendly compared to many regions in Canada that may not be (Collins, 1997). Therefore, the findings of this study may not reflect the experiences of lesbians that are living in more conservative regions (e.g., rural, smaller cities), as the conditions these women face may influence their paths to occupational success. The ambiguity and complexity of the meaning of occupational success may have been an inherent limitation in this study that prevented the development of a theory to fully explain this complex process.

A limitation of the interviews was the reliance on retrospective data. However, because the focus of this study was to explore the process of these lesbians becoming successful, reflection on experiences early in their career was necessary to understand this process. The retrospective nature of the data facilitated these women disclosing career experiences that they deemed salient in relation to their present occupational success. Many of these women noted that they had never discussed their occupational success in light of their lesbianism prior to their interview. Nevertheless, detailed descriptions of their experiences combined with perusing their resumes indicated that they were thorough in their answers. Furthermore, several other lesbians were informally consulted on the
trustworthiness of the description of the central process, and all felt they could relate their own experiences with these findings.

Throughout the interviews open-ended questions were used and leading questions were avoided, as an effective way to gain an authentic understanding of participants’ experiences. Although this is a strength in this study, it is possible that not all aspects of lesbians’ process of becoming successful in their occupations are included in the resulting conceptual ordering of this process. However, at the end of each interview, participants were invited to add anything they felt was important that had not been discussed, and several participants did so.

A limitation of this study is that I was unable to fully account for the data through the categories I developed. Although a preliminary ordering of the categories was attempted, the results cannot be construed as a midrange theory that explains the process of lesbians becoming successful in their occupations. Because of the complexity of the phenomenon, the ensuing ambiguity of the concept occupational success, and the difficulty in recruiting additional participants, the results of this study represent a first step in providing a rich description and conceptual development, which lays the groundwork for further theorizing. Other grounded theory studies that have focused on career development and success (e.g., Gomez et al., 2001; Richie et al., 1997) have claimed to have generated theory. Contrary to analytic strategies associated with the grounded theory method (e.g., Strauss & Corbin, 1998), these studies did not use theoretical sampling, the interview protocols were standardized, and the series of questions in the protocol were based on a review of the literature. Finally, the protocol was not modified as interviews progressed. In contrast, in the present study, I followed the procedures of the grounded theory method recommended by
Strauss and Corbin, however, I recognize that my categories did not fully explain the complex process of lesbians becoming successful in their occupations, thus I do not claim to have developed a midrange theory.

Implications for Research

The current study has only begun to illuminate the process of lesbians becoming successful in their occupations. Further research is needed to develop a theory to explain this important process. Future research needs to increase variation in participants and data sources. For example, the majority of the women in this sample were Caucasian, middle-class, professionals. The experience of women representing other demographic groups are clearly needed, such as women of color, women with disabilities, bisexual women, and working class women. In addition, comparing lesbians from other regions of the country, and from rural areas, would contribute to our knowledge of how geography and the social, political environment may influence the process of lesbians becoming successful in their occupations.

It may be important to compare experiences of lesbians who are considered successful in their occupations with those who are not. To better understand the concept of occupational success, sampling lesbians who do not perceive themselves as successful, but who are perceived by others as successful, may contribute to understanding more fully the term occupational success and all that it embodies. In addition, comparing lesbians with gay men may prove useful, recognizing shared experiences and differences among different groups. Finally, examining in more depth the internal and external criteria that are relevant to lesbians’ experiences of success, may contribute to a multi-dimensional understanding of occupational success (Poole & Langan-Fox, 1997).
The current sample was somewhat restricted because the large majority of participants were visibly out and some of them identifiable in the media. Further research focusing on those who are more closeted would greatly contribute to our understanding of the factors that contribute to their invisibility in the workplace and the coping strategies these women use to conceal their lesbian identities in the workplace. Additional research focusing on cognitive factors such as self-efficacy and goal mechanisms (e.g., Lent et al., 1994) would be useful to better understand how lesbians are able to cope with difficult circumstances in the workplace and become successful in their occupations. In addition, being out at work as a psychological process of change is an area warranting further research. The current findings clearly point to some of the psychological benefits of being out at work and greater attention is needed to further explore the subcategories “taking risks and being out,” leading to the continuum of coming out (e.g., working “in” silence) and the interactions of the conditions that influence this process. It would be important to explore the role of mentors and role models in future studies (e.g., Hollingsworth et al., 1997; Tomlinson, 1998). Further research on the subcategory “fighting for social change” may prove useful in illuminating the role politicization (e.g., Gomez et al., 2001; Richie et al., 1997; Yewchuk et al., 2001) has on the occupational success of lesbians. The findings in this study indicate this factor is important, however, research that would more fully explain this influence would be helpful. More specifically, investigating the power of workplace protection for lesbians may prove fruitful for understanding its influence on the process of lesbians being out and becoming successful in their occupations. In addition, the category “holistic integration” has not previously been identified in the literature and may provide an interesting focus for future research. If being out in the workplace leads to holistic integration, further research is needed to explore the
dimensions of this category in order to contribute to our understanding of this complex category on both intrapersonal and interpersonal levels.

