Lesbian Identity Management in Workplace Contexts:
"Don't Ask, Don't Tell" in Mainstream Organizations

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ABSTRACT

KATHRYN J. SCHMIDT: Lesbian Identity Management in Workplace Contexts:
"Don't Ask, Don't Tell" in Mainstream Organizations
(Under the direction of Philip N. Cohen)

This project uses interviews with twenty lesbian workers in the late 1990s to analyze

their understandings of the meaning of lesbian identity in their lives and their strategies for

managing lesbian identity at work. Using identity management models focusing on methods

of identity management (Dunne 1997; Griffin 1996) and on links between mainstream

organizational contexts and identity management strategies (Lindsay et al 2006; Ward and

Winstanley 2003), I link the symbolic interactionist tradition to individual workers' strategies

and to the larger political context in which the very meanings of lesbian identity are

negotiated.

The main contributions of this project include deeper understanding of workers'

strategies for dealing with stigmatized identities, especially those that may not be visible to

others. I describe how workers understand the meanings of the identities they are

managing, instead of exploring how workers manage an identity that is defined as

stigmatized. I found people who defined their identity as a visual marker, those who

perceive being lesbian as simply another facet of their identity to be integrated or

compartmentalized from their work lives, and those who define lesbian as a political

category. The meaning of lesbian identity to these workers and to those with whom they

interact profoundly affects their identity management strategies. The study also

demonstrates that many identity management strategies desexualize disclosures through

mentioning daily activities or specific partners rather than sexual identity.

My study thus offers examples of workers' struggles over how sexuality will be enacted and spoken in workplaces. Previous studies argue that workers' disclosures are shaped by formal organizational protections, desire to gain domestic partner benefits, and efforts to be integrated people at work (Dunne 1997; Griffin 1998; McDermott 2006; Raeburn 2000; Rasi and Rodriguez-Nogues 1995; Ward and Winstanley 2005). The study contributes to an understanding of how workers used formal non-discrimination policies primarily as signals of welcoming cultures rather than for the benefits the policies provided. Overall, the study contributes to the workplace identity management literature by showing how people manage a stigmatized identity during a time of rapid social change in the meanings of that identity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

iv

vi

LIST OF TABLES

Table

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION: BALANCING IDENTITIES
AMIDST DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL CONTEXTS

"I think what surprises most straight people is that you can be fired for being gay or

lesbian," said Stephanie, one of the people interviewed for this project. Stephanie's

comment illustrates the threat of job loss that she and many other lesbian workers faced if

their lesbian identity were known.[1] Stephanie and other lesbian workers balanced their

stigmatized identity as lesbians with their workplace performance on a daily basis. They

also faced pervasive institutionalized heterosexism and a chilly climate of micro-inequities in

treatment from supervisors and coworkers (Sandler, Silverberg and Hall 1996). How did

lesbian workers negotiate identity management in such tense and high stakes environments

that determined their livelihoods and, often, their sense of adult identity?

This study uses interviews with lesbian workers in the Research Triangle to explore their

daily experiences of combining lesbian identity with their paid work. The study finds that

lesbian workers often faced a chilly climate of heterosexist assumptions in their interactions

with coworkers (Sandler, Silverberg and Hall 1996). While being fired for being lesbian was

a possibility, most workers faced instead daily experiences of micro-inequities which

undermined their comfort in their workplaces and hampered achievement. Lesbian workers

feared not getting jobs, being unfairly treated in jobs, and losing their jobs if they

mismanaged their lesbian identities (Badgett 2001). Some of them worked hard to diminish

the possibility that others would know they were lesbian while others spoke freely about this

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[1] Identifying as lesbian was based on workers' self-identity, not on behavioral definitions. Lesbian workers and lesbian employees are used to reflect that all of the interviewees worked for an organization and were not self-employed or employed by a single other person.

identity. Whatever strategies they used, they were very aware that discrimination was a

possibility. Several reported not receiving jobs for which they were qualified and their

suspicions that such non-offers were linked to the prejudices of those making hiring

decisions. Not knowing whether discrimination against them as lesbians might play a role in

others' assessment of their work and of them as persons heightened these women's anxiety

about managing identity in the jobs they did secure. As McDermott (2006) has shown such

anxiety decreases emotional health for lesbians. Finding jobs that would allow them to feel

safe also meant a process of careful selection that limited their job opportunities.[2] This

research project focuses on how lesbians managed their sexual identities in workplaces to

help understand how these women addressed such concerns.

Social Contexts of Study

When studying an identity whose social acceptance and meanings are being contested,

we must examine how social structures and historical events shape the identity. Prior to the

feminist movements and gay rights[3] movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s, lesbian

identity had been highly stigmatized, often framed as a sign of moral failing, mental disease,

or immature development (D'Emilio and Freedman 1988). Starting in the 1960s, social

movements helped to decrease these negative labels and   provided alternative frameworks

for understanding lesbian identity (Fetner 2001; Linneman 1998). Lesbian-feminism and

gay rights activities were two main streams of activism whose work created increasing

acceptance for lesbians.

From the 1970s through the mid-1990s, lesbian feminists argued that lesbian identity was

not only an acceptable identity, but that choosing to identify as lesbian could be a politically

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[2] I will focus on job-level issues throughout this study, because the effects on occupational and long-term career choice were outside the scope of the interviews.

[3] Gay is used here as an inclusive (though problematic) term covering gay men, lesbians, and bi-identified people of all genders. It does not include transgender or transsexual people, since the debate about coming out for gay, lesbian, and bisexual people has not been clearly inclusive of transgender and transsexual people's issues.

effective reaction to patriarchal oppression. Growing out of the feminist movements of the 1960s, this work was deeply concerned about sexism as oppressive to women. Authors like Adrienne Rich (1980) created inclusive definitions of a lesbian continuum on which many forms of women's bonding with each other, not only primary romantic or sexual relationships, could be defined as lesbian. Lesbian-feminism was never a dominant ideology, but it worked to reframe lesbian identity in a way that de-sexualized it and emphasized its focus on women's emotional support for each other (Whisman 1996). While this de-emphasis on sexuality angered some women who had long identified as lesbian and who prized their sexual relationships with other women, the framing appealed to many people within lesbian communities and among non-lesbian audiences (Fetner 2001). The lesbian feminist model fostered new organizations, including some alternative communities and workplaces (cf. Weston and Rofel 1984).

In the 1980s and 1990s, mainstream gay rights advocates mostly used a normalizing rhetoric to push for legal and social equality for gay people. They generally framed lesbian and gay identity as inborn, perhaps biologically based or developmentally based, but beyond the individuals' ability to change (Bawer 1994). From this liberal rights-focused analysis, activists suggested that like other minority groups, gay people should be protected from discrimination because their identities were fixed and beyond conscious choice. This essentialist model has been highly successful politically and socially at explaining gay identity to Americans (Whisman 1996).

Both the political activists who worked for integrating lesbians and gay men into existing institutions and those who worked for more radical alternatives used coming out to create more positive views of homosexuals and homosexuality. Both also encouraged lesbians and gay men to lead more visible lives to create further change.[4] By the 1990s, coming out

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[4] The issue of visibility relies on the idea that lesbians and gay men are invisible unless they disclose their identities.

as lesbian or gay was becoming more common. The rising visibility of lesbians and gay men meant that assumptions that all people were heterosexual were becoming less common; however, many lesbians reported that they were still invisible within gay rights organizations (often dominated by men and focused on gay men's interests in the wake of the HIV/AIDS crisis) and within feminist organizations (see McNaught 1993 and Whisman 1996 for contrasting views).