Implications for Practice

Counselling psychologists need to be aware of the positive effects of being out at work for some successful lesbians and assist them in their decision making around this issue by exploring these benefits while recognizing the need for self-protection. For a few participants, it was perceived as too risky to be out in certain work environments. With this knowledge, a counselling psychologist should consider the occupation and the work environment when working with lesbians and should explore occupations and work environments that are both affirming and supportive of their lesbian identity and potentially unsafe (e.g., schools) for them to be out in. The counselling psychologist should also help the client explore other environmental factors that may effect career opportunities. Discussing the present social climate in regards to gays and lesbians and its affect on career choices would be helpful for lesbian clients. It is important to recognize the interaction of a lesbian identity with career choice by presenting a realistic picture of the potential discrimination the client may face if she is out at work. As well, the counselling psychologist should explore career choices that are more open to lesbians, while being aware of not trying to deter a client from career paths based on homophobic stereotypes.

In addition, practitioners should explore the personal and professional costs of remaining in the closet. Although this study’s findings indicate that many successful women began “working ‘in’ silence,” a number of these women found that their fears were untrue or those who did experience barriers found that these obstacles could be turned into opportunities. Therefore, counselling psychologists working with lesbians who are
considering being out at work should help these women explore their fears, the potential consequences of being out, and prepare them with coping strategies to deal with these consequences.

The findings of this study indicate that these lesbians employed effective coping strategies for handling homophobia or discrimination in the workplace. Seeking support from partners, families, friends, and colleagues was paramount in helping them handle these situations. Counselling psychologists should help lesbians examine and build their social network to ensure they have sufficient support that can sustain them through difficult periods in their lives. Furthermore, assisting lesbian clients in searching for lesbian role models and mentors may be very helpful to these clients. Therapists should develop an awareness of positive role models in the lesbian community who represent a variety of occupations. Seeing other lesbians who have come out in their occupations and are successful and happy can be encouraging and hopeful for younger lesbians.

Additional coping strategies used effectively by the women in this study included participants facing fears around homophobia by taking action and directly challenging the source. As well, many women employed cognitive reframing strategies whereby they were able to create something positive from a negative situation. A number of participants chose to be more public in their battle against homophobia and discrimination by pursuing legal action and fighting for gay and lesbian rights. These women became more political and often pioneered social change in the workplace or in society at large.

Counselling psychologists should be knowledgeable regarding community resources for lesbian clients and local and national legislation that affects a lesbian’s rights at work. Being involved in the lesbian community could also be helpful for lesbian clients who are
seeking support or interested in becoming more politically involved in fighting for social change.

The current findings have important implications for psychological well-being and personal and interpersonal growth. Managing one's lesbian identity in the workplace by taking risks and being out may contribute to a sense of wholeness and balance in their work and personal lives. Additionally, the majority of the women in this study no longer felt their lives were fragmented as they began to integrate their work and lesbian worlds. As they became open about their lesbian identity, they felt free to be themselves and experienced genuine relationships with colleagues based on honesty. With this knowledge, a counselling psychologist may be in a better position to help a lesbian client understand the psychological and vocational benefits of being out at work and to help her incorporate balance and holistic health practices into her lifestyle. However, the lesbian client's personal background (e.g., personal characteristics and opportunities due to her upbringing), love and support (e.g., partner, family, friends, colleagues), work environment (e.g., is it gay friendly), social climate (e.g., is it accepting of lesbians), and serendipitous conditions (e.g., role of connections and being in the right place at the right time) need to be taken into consideration and explored as being helpful or hindrances on her occupational path to success. These influences need to be addressed in order to understand the complexity of the interaction between the personal and professional leading to holistic integration and occupational success.