Coming out was increasingly advocated by activists to build awareness of the numbers of gay people in American society and to demonstrate the diversity of these people (Bawer 1994; Gross 1993). Gay rights leaders urged high-profile people in entertainment and politics to come out, and some even advocated outing high-profile gays. Outing involves disclosing the identity of closeted people who would not voluntarily reveal their sexual identities (Signorile 1993/2003). Signorile and others claimed that those with social power should lead public efforts to cast lesbian and gay identity in positive terms. For people whose lives were not lived in the media spotlight, coming out publicly and to family and friends was a way of building visibility that showed real gay and lesbian lives that expanded on the publicly available stereotypes (Gross 1993; Rasi and Rodriguez-Nogues 1995). Lesbian feminist activists who saw being lesbian as a major challenge to patriarchal norms also urged people to come out as way to challenge patriarchal culture. The growing political rhetoric helped shape social expectations that it was appropriate to come out and express pride in being lesbian. These waves of growing emphasis on coming out as the norm influenced interviewees who repeatedly felt the need to apologize for instances where they were not out, suggesting that the norm of being out and proud was well-established, if imperfectly followed, by the late 1990s.

Other efforts to end discrimination against lesbian and gay people included political advocacy to gain non-discrimination policies placed into law and workplace-focused efforts to provide organizational policies prohibiting workplace discrimination. Legal barriers to gay

employment lessened somewhat after the 2003 Supreme Court Lawrence vs. Kansas decision that sodomy laws could not be used to discriminate against people engaged in sex acts with same-sex partners. Justice Anthony Kennedy, writing for the majority, wrote that gay and lesbian people could not be singled out by the government for harassment and discriminatory treatment simply because of "moral disapproval" of homosexuality. This ruling overturned previous uses of sodomy laws to argue that all gay people were engaging in same-sex sexual acts that were inherently criminal and therefore not entitled to legal rights (Robson 1992). Sodomy laws had been widely used to justify discrimination against lesbians and gay men because their disclosure of a lesbian or gay sexual identity was defined as equivalent to saying that they had or would practice the illegal act of sodomy (Shawver 1994). While the Lawrence ruling prohibited the use of sodomy laws for discriminatory practices, it failed to grant gay and lesbian people protection from other forms of legally-enforced differences in treatment. For instance, the US military's ban on homosexual soldiers is still in place. Legal challenges to discrimination continue at state and federal levels. The Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), a federal law that would ban discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation was passed by the House of Representatives in 1993, but never passed by the Senate. In 2007, Representative Barney Frank reintroduced the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, with the inclusion of protections for gender identity and expression as well as sexual orientation, but this bill has received little support by other legislators.[5] While the conditions some lesbian workers face today have improved since the time of this study's data collection, the issues of identity management in the workplace remain relevant to lesbian and gay workers and to other workers whose identities might stigmatize them in workplace settings.

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[5] This study focuses on issues of sexual orientation and discrimination against those who have a lesbian sexual orientation. By the early 2000's, political activists from gay rights organizations were increasingly including gender identity with sexual orientation in legislative proposals (Human Rights Campaign 2007).

Among the many arenas where advocates strategized for greater employment protections in the 1990s, the United States military was the most prominent. The military's policy became both a major controversy and a lasting metaphor for gay and lesbian employment practices. None of the women I interviewed were in the military or were military veterans (groups who represent about 3% of the total population, Shawver 1995), however the debates over the policy were reflected in their familiarity with the policy and their use of Don't Ask, Don't Tell metaphors for describing their own workplaces. Women's disclosure experiences in the military have been studied extensively elsewhere (Brown 1996; Shawyer 1995). The military policy of Don't Ask, Don't Tell was significant for this project because the policy and debates surrounding it brought lesbian and gay workplace issues into national prominence and because it became a powerful metaphor in describing workplaces where lesbians and gay men were accepted as long as their sexuality was never openly acknowledged. As a metaphor, the policy became shorthand for situations where gay men and lesbians were accepted as long as their sexual identity was never explicitly mentioned.

Formal policies defining gay and lesbian employees as security risks or as morally suspect in the military in positions of authority have existed since at least the 1950s in the United States. Debates about employment discrimination and rights became a national concern in the early 1990s (Britton and Williams 1997). Don't Ask, Don't Tell was promoted by President Bill Clinton as an effort to offer more inclusion of gay men and lesbians in the military (Shawver 1994). The policy replaced previous regulations which allowed investigations of service members who were suspected of being homosexual. In the 1992 presidential election season, the growing power of the gay rights movement and the backlash against it by conservatives centered on gay issues relating to HIV/AIDS and the military's ban on homosexual soldiers. Despite clear evidence that lesbians in the military were more at risk of dismissal than gay men (Halley 1999), equal rights advocates framed

6

these debates in gender-neutral terms and conservatives painted images of gay soldier

creating threats to heterosexual masculinity and male bonding (Britton and Williams 1997).

Before the 1992 election, candidate Bill Clinton promised voters that he would lift the

military's ban on gay and lesbian service members to allow such persons to serve openly.

In 1993, President Clinton approved the military's "New Policy Guidelines on Homosexuals

in the Military" that allowed homosexual persons to serve in the military under specific

conditions (Shawver 1995). The policy also officially removed homosexuality as a reason

for denying a service member security clearances, a policy that was based on the belief

such persons were more subject to blackmail than were heterosexuals.

The policy's discharge provision stated:

> Sexual orientation will not be a bar to service unless manifested by homosexual conduct. The military will discharge members who engage in homosexual conduct, which is defined as a homosexual act, a statement that the member is homosexual or bisexual, or a marriage or attempted marriage to someone of the same gender. (as cited in Butler 1997, p. 176)

The order quickly became known as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," because it forbade military

personnel from asking service members to disclose their sexual identities (Don't Ask), but

also prevented personnel from disclosing it themselves (Don't Tell) for fear of dismissal from

the service. Despite widespread initial publicity by the Clinton administration about the

policy's greater support for lesbian and gay soldiers, the policy continued to define sexual

activities with a member of the same sex and statements of one's homosexual sexual

identity as violations of the Military Code of Justice (Britton and Williams 1997). Advocates

of Don't Ask, Don't Tell argued that it would prevent investigative searches for gay and

lesbian service members that had led to surveillance and investigations of military personnel

suspected of being gay or lesbian.

Later in 1993, the Department of Defense clarified the above statement to describe how

statements of sexual identity were related to conduct and defined statements declaring that

one is homosexual were a form of conduct and grounds for dismissal from the military (Butler 1997, p. 176). As Judith Butler notes, this policy defined declarations such as, "I am a homosexual," as an act which could determine a service members' identity (Butler 1997, p. 112). She argues that this policy gave far more power to statements about identity relative to sexual activity than had been present in previous policies (Butler 1997). Proof of sexual activity was no longer required to prove homosexuality, only a statement that one was lesbian or gay.

   Advocates for gay service members framed the policy as ending 'witch hunts,' but creating a situation of second-class membership in the military for lesbian and gay persons that was predicated on their agreement to never discuss or disclose their sexuality (Halley 1999). Gay people could serve, but were not able to claim either an identity as lesbian or gay or be sexual with same-sex partners, inside or outside of committed relationships. Reactions to this policy were fierce from both sides. Liberals saw it as a policy of separate and unequal treatment (Shawver 1994; Halley 1999), while conservatives argued that homosexuals would corrupt the military and weaken unit cohesion. In 1993, a National March on Washington, D.C. by gay groups called for an end to this policy. As of 2007, the policy is still in place.

   More generally, the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy sparked debates about lesbian and gay employment in many organizations. Hearing arguments for equal treatment for service members led many gays and lesbians and their allies to question their own organizations' policies. Workplace advocacy groups formed in many companies, especially Fortune 500 companies to create organization-specific anti-discrimination policies (Human Rights Campaign 2003). Many people, especially gay men, noted the weaknesses of employment protections and of benefit plans for those who had AIDS or had partners with the disease. As the economy surged and broader debates advocating recognition of diverse workforce characteristics took off, many organizations created new workplace policies (Human Rights

Campaign 2003). Organizations were also challenged from within by advocates for protecting gays in the workplace. For instance, several leading organizations developed gay and lesbian employee support groups, non-discrimination policies, and benefits statements (Human Rights Campaign 2003; Mickens 1994). In industries with high demand for employees and highly skilled workforces, organizations adopted gay-friendly policies and more generally family-friendly policies to recruit workers (Badgett 2001; Mickens 1994). The most common policies included non-discrimination policies that denied the organization the right to dismiss, punish, or refuse to hire gay employees for their sexuality. In some cases, organizations also extended equal benefits or comparable benefits to partners of gay employees (Bawer 1995; Mickens 1994; Human Rights Campaign 2003). These debates and rapid changes made the late 1990s a pivotal time of change for gay and lesbian employment issues.

Since the late 1990s, corporate America has become far more supportive of lesbian and gay employees, even though legal progress and progress in military policies has been uneven. More private companies now offer protection against discrimination. In 2006, the Human Rights Campaign's (HRC) Corporate Equality Index reported that 436 (98%) of the 446 financially powerful companies they surveyed now explicitly include sexual orientation in their non-discrimination policies and 388 (87%) offer healthcare benefits to domestic partners of employees (Human Rights Campaign 2006). According to the HRC Foundation's 2003 edition of the The State of the Workplace report the "number of Fortune 500 companies offering domestic partner benefits almost tripled in five years, from 69 in 1998 to 200 by the end of 2003." This report further found that among the Fortune 500, the higher a company's rank, the more likely it is to offer domestic partner benefits, with 40 percent of all Fortune 500 companies offering domestic partner benefits and 68 percent of the Fortune 50 companies offering such benefits (HRC 2003).

The Human Rights Campaign survey focuses on corporate leaders and does not provide specific information on smaller firms. Smaller firms are generally less likely to offer specific anti-discrimination policies or domestic partner benefits according to listings of companies in popular press advice books (Mickens 1994) and the Human Rights Campaign's general website. Even where official policies promise protection, many workers note that the organizational cultures vary in how supportive they are for lesbian workers. Therefore, managing information and perceptions of lesbian identity in the workplace remain a strong concern for lesbian workers.

These macro level factors provide a legal and economic backdrop to Americans' lives. What happens in their workplaces with specific coworkers and supervisors mediates how the latest debates in Congress or corporate human resource policies will affect specific workers. To get at that lived reality in this project, I explore how women who identify as lesbian manage their sexual identities at their workplaces, not simply what the laws or personnel policies say about their identities. This research focuses on workplaces because they are the interactional locations in which individual adults spend the largest proportion of their time and because economic discrimination has ripple effects in all parts of people's lives.

Contributions of the Study

Work continues to provide an important sense of identity and meaning to adults' lives in the United States (Hochschild 1998). Paid work provides most people with the financial support to maintain the remainder of their lives. Workplaces are also important sources of friendship and adult interaction for many people (Hochschild 1998). Understanding how lesbians negotiated how, what, and when to tell coworkers about their lesbian identity contributes to an understanding of a central focus of their lives. By extension, it contributes to understanding the lives of many others who balance stigmatizing private identities with their workplace constraints.

This project contributes to the growing literature on the intersections of personal lives and workplace contexts. As Jeff Hearn (1996) asserts, sociologists have tended to ignore the ways that our theories and empirical studies frame workplaces as places where sexuality and sexual identities are either absent or present only as problems. The norm, even in some recent studies, has been to treat workers as asexual, usually male, entities and to treat all discussions of sexuality in the workplace as problematic (Wlliams, Giuffre and Dellinger 1999). This pattern misses the significant impacts of covert and unexamined assumptions on the ways that researchers and other social actors understand workplaces (Hearn 1996). Centering the experiences of lesbian workers offers ways of looking at how all workers, regardless of their gender, sexuality, or relationship status, negotiate identity management issues in their workplaces.

Although the data were collected several years ago, the data offer relevant information today. The study represents a wide range of workplaces and discusses how the meaning of being a lesbian at work varied and influenced disclosure strategies. The study's emphasis on avoiding the best and worst of employment experiences meant that I gained a range of women's experiences and did not pursue only those who had particularly dramatic stories or who worked in exceptionally welcoming or heterosexist environments. One of the unexpected results of this wider range was that many of the interviewees had previously had few opportunities to reflect on their experiences as lesbian workers. While most had some experiences of heterosexism, those not employed in or involved in academia, tended to report that they had never discussed these issues with others. Instead, they had developed strategies for being lesbian in their workplace drawing on other kinds of knowledge, such as what it meant to be a professional, instead of carefully strategizing their identity management specifically as lesbian workers. Given the gay and lesbian rights movements' emphasis on identity management, the lack of a discourse about it among interviewees suggested that their practices were less based on the identity politics academics explored

and were more related to adapting to workplace situations without the benefit of well-articulated identity strategies.

As mentioned above, the data includes in-depth interviews with lesbians working in a range of places. Their workplace settings allow for a cross-sectional view of different kinds of workplaces where these middle-class, college-educated women worked. Previous studies had largely focused on particular occupations such as teachers (Blount 2000; Khayatt 1992; Kissen 1996; Woods and Harbeck 1992), sociologists (Taylor and Raeburn 1995), or coaches (Griffin 1998) or on single workplaces, usually ones that were either very open to lesbian workers (Weston and Rofel 1985) or that were part of large corporate organizations (Friskopp and Silverstein 1995; Miller 1995; Woods 1993). Anecdotal collections gathered stories from varied people, but made no attempt to analyze patterns within the stories (Rasi and Rodriguez-Nogues 1995). The middle-range of otherwise-mainstream organizations and the women who worked in them are still under-studied. This project thus adds to our in-depth understanding of workplaces in varied industries and types of organizations.

This study also contributes by documenting the experiences of people in an urban setting where in-migration had been high because of the region's overall growth and because of its reputation as a lesbian-friendly urban setting. As one of the fastest growing regions in the Southeast, the Triangle area of North Carolina was a place with both settled long-time residents and a large proportion of new residents. The five counties in the region grew from 957,000 to 1.4 million people from 1990 to 2000 (Wake County Economic Development 2007). Because of the active social and political organizations in the area (a lesbian bar, lesbian-owned businesses, and active social organizations) and because of the Triangle's cultural openness (especially compared to many Southern cities), the region was listed in several gay and lesbian publications as a top city in which to live (Mickens 1984).

12

Nearly all of the interviewees had moved from some other place, usually from outside the South, to live in the Triangle. As the result of such movement, most of the interviewees did not have families-of-origin near their present locations. Their own mobility and that of many people around them allowed for a level of urban anonymity not present in other urban regions of similar size. As we will see, this offered several of them a sense of being able to determine their disclosure methods without worries about unplanned disclosure to family or extended social networks.