Concluding Remarks

The complexity of the meaning of occupational success was revealed in this investigation. Many of the women in this study changed occupations (two to seven times)
over the course of their careers. These occupational transitions required participants to continually adapt to new workplace settings en route to occupational success. Only four participants (e.g., writer, police officer) chose an occupation and stuck with it throughout their entire career. This finding supports researchers (e.g., Poole & Langan-Fox, 1997; Young et al., 1996) who have expanded our understanding of career, suggesting it include contextual explanations and that it should be considered in a multi-dimensional way. Consequently, given that most of the women in this study changed occupations throughout their careers, the meaning of their occupational success was reflected in their “workplace” success or their careers (that includes their occupational changes), rather than their success in a single occupation. The careers of these participants were characterized by sequences of decisions and workplace transitions throughout their lives. A consequence of these occupational changes is that careers are becoming more difficult to describe, explain, and predict. Future research is needed to explore new ways of understanding occupational or career success in a more holistic and dynamic manner.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to enhance current therapeutic and career counselling practices as well as its promising contribution to future career development theories that include the experiences of lesbians. Competent, ethical services can be provided by the counselling psychologist who is familiar with the unique work issues lesbians face. Sensitivity to factors related to lesbian identity such as minority group status, being out, and employment discrimination is required of therapists who seek to understand and work with lesbians. It is critical that professionals working with lesbians understand the complexity of their career paths in order to meet their vocational needs and that they recognize the internal and external processes and coping strategies successful lesbians
employed that facilitated them overcoming external barriers and achieving occupational success. In addition, counselling psychologists need to be aware of their own homophobic or heterosexist biases and their potential limitations, values, and absorbed prejudices around lesbian issues. It is important to realize that lesbian clients may be fearful of disclosing their lesbian identities because of a potential homophobic reaction.

This seminal work in the area of lesbian occupational success lays the groundwork for further research in this substantive area. This work provides a conceptual ordering of the psychological process of "striving for holistic integration," wherein holistic integration is identified as a complex process of change and growth that is initiated by lesbians taking risks and being out in the workplace. The findings of this study identify benefits of being out at work, however, not without struggle and adversity, which contributed to participants' personal and professional integration.

Finally, it is hoped that this study has rendered visibility to the uniqueness and complexity of lesbians' successful occupational experiences. These findings may educate practitioners and facilitate improving the workplace environment for both lesbians and their co-workers and empower lesbians in their lives to become the best they can be by being true to themselves. Striving for holistic integration facilitates this process of lesbians bringing their work and personal worlds together and consequently provides hope and faith in future work endeavors.
References


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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: Participant Consent Form

Purpose of study:
The purpose of this study is to explore the occupational experiences of successful lesbians. This research is being conducted as a doctoral dissertation by Faith Rostad, under the supervision of Dr. Bonita Long, in the Department of Counselling Psychology, at the University of British Columbia.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate in the study, the following will occur:

1. You will be asked to meet with Faith Rostad for a audio-taped interview that will last approximately 1 1/2 hours, at a comfortable location mutually decided upon. During the interview you will be asked questions about your occupational experiences. At any time during the interview, you are free to decline answering questions that you may feel uncomfortable answering.

2. You may be contacted for further interviews (no more than 2) to provide clarification of the earlier interviews, or new insights into your experience of career. Further, you may be asked to provide input into the research findings or to participate in a group that will discuss research findings. You have the right to decline to participate in further interviews at any time.

Risks:

1. You may find certain topics during the interview process upsetting to recall or answer. You are free to not answer the question and to stop the interview if you so desire.

2. Your participation in this research project, as well as all audio-taped and transcribed information gathered will be kept completely confidential. Due to the sensitive subject matter discussed in interviews, your name will not appear on any data, code names will be used and your identity will be disguised. Only the investigator and her supervisors will have access to audio tapes and files. Transcriptions of the tapes, with code names, may be seen by research assistants for analysis purposes, and by a supervised study group.