One of the chief intellectual contributions of this study seems unmatched in other studies of lesbian workplace issues. In the fifth chapter, I explore how the meaning of lesbian identity to interviewees influences their disclosure strategies. While there is considerable discussion about what kind of identity "lesbian" is no one seems to have explored how an individual's understandings of what a lesbian is, and particularly, what kind of lesbian identity she claims for herself influences her handling of workplace disclosure issues. Often, these meanings of identity become important when lesbians use these meanings to guide their decisions about what personal information is relevant in their workplaces and determine how to share relevant information in a workplace.

<u>Overview of the Study</u>

My project uses qualitative content analysis of interview data from intensive interviews with twenty women who identified as lesbian and were working part-time or full-time in the Durham-Chapel Hill area. I purposefully sought women in a range of organizational and occupational settings whose experiences of identity disclosure ranged from complete closeting to open disclosure of identity. Efforts were made to provide a range of experiences in the sample, but given the nature of the lesbian population, taking a standard random sample was not practical (Denzin 2000). Snowball sampling produced interviewees who shared some social traits but were not a closed social circle.

The sample included only white women who were not actively parenting children at the time of the interview. Their ages ranged from 19 to 45 with the majority in their thirties. Nearly all of them either came from middle class origins or had jobs that fit into the broad middle class category.[6] All interviewees had at least some college education and several had graduate degrees. The interviewees' workplaces included social service provision, education, industrial work, and medical services. As discussed in the methods section, these characteristics limit the generalizability of the project, but do illuminate the experiences of well-educated white lesbian workers.

The overall question of how lesbian workers manage their sexual identities at work presumes that being lesbian and being a worker are sometimes conflicting. In both research literature and public discourse, lesbian has generally been framed as a private identity and worker is framed as a public identity (Dunne 1997; Ellis 1996; Griffin 1998). Other researchers have questioned how this public/private split is imagined and created in public discourse that makes invisible the lives of gay and lesbian people (Skidmore 2004). Among the questions this research addresses include: What are the range of ways women manage lesbian sexual identities and identity information at work? What identity management strategies are available? How do women's understandings of the meaning of lesbian identity influence what sorts of identity management strategies they use? In the literature review, I explain how theorists and researchers have described sexual identity management and situate this research in its historical and political context. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology of the study.

Chapter four, five, six, and seven develop the argument that understanding how lesbian workers manage their identities involves understanding the methods, meanings, and contexts relevant to such management. In Chapter 4, I describe the identity management

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[6] Class of origin and current class were not selection criteria for the sample, but resulted from the snowball sampling technique.

strategies interviewees used most often and explain how their perceptions of their abilities to pass as heterosexual influenced the strategies they used. Research about lesbians at work has tended to treat the meaning of the category "lesbian" as unproblematic in itself, simply as information to be managed or an identity to be enacted (Andriote 1991, Dunne 1997). Although I began the research from this same premise that presumed I knew what lesbian identity was (and operationalized the identity as someone willing to identify herself to an interviewer as lesbian), listening closely to interviewees showed that lesbian identity had different meanings for them. For instance, women who see lesbian identity as a political commitment differ significantly in their management strategies from women who see lesbian identity as a private personal characteristic. These meanings shape whether workers believe that their lesbian identity is relevant information for coworkers to have and whether they feel compelled to share such information to educate others or can treat it as private information relevant only in managing their non-work lives. In Chapter 5, I unpack the meanings of lesbian identity to interviewees and link those meanings to the identity management strategies used. How women understood the meaning of lesbian identity in their lives shaped many of their strategies for managing sexual identity. To explore this topic, I categorized interviewees into groups whose comments suggested they share a strategy for managing their identity in their work lives.

After discussing the meanings of lesbian identity for these workers and how these meanings influence their identity management, Chapter 6 expands on how personal characteristics influence identity management. Because so much previous work on lesbians has focused on their 'private sphere' experiences of personal relationships and individual identity development, my interview questions focused primarily on workplace contexts; however, interviewees often introduced personal contexts to situate their answers. I found that issues including age, life stage, and partnership status mediated the effects of meanings of identity and workplace contexts.

In the seventh chapter, the analysis expands on how the interviewees' organizational contexts influence their identity management. The interviewees' organizational settings ranged from settings that were officially welcoming of gay and lesbian employees to those that were officially unwelcoming. Most interviewees were employed by organizations without specific statements about sexual orientation. The interviewees' experiences navigating these organizational contexts illustrate that formal policies are helpful to lesbian employees, but that informal cultural aspects of organizations are even more important in determining workers' identity management strategies. Chapter eight summarizes the findings and suggests their implications further research and application. We now review the literature that helps frame our exploration of the key question of how lesbian workers negotiated their workplace environments.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW: SITUATING THIS STUDY AMONG OTHERS

Understanding the processes through which lesbian workers negotiate mainstream work environments draws on theories of symbolic interactionism and on studies of organizational sexuality (Hearn and Parkin 1995; Ward and Winstanley 2005; Williams, Giuffre, and Dellinger 1999). This project draws most deeply on traditional symbolic interactionist identity management accounts (Goffman 1958) and on the elaborations of that theory to include discussions of how inequality colors available strategies (Schwalbe et al 2000; Ingraham 1996).

Elaborations of Goffman's model have been frequently applied to lesbian identity management (Besant 1999; Crawley 2001; Dalton and Bielby 2000; Dunne 1997; Lindsay et al 2006) because Goffman addressed how people manage an identity that may be concealed to avoid stigma or to deal with stigma once an identity is known. Because social activists contest the stigmatized nature of lesbian identity (Broad 2002; Gamson 1998; Gross 1993), the meanings of the identity are shifting (Broad 2002). The study explores how discourses shape the strategies people use to manage information (Boden 1994; Swidler 2001). Using identity management models focusing on methods of identity management (Dunne 1997; Griffin 1996) and on links between mainstream organizational contexts and identity management strategies (Lindsay et al 2006; Ward and Winstanley 2003), I draw on the symbolic interactionist tradition and link it not only to individual workers' strategies but also to their larger context in which the very meanings of lesbian identity are negotiated.

This study remains clearly focused on workplaces as the sites of such negotiations because these organizations are where lesbian workers determine their economic well-being (Lyons, Brenner and Fassinger 2005). I draw from quantitative studies of lesbian and gay workplace issues (Badgett 1997, 2001; Black 2003; Blandford et al 2003; Gluckman and Reed 1997; Lyons, Brenner and Fassinger 2005) and from others' studies of specific types of workplaces and occupations (cf. Besant 1999; Khayatt 1992; Kissen 1996; Weston and Rofel 1984) to situate this study within a larger research stream. General studies of lesbian and gay workplace issues suggest that workers' disclosures are shaped by formal organizational protections, desire to gain domestic partner benefits, and efforts to be integrated people at work (Dunne 1997; Griffin 1998; McDermott 2006; Raeburn 2000; Rasi and Rodriguez-Nogues 1995; Ward and Winstanley 2005); however, more work is needed to show how lesbian workers' actually manage information about their identities in order to avoid discrimination and share information about their personal lives with coworkers on equal terms with heterosexual coworkers.

While many still argue that lesbian workers can simply pass unnoticed if they wish, these workers are challenging that claim and the idea behind it that their sexual orientation is something of which to be ashamed. This study draws on symbolic interactionist accounts of identity, studies of gender and sexual orientation as identities and as parts of on-going relationships, and finally uses studies of lesbians' participation in mainstream organizations to understand lesbian workplace identity management.