Benefits:

Although there will be no direct benefit to you for participating in this study, you may find the process of sharing your work experiences may be beneficial and interesting for you personally. Additionally, the information you share may ultimately help other lesbians, and career counsellors, to better understand the unique occupational experiences of successful lesbians. At the completion of the study, a summary of results will be sent to all participants who request it. Quotes from participants’ interviews may be used to better illustrate the
APPENDIX B: Demographic Information

Name: __________________________

Date of birth: _________________

Partnership status: _________________________

Number of children: ______

Ethnic Background: _________________________

Current occupation: _________________________

Years in present occupation: _____

Years in Workforce: _____

Current annual salary: _________________________

Number of occupational changes: ______

Reasons for leaving jobs:

Highest level or year of education completed (e.g., High school diploma, Ph.D.):

________________________________________________________________________

Place of birth: _________________
If you were born outside of Canada, please complete the next question (otherwise omit):
Number of years lived in Canada: _____

Parents’ occupations during your childhood:
Mother’s occupation(s): _________________________

Father’s occupation(s): _________________________

Highest level of education completed by parents:
Mother: _________________________

Father: _________________________
APPENDIX C: Interview Questions
(based on Hollingsworth et al. (1997) study and the literature review)

I'd like to thank you for giving me this chance to meet with you for this interview. The aim of this research is to better understand the process of how lesbians become successful in their occupations. In this interview, I will be asking you a number of questions about your occupational experiences. I will be asking you about a variety of influences upon your occupational path, including your family, your beliefs, your friends and relationships, and your coming out experiences. The interview will take approximately 1½ hours and I will be using an audio-tape recorder from which I will be transcribing our interview. Everything you say on this tape will be kept confidential and only myself and my supervisor will hear what is on this tape. I will ensure that your name or any identifying information does not appear anywhere on the transcript and we will choose a pseudonym for that reason.

Initial Open-ended questions:

1. What is your present occupation?
2. What is the nature of the work you do?
3. How do you feel about having achieved this position?
4. How do other people feel about your success? (e.g., colleagues, family, friends)
5. What has helped or hindered you attaining this position?
6. Has being a lesbian influenced your occupational success? If so, in what way?

Questions:

1. Begin by describing the path that brought you to your current position?
2. Have there been any external challenges and limitations that you have dealt with in order to achieve in your occupation? If yes, how have they affected your occupational path, either positively or negatively? (By external challenges & limitations, I mean barriers or things beyond your control)
3. Can you tell me about your coming-out process?
4. Has your coming out process affected your occupational path?
5. How have you dealt with your disclosure in the workplace?
6. Do you identify with a specific culture or community that has influenced your occupational path? If yes, how has this influenced your path? (e.g., racial, ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, political, or professional communities, now or in the past)
7. Is there anything about your beliefs or values that has had an influence on your success?
8. How would you define occupational success? Based on that definition, are you successful?
9. How do you feel personally about how far you have come?
10. Have you ever changed jobs or geographic locations because of your sexual orientation?
11. Has workplace protection for gays and lesbians influenced your jobs?
12. Are there any other things in your life that have had a significant influence on your occupational success?
13. Finally, is there anything else you feel is important in relation to your occupational success that I have not asked?

Thank you so much for your time. If you think of anything I have forgotten to ask or if you think of anything that you would like to add at a later point, I will leave you with my phone number if you want to contact me.

Note: These questions are directed by the research questions and are aimed at eliciting the process of lesbians becoming successful in their occupations and the development of relevant concepts. The questions serve as a guide and were modified as necessary depending on emerging concepts and relationships between concepts.
APPENDIX D: Researcher Context

I am a 45-year-old White, lesbian woman who grew up in Alberta in a religious family. My father was a Lutheran minister and many of my beliefs and values originated from this background. I realized I was a lesbian at the age of 22, a time when my career was just beginning. My religious upbringing reassured me that being a lesbian was okay and that all people, regardless of sex, race, and sexual orientation should be treated equally and be loved unconditionally. These beliefs helped me deal with my lesbian orientation, which I never questioned but just accepted. I completed a Master of Arts degree in Sport Psychology and began a career in coaching and teaching at the College and University level. When I left the life of a University student and varsity basketball player and entered the world of work I began to feel the effects of homophobia and discrimination on my career. The experiences I have had in my career may affect this study as they do present me with a couple of blindspots. I tend to generalize and assume that most lesbians have experienced the effects of homophobia and discrimination in their careers. I experienced the inability to advance beyond a certain level in my career as a women’s basketball coach because of my lesbian orientation. I was denied jobs at major universities because the athletic network across the country was small and involved the “old boys network” who prevented lesbians from advancing. I watched friends and colleagues experience similar discrimination and observed many of us living divided lives, separating our personal from the professional. Ultimately, I changed careers, moved back to Vancouver, a city considered to be “gay friendly” to begin a new career in counselling psychology. My clinical experience in the doctoral program and my previous counselling experience as a high school counsellor have facilitated me integrating psychological theory with practice. Rogers (1951) client-centered approach has
formed the foundation of my developing model of counselling and I have integrated it with object relations theory and social constructionism. Moving to Vancouver and going back to school was motivated by my feelings of discrimination and became a turning point in my life. I began to integrate my lesbian identity into my work and for the first time in my life realized I did not need to hide, I could be myself and be accepted for who I was. I also believe that women, and in particular, lesbian women are extremely resilient and possess amazing strength. I have had the luxury and honor to be influenced by strong women in my life that have served as role models and mentors. As many of these women have developed success in their careers, they have become leaders in organizations and institutions and have consequently provided many lesbians with career opportunities that may have been previously denied. Many of my occupations began with such opportunities and allowed me to reach my potential in a career that may otherwise have been denied to me. These occupational experiences have motivated me to study women who have developed success despite the internal and external obstacles they are confronted with. I look forward to learning from these women and am aware of my own personal, educational, and career experiences and their influence on my interpretations in this study. This study is of great personal and professional significance for me. It represents myself disclosing my lesbian identity as a professional, a disclosure that allows me to feel more integrated and whole as a lesbian woman. Professionally, it allows me to explore a relatively unexplored topic and contribute cutting edge research to the field of counselling psychology that can empower the lives of lesbians and help younger women develop success in their occupations.
APPENDIX F: Updated Interview Questions

I began these interviews by asking the same initial open-ended questions in Appendix C and incorporated some of these questions into the interview at appropriate times.

August, 2000 (1-5) March, 2001 (6-10)

1. I’ve noticed in previous interviews that some women described themselves and appeared more “butch” while others described themselves and appeared more “femme.” It has been interesting to note the butch women have experienced more homophobia and discrimination because of looking like the stereotypical “dyke” as opposed to the femmes that have been able to pass as heterosexual and claim to have experienced heterosexual privilege. Could you comment on your own experience in that regard?

2. In your life have you done things or acted in certain ways in order to change dominant beliefs/values or structures?

3. How have you contributed to social change?

4. How important has the gay and lesbian community been for you?

5. What is your greatest success?

6. From my previous interviews there seems to be this process that unfolds that involves people defining themselves as lesbian and then after that things may happen or they may not in terms of coming out. What I would like to know from you is what did that first awareness look like and how did you or did you decide to deal with it in terms of your occupation? (e.g., was it a decision, did it slip out, were you outed?)

7. Has occupational success been defined differently for you at various points in your life cycle?

8. I’ve gone through a number of interviews and I’ve come up with this idea of participants striving for holistic success. When people describe it to me its funny because the idea of being a lesbian doesn’t get mentioned by most of them. I have this feeling that this piece about coming out may be important but maybe I’ve got it wrong. What do you think? How did that play out in your life? How do you define occupational success and where does coming out fit in the whole thing?

9. One of the elements many women have identified as important when defining occupational success for themselves is a moral element of social value. Does this apply to your experience in your work (e.g., making a difference).

10. From my interviews I have a sense of participants “bringing two worlds together” or a sense of participants “feeling integrated.” Could you comment on this from your own perspective?
APPENDIX G: Developing Models

Striving For Holistic Success

Making a Difference

Managing Lesbian Identity in the Workplace

Fighting for Social Change

Taking Risks - coming out

Integration

Working 'In' Silence
- "selecting a life of secrecy"
- stopping and changing gears
- "obstacles into usefulness"

Social Support

Facing Fear

Serendipity
- direct
- trusting the truth
- being true to self
- an act of integrity

Gay Friendly Work Environment

Changing Social Context

"Bringing Two Worlds Together"
Theoretical model of the process of "Striving For Holistic Integration"
"Bringing All Worlds Together"

Personal Characteristics

Gay Friendly Work Environment

Social Support

Changing Social Context

Making a difference

Serendipity

Fighting for social change

Facing Fear

Boldly 'out' Spoken
- Direct
- Trusting the truth
- Being true to self
- An act of integrity

Working 'in' Silence
- Selecting a life of 'secrecy'
- Personal/public divide
- Stopping & changing gears
- Obstacles into usefulness

Taking Risks - Coming Out

Managing Lesbian Identify in the Work Place

'Striving for Holistic Success'