Symbolic Interactionist Accounts

Because understanding the unequal workplace experiences of lesbians was a primary focus of this research, I was interested in how lesbian employees made sense of and worked within the situations in their specific workplaces. Symbolic interactionism offers tools for understanding these micro-level issues of meaning and action. My focus on understanding the development of social identities and senses of self as an ongoing process

that is shaped by and reshapes social structure led me to explore how others had discussed these issues.

Symbolic interactionism attends to the ways that humans act based on the meanings they perceive a situation to have (Blumer 1969). Blumer argues that the meaning of a situation or object for a person is shaped by the social interactions that person has with others (interactions with other people or the accumulated actions often described as culture). Another basic tenet of symbolic interactionism is that these meanings of situation and objects are interpreted by people in the context of ongoing interactions and problems. Developments since Blumer's 1969 work have extended these concepts to describe how social interactions produce identities.

Mead, whose work influenced Blumer, described the self as able to engage in self-interaction where the self is both subject and object, knower and known (Mead 1934/1962). It is this ability to imaginatively step outside of one's sense of self to treat the self as an object which can have meaning for the self and in relationship to others that distinguishes symbolic interactionism's concept of self from other uses of the term. As these terms have been used, researchers have adopted the practice of using identity to refer to the social meaning of the self. "Identities, therefore, or selves as social objects are a central component of self-concept…identity is not identical with the self, but locates the self in social terms; it refers to the social meaning of the self," says McMahon (1995, p. 18). The meaning of these identities, therefore, is both social and individual.

As mentioned in the introduction, the social meaning of the identity of lesbian has been widely debated and their reframing has been the focus of identity movements whose primary goals were the promotion of positive lesbian identities. Because coming out as lesbian requires taking on an identity as lesbian, an identity outside the heteronormative mainstream, various explanations have been offered for how people develop this identity in a social sense. Psychologists theorize coming out as an individual, developmental process

(Markowe 1996). Gay political advocates using an essentialist model of identity speak of 'discovering' one's true self and recognizing what had always existed in oneself (Bawer 1994). Whisman (1996) suggests that such essentializing rhetoric hides the ways identities vary over time. What these models do only implicitly is acknowledge that self and identity are social processes, rather than psychological phenomena. The model suggested by lesbian feminists of lesbian as chosen political identity is more sensitive to taking on the identity as a socially significant action. Lesbian feminists described coming out as choosing to participate in a woman-identified world that would challenge oppression (Rich 1980; Rust 1993). Their work adds an understanding of oppression and shifting meanings of identity to Mead's classic theory of the self.

This project, however, keeps its focus on the ways that individual women managed identities as lesbian. In looking at how lesbian workers managed their identities, it is useful to use the framework of announcements and placements Stone (1981) suggested. Announcements are the identities people claim for themselves, while placements are the identities in which others cast them (McMahon 1995, p. 18). For identity management, the social processes of claiming identities through announcements and being seen in certain identities by others will be a central issue.

Throughout this project, I will use the term identity management to mean "the decision-making processes lesbian go through every day in determining how much of their lesbian identities to reveal or conceal. These processes include self-monitoring as well as monitoring the reactions of others to gauge the safety or risk in each new relationship or situation a lesbian encounters." (Grifiin 1998, p. 135). As noted in studies of identity management reviewed in Markowe (1996), identity management takes place as lesbian workers compare their actions to those of other groups, such as heterosexual women. Using heterosexual women as a reference groups while their social status is higher than those of lesbian workers, leads lesbian workers to construct identity management strategies

20

on their own. By relying on people who do not share their identity management problems and without access to direct socialization in how to manage lesbian identity in the workplace, lesbian workers construct their strategies in isolation or from media (Markowe 1996).

Markowe's description implies a degree of conscious control of identity management; however, a habitus of identity management (Bourdieu 1999) describes women's on-going patterns of action that had become routinized, so that they were rarely consciously concealing or revealing information. While Bourdieu proposes a general model of action, Swidler's study of Americans discussing their views of love (2001) updates his accounts and suggests how they apply to people seeking to explain emotional problems and how people's culture helps to shape their identities.

Swidler's description of identity development (2001) suggests that culture helps to form particular kinds of selves who not only have particular sets of cultural capital, but also have incorporated ways of acting, senses of group identity, and habitual styles of action into their unreflective senses of themselves. She explores the ways culture is self-forming as people use it to shape themselves and to create their own basic repertoires of action (p. 71). These selves have developed habitus for negotiating certain kinds of situations and do not continuously calculate their actions according to particular criteria, but rather take un-reflexive actions that make sense in the context (Bourdieu 1997). For Swidler, like Bourdieu (1997), culture is not something that people only use consciously, but rather becomes intertwined with becoming a certain kind of person. In this view, people's daily actions are not simply acting out some sort of socialized cultural patterns, but also express and enact their senses of themselves and the kind of people they are.

Swidler, however, emphasizes that people must determine what sort of "game" or situation they have entered and that people often frame situations in terms of those they already understand (2001). Here, Swidler's discussion returns to Blumer's (1969) focus on

meaning-making to show that people are striving to make the situations they encounter meaningful and to see the situations as one they are competent to address in ways that reinforce their valued senses of self and protect identities they value. These theories direct our attention to the ways lesbians are acting in concert with others in their immediate situations and with larger cultural systems of meaning to respond to situations that are meaningful for them. What understandings of their own identities and of their workplace situations shape lesbian workers' experiences at work?

Within sociology, work on lesbian identity disclosure has repeatedly cited Goffman's work on stigma (1959, 1963), contrasting discredited and discreditable identities. Within this framework, research has focused on ways that lesbians manage potentially discrediting information in varied settings. Goffman's work (1963) uses a dramaturgical model of identity management that emphasizes an actor's efforts to control the information others have about her. An important distinction for his explanation was the differentiation of identities that are evident or already revealed (discredited) from those that are invisible or not yet known (discreditable). Given the widespread perception of lesbian invisibility, meaning that lesbians cannot be immediately identified by others (Markowe, p. 14), research has proceeded from the notion that lesbian workers have discreditable identities about which knowledge must be concealed or selectively revealed. Understanding that lesbians may shift identity management strategies based on how they feel about being lesbian and what being lesbian means to them (Swidler 2001) helps extend Goffman's model to look at how lesbians manage their identities at work.

Other studies (Broad 2002; Golebiowska 2003) have reflected a growing political argument that lesbian identity was not the problem but heteronormative assumptions and rules were. Their work, in some senses, reflects Goffman's earlier discussion of the ways that those with stigmatized identities were enacted within stigmatizing environments; however, with an increased focus on identity-based social movements, these works show

the shifting contexts of identities (Broad 2002; Gamson 1998). Schwalbe and coauthors (2000) have offered a more general theory based in symbolic interactionism, but focused on inequality that describes the processes through which privileged groups maintain privilege in part through shaping the individual and group identities of marginalized and oppressed groups. Privileged groups maintain their power in part through defining marginalized groups as deficient or lacking in some way, they argue (Schwalbe et al 2000). Political action groups and social movement organizations such as the LGBT movement have countered such arguments in part by creating new frames for lesbian identity (Broad 2002).

Individuals, in turn, have used these frames not only to make claims to privilege groups, but also to articulate their own experiences (Gamson 1998). Gamson's study of media representations of and by gay and lesbian people documents many efforts gay people have made to reduce the stigma of gay identities. Swidler (2001) takes these stories of meaning beyond social movement analysis and into direct exploration of the stories of meanings individuals use in explaining their experiences in everyday settings, not just during social movement debates. Swidler's discussion of identity strategies emphasizes both the ways that identity stories are deployed in conscious ways and the ways that these identity stories become parts of a cultural toolkit which can be drawn on as needed (Swidler, p. 200).

Swidler (2001) reviews and extends several classic ways of understanding how people talk about and use identity and the culture that produces an identity. Swidler's account emphasizes the context-dependence and fluidity of people's uses of culture. Her analysis places less emphasis on issues of relative power (perhaps because she studied mainstream members of the culture who had many of its privileges---white, heterosexual, people, and theorized from the place of the mainstream not marginalized people). When trying to discern what meaning identity management has for interviewees, understanding the contexts within which they manage those identities as well as their preferred methods for

handling their identities is important, but understanding the meaning of lesbian identity (and whether it is a problem is a key part of the meaning-making process.

Pat Griffin's work extends the discussion of stigmatized and stigmatizing identities because it reflects the range of emotional responses lesbians may have today as they respond to external and internal aspects of heterosexism (Griffin 1998, p. 147). Griffin's framework for identity management describes how lesbian athletes and coaches adapt to the heterosexist sports culture in which they do sports. Among lesbian college athletes, Griffin reports, categorizing "these management strategies as (1)antigay/denying, (2) special friends/ashamed and self-hating, (3) member of a secret "club", (4) prudent and proud, and (5) out and proud," (Griffin 1998, p. 149). In these categories, she describes that range of responses young women have to discovering their own lesbian identities or feeling attractions to other women. While these categories are useful for exploring the experiences of people who are just discovering a lesbian identity, the range of strategies lesbian coaches used better characterized the patterns lesbian workers use in their workplaces. These strategies include passing as heterosexual, covering lesbian identity, being implicitly out, and being explicitly out (Griffin, p. 135). Griffin's typology also included categories of being completely closeted and publicly out which were much less common. How does this typology describe not only coaches, but also others lesbian workers' strategies for managing their identities at work?

Griffin's categories for coaches are named to reflect the lesbian athlete's acceptance of her identity as well as her strategies for managing that identity with others (Griffin 1998, p. 149). Part of that acceptance is based on whether the lesbian coach thinks about lesbian identity as something of which to be ashamed, an aspect of a particular relationship, or as integral to her own identity. The gay rights movement rhetoric has increasingly popularized the idea that lesbian and gay identities are essential features of one's self rather than deviant behaviors (Bawer 1995; Whisman 1996). The availability of a set of ideas naming

24

lesbian identity as a possible way of being, perhaps even inborn and beyond one's control,

allows those who suspect they might be lesbian to accept an identity label loaded with fewer

pejorative connotations than in the past (Whisman 1996). Her analysis, therefore, asks how

what people think about an identity shapes how they manage that identity with other

people?

<u>Doing Heterosexuality at Work</u>

To some extent, lesbian identity management is about how actors do sexuality in the

sense that doing sexuality is seen as acting in certain ways to claim and enact an identity

(Ingraham 2001). In workplace settings, such enactment is usually through speech or other

behavior, but not through 'having sex'. Female adults' efforts to "do gender" in ways

appropriate to their workplace norms, senses of personal identity, and complex patterns of

race, class, and job positions are also central to their construction as lesbian or

heterosexual persons(Ingraham 2001). Most researchers exploring lesbian identity

management emphasize that lesbian, gay, and bisexual people can and do pass as

heterosexual (Badgett 2001, p. 51). Badgett suggests that the absence of visible

characteristics means that lesbians can and do pass as heterosexual much of the time

which means that not identifying to others as lesbian could be a strategy for avoiding

discrimination (p. 51). Ingraham (1999) and others (Hearn 1996; Messinger and Topal

1998) argue that most observers still rely on heteronormative assumptions. For many

audiences, doing gender appropriately also leads to presumptions that the actor is

heterosexual (Dellinger and Williams 1997; Ingraham 1999). Thus, unless a person

explicitly discloses homosexuality or provides a large numbers of indicators of gay identity,

people will assume that person is heterosexual.

Previous studies (Markowe 1996) have focused on how lesbians are often invisible or

seen only when they match particular stereotypes of lesbian identity (Budge and Hamer

1994; Atkins 1999). Among themselves, lesbian workers may not only differ in appearances,

25

but also differ in their perceptions of their ability to pass as heterosexual and the degree of agency over their appearance (Budge and Hamer 1994; Goffman 1964). How does a worker's belief that she passes affect the identity management strategies she uses at work? In Chapter Four, this question and related issues are explored.

Some women, lesbian and not, however, may fit social stereotypes of lesbians (Erickson 1999). For them, heteronormative assumptions about how 'real women do gender' may lead to a presumption of lesbian identity (Erickson 1999; Esterberg 2000; Halberstam 1998). These stereotypes are linked to images of 'butch' identity or female masculinity (Esterberg 2000). Women who deviate from gender norms may be assumed to be homosexual or transgender (Creith 1996; Kunkel 2003). For some women, this gendered presentation feels like an expression of their deepest selves (Erickson 1999; Halberstam 1998), while others adopt the presentation with a sense of performing an identity (Crawley 2001). How do women who believe that their bodies are 'marked' in some way as lesbian or who feel that their presentation of self as butch is their authentic self manage their identities at work?

For lesbian workers who believe their appearance does not signal their lesbian identity, what is the combination of willingness to disclose and recognized opportunities for disclosure provided in a workplace (Boden 1984)? Conversational norms that frowned on flaunting one's sexual identity meant that most women did not say they were lesbian, unless someone presented them with an 'appropriate' conversational opening (Boden 1984). Messinger and Topal (1998) report on their experiences in social work internship placements where their marital and relational status was a common conversational opening from colleagues. While they reflect on differing ways of handling such questions, they saw these openings as requiring some sort of identity management move on their parts. Their choices ranged from direct answers, such as "Yes, my partner is a woman," to answering "no," and avoiding further comments. This question presented a clear decision point. For Messinger, replying negatively would deny her partner's significance in her life and be a

missed opportunity to educate others on their hetero-normative assumptions. She chose to make her status explicit in one setting, while Topal did not disclose her identity in her placement. Their article highlights the power relations at play as both were interns needing credit for her work in the agency. While social work is one of the few professions whose main professional organizations has a non-discrimination policy and statement of advocacy for sexual minorities, individuals and organizations vary in their commitment to this policy (Messinger 2004). As interns in mainstream agencies, Messinger and Topal worried about possible repercussions of coming out. Their experiences suggest exploring identity management by looking for both moments where clear questions require responses and for moments where lesbian workers ignored questions that might have led to discussions of lesbian identity.

Assumptions of heterosexuality are changing, so that heteronormative assumptions are changing for audiences trying to discern individuals' identities and for lesbians' beliefs in their ability to pass.[7] The growth in lesbian visibility has begun to change assumptions of heteronormativity since the late 1990s (Dalton and Bielby 2000). During the late 1990s, lesbian authors wrote frequently about lesbian invisibility, a concept that had both literal and political meanings (Cottinger 1995; Frye 1994). At a literal level, they argued that most lesbians were invisible as lesbian to the general public, leading people to underestimate the number and diversity of lesbian people (Cottinger 1995). At a political level, lesbian activists noted that political issues affecting homosexuals or same-sex couples generally were framed in terms of male lives (Cooper 2000; Cottinger 1996; Creith 1996).[8] For instance, discussions of United States' military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," the military's policy on

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[7] Others have shown that heteronormative assumptions may vary based on occupational and social locations of audiences (Esterberg 2000; Halberstam 1998)

[8] Even the use of "gay" as a generic term for men and women who identified as attracted to same-sex partners was taken to be a form of male bias in language that minimized women's experiences, especially where they differed from male experiences.

homosexual soldiers was widely debated for its effects on male soldiers. These debates

ignored data that female soldiers were discharged at far higher rates for homosexual

conduct than were male soldiers (Shawver 1995). At a broader level, the military's policy led

to increased debates about gay workplace rights (Shawver 1995).

Over time, media began to feature more lesbian characters. The growing visibility of

lesbian and gay images in mass media and the increased visibility of lesbians and gay men

in some people's social circles have given a far larger segment of the heterosexually-

identified population at least superficial knowledge of 'gay life'. This growing visibility varies

by region, age of observers, and social context, but has meant that identity negotiation in

some settings has ceased to be a struggle against lesbian invisibility (Dalton and Bielby

2000). Further study is needed to explore how the shift from lesbian invisibility to lesbian

visibility may affect individual workers.

Preparations for Work

Issues of how lesbian workers prepare for their work lives and how partnerships may

shape those experiences have been raised in studies specifically of lesbians' workplace

experiences and those of partnerships more broadly. In a study of British lesbians' work

and family experiences, Dunne (1997) finds several paths women took in preparing for work.

She notes the continued influence of societal expectations, especially for the working-class,

that women would work until marriage in short-term jobs, and then leave the labor force to

raise children. Her analysis shows that women's expectations of following this job-until-

housewife track led to lower levels of education and less job-specific preparation. Other

women described expectations that they would work throughout their lives that arose both

before and after coming out as lesbian. Having such a work-focused set of goals was

related to higher education and more preparation (such as internships) aimed at gaining

specific skills. Dunne also reports that women with a higher work focus were more likely to

enter male-dominated occupations, reporting that they sought the higher pay. Research on

women's entry into non-traditional occupations suggests that their higher pay is a major draw. Traditional women's work of caring such as nursing and teaching has been devalued economically and socially (England 2005b). Dunne's interviews do not allow her to test for causality, but she argues that having more job opportunities both offered women an alternative to marriage and housewifery and enabled those who had rejected marriage to support themselves (Dunne 1997). From Dunne's analysis, the expectation that lesbians might approach career and job choice with a greater willingness to invest in education and training to prepare for longer expected work lives and greater need for income.

Dunne focuses her analysis on how individual women prepared themselves for lives 'beyond heterosexuality' (p. 10) with lives as housewives as a backdrop. She does not examine how or whether these women expected to support only themselves or envisioned being members of lesbian partnerships. Others find high rates of partnership (often serial relationships rather than single long-term relationship) among lesbians (Blumstein and Schwartz 1987; Black et al 2000). Graff suggests that not only lesbians, but high proportions of women and men in the United States have rejected the breadwinner and housewife model implicit in Dunne's analysis. As opportunities for women have risen and men's earning power has declined, Graff argues that a dual earner model has become the norm. Women as well as men increasingly prepare for lifelong participation in the waged labor force (p. 34). For Graff, this growing equality of preparation has facilitated greater partner homogamy in education and earnings rather than the specialization into housewife and breadwinner more common prior to the 1970s (Graff 2004; Kurdek and Schmitt 1987).

Graff sees this increasing similarity of men and women in marriages and partnerships as decreasing the importance of gender in marriages (and thus supporting same-sex marriage), because women and men have become more interchangeable as economic contributors to partnerships (Graff 2004, p. 54). Historians have likewise argued that modern lesbian identity as lived in long-term partnerships that include separate households

from other kin has been made possible in part by women's increased opportunities and participation in paid work (D'Emilio and Freedman 1998; Faderman 2001). Both Graff and Dunne focus on ways that women's preparation for paid work links to their expectations about adult relationships. Dunne saw a shift to a lesbian identity led women to prepare more for work roles and to target their efforts to higher paid careers. Graff, saw less direct influences on coming out on job preparation, but argued that women's increasing labor force participation made supporting themselves or themselves and a woman partner easier than in the past. What neither explored directly was how women's experiences of partnership with women shaped their workplace experiences. How then did partnerships with women shape lesbian workers' workplace experiences and job paths?

Previous work on lesbian partnerships has shown that they have high rates of dual earner patterns (Blumstein and Schwartz 1987; Kurdek and Schmitt 1987). Recent research has suggested that even for those raising small children, dual labor force participation is the norm (Sullivan 1996; Winfeld 2005). Some studies suggest that lack of coverage for domestic partners and their children makes a breadwinner model more difficult for lesbians who might choose such a pattern (Sullivan 1986; Badgett 2001). Biological mothers, for instance, may remain in the work force to gain insurance benefits for themselves and their children from previous relationships or those born within a lesbian partnership (Sullivan 1996; Badgett 2001). Partners who might prefer have one person work while the other pursued more education or other opportunities may find that the lack of health insurance or other benefits makes such options difficult to finance (Badgett 2001). What are some of the ways, then, that lesbian workers experience economic constraints on their relationships through lack of partner recognition on formal policies?

What these studies also find are that lesbian partner households earn less on average than households with heterosexual couples or gay male couples (Blumstein and Schwartz 1987; Badgett 2001). A large portion of this difference may be attributable to gendered

wage differences (Blumstein and Schwartz 1987; Badgett 2001). Others suggest exploring

the patterns of lesbians' labor force participation to better understand the links between

gender and sexual orientation in predicting earnings and other outcomes (Black et al 2001;

Blandford 2003).

Beyond economic issues, another aspect of partnership that may affect lesbians'

workplace experiences is their desire to discuss those relationships with others (Rasi and

Rodriguez-Nogues 1995). Gay and lesbian scholars have argued that being able to talk

about and recognize one's partner at work on par with heterosexual couples is emotionally

meaningful as well as economically important (HRC 2000). For women, the construction of

a work identity linked to a personal relationship has been suggested to be especially

important. Deborah Tannen's accounts (1994) of gendered linguistic practices at work finds

that compared to men women in workplace settings more often mention their partners

(Tannen 1994). Tannen links these kinds of mentions, such as 'I'll have to check with my

husband before planning a work trip,' are used by women to honor their connections to

others and to signal the importance of these relationships (Tannen 1994, p. 54). Such

mentions of partners symbolically link these women workers' workplace decisions to their

connections to others. Tannen suggests not only that this behavior is more common among

women workers, but that it is a form of doing gender appropriately in the workplace. Her

analysis uses only heterosexual women's experiences, but implies that this pattern is related

to the gender of the speakers and not that of their partners. This leads to questions for

further investigation. Do lesbian workers see a pattern of talk about heterosexual partners

in their workplaces? How do they participate in such talk themselves? To what extent do

lesbian workers report discussing their (female) partners with others at work?

Organizational Contexts and Personal Strategies Interact

Using a framework that shows how workers' preferred strategies of disclosure interact

with workplace contexts drawn from Lindsay et al's 2006 study helps better explain the

meanings and processes that shaped such choices. Lindsay et al's (2006) study of how lesbian-parented families negotiated school settings as a schematic for thinking about the joint influences of two aspects of mainstream workplace interactions. They studied the strategies of disclosure used by lesbian-parented families and the school's position toward lesbian-parented families. Lindsay et al "took a largely interactionist approach to explore the dialectic between lesbian-parented families and schools and how this interface is constrained by the wider social environment," (p. 1063). They note that larger social forces influence both families' strategies of disclosure and school environments (Lindsay et al 2006, p. 1064). This acknowledges larger political debates while keeping their focus on the families and schools they studied.

Their study also suggests the need to consider other potential interaction participants in to understand the focal families. They found that in many cases, families adopting a private strategy included a formerly married mother and her children, while the proud families were more likely to have been formed through two women's choice to use assisted insemination to create a family (Lindsay et al 2006, p. 1070). In the former cases of private strategies, fathers' presences sometimes led families to be more private that they reported wanting to be to manage custody concerns or to acknowledge a father's continuing parenting role in children's lives (Lindsay et al 2006, p. 1066).

Lindsay and her co-authors create two interacting continua to explore how parents' strategies for identity management intersected with schools' environments for the members of lesbian-parented families. Family strategies included proud, selective, and private (Lindsay et al 2006, p. 1064). The proud families shared information about their family with teachers and school officials and encouraged schools to offer safe environments and inclusive curricula. Families who were selective were more likely to react to school policies than to be involved in efforts to change the policies or environment. They selectively shared information about their families when specific needs arose, but rarely volunteered

information or attempted to question or expand curricula to better include representations of diverse family forms. Finally, families using private strategies of disclosure tended to hide or keep secret information about their family's formation.

They (Lindsay et al 2006) found that some parents adapted to the possibilities of the schools in their area, while others researched school policies and chose schools specifically because the schools seemed to fit the families' preferred strategies of disclosure. Lindsay et al (2006) found that congruence between family strategy and school environment varied. They note that in cases of incongruence between family strategy and school context, usually the school's greater power relative to parents ensured that school policies would remain unchallenged; however "in some instances, parents and children are forced to change their strategy and at other times schools actively change their approach. The interaction and outcomes are context specific (p. 1064)."

The continuum of school positions toward lesbian-parented families included categories of schools as homophobic, heteronormative, and supportive (Lindsay et al 2006, p. 1064). 'Homophobic' schools usually did not prioritize children's safety from bullying and often had teachers who taught non-inclusive curricula and resisted children's efforts to name the realities of their families' lives. 'Heteronormative' schools presumed that all children, parents, and families were heterosexual, and tolerated lesbian-parented families if their identities are kept secret. These schools tended to ignore family diversity administratively on forms or parent recognition and behaviorally in urging children or parents not to disclose their identities. Heteronormative schools, enacted their preference for silence in several ways including sometimes claiming that children who were being bullied had created the situation by talking about their mothers rather than seeing such bullying as an expression of discrimination. 'Supportive' schools offered inclusive curricula and resources that showed lesbian-parented families in combination with other types of families. They also included all parents in administrative forms and decisions.

33

Lindsay and her co-authors note several ways that parents and students related to schools, finding that parents repeatedly focused on providing physically and emotionally safe environments for their children. While they do not discuss the different ways parents defined safety, I expand on it here, because it mirrors patterns found in workplace organizations. Interestingly, the ways parents defined and ensured children's safety varied depending on their own preferences for strategies of disclosure and the school's environment. Parents using proud strategies of disclosure in supportive schools might talk about safety when describing the ways the school curriculum reflected different types of families as valid and actively prohibited bullying of children from lesbian-parented families. In homophobic schools, parents might use private strategies to maintain the families' secret and protect children from the bullying or teacher disapproval that might result if others knew they were from lesbian-parented families. How does using a model of types of workplaces and preferred interaction strategies help to explain lesbian workers' identity management strategies? In the following chapters, I describe the methods used to collect information and analyze the methods lesbian employees use to manage their identities at work.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY: FINDING AND LISTENING TO LESBIANS

To understand how lesbian workers negotiated identity in their workplaces requires information about the daily interactions that made up their experiences and about the meanings they gave to such negotiations. This study uses interviews to gather such information.

This study was first conceptualized as a survey of workplaces that would explore how context variables like size of an organization or years since coming out to oneself influenced lesbians' strategies of disclosure at work. After discussions with the committee and reviews of the literature, it became clear that such a design would offer some new information, but surveys might also risk disclosure of lesbian workers' identity to their employers or coworkers.

Studies of workplace phenomena have also often relied on participant observation because of that method's ability to provide direct observations of the interactions of interest. Previous research (Weston and Rofel 1985) and a class project had shown me that it was possible to gather information on identity management through participant observation at lesbian-friendly workplaces; however, my goal was to represent the strategies used by women in unfriendly or neutral workplaces. Observing in unfriendly workplaces had the potential to disclose information about lesbian workers that might cause harm to them. Therefore, using interviews avoided adding to workers' disclosure and allowed me to compare workers' reports of varied workplaces and the ways they had interpreted what happened in those settings.

Previous interview research has been criticized for reaching only small networks of lesbians who are very similar to each other and who may share an ongoing discourse about coming out issues (Lindsay 2006). Studying such groups requires attending to how they mutually constitute discourses about identity. Rheinharz (1992) discusses ways others have responded to such problems. In this study, I was more interested in how individuals' strategies of disclosure were meaningful to them. As mentioned below, I sought women with a range of experiences. Most of them did not know each other or knew only a few of the other interviewees. Unlike Dunne (1997), I did not hear of or find evidence that the women had spoken with each other beyond general positive comments between the times of my interviewees with initial interviewees and those to whom they referred me. Managing sexual identity issues at work was something they said was rarely discussed in social settings. While a few of the women had discussed these issues with partners or close friends, most had not. The interviewees thus were not part of a larger conversation about these issues and often were articulating their experiences for the first time in our interviews (for a discussion of people's variability in their accounts see Swidler 2001, Chapter Four). Therefore, their accounts drew on generally-available cultural resources, but were not representing a shared group account.

During the data collection period, I was an active participant the lesbian community and did informal observations in the community. I discussed non-confidential aspects of the project with friends and suggested tentative ideas for feedback. Such informally collected information is not reported as findings in this project, but did assist me in exploring developing themes.

Linking Theoretical and Methodological Approaches

Feminist methodologists and symbolic interactionists have long advocated using in-depth interviewing to gain access to people's understandings of situations. In this project, I was influenced by feminist methodologies (Reinharz 1992) and the use of grounded theory

36

methodology (Gelles and Straus 1967; Charmaz 1991, 2000). As advocated by grounded

theory, I began analysis as I gathered data and used early interviews to help guide further

questions in later interviews. The process of interviewing and analyzing emerging patterns

was interwoven over the course of approximately eighteen months. Through a grounded

theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967) that was influenced by Charmaz's constructivist

ideas of grounded theory (2000) and Miles and Huberman's suggestions for analysis (1994),

I created the theoretical categories that became the central focus of this project.

The interviews were analyzed using a feminist critical research design, striving to be

"multi-vocal, collaborative, naturalistically grounded in the worlds of lived experience, and

organized by a critical, interpretive theory" (Denzin 1994, p.509). Feminist critical theory

informs my research design in that I: (1) invite the subjects of research to shape the

direction of the research by listening to issues important to them and incorporating these

into the analysis, (2) include the voices of oppressed peoples, such as lesbian employees,

and (3) challenge myself to be self-reflexive throughout the research, analysis, and writing

processes (Denzin 2000). The data were coded and analyzed using two strategies:

theoretical and thematic analysis to both link interview data to previous work and to develop

grounded theory based on the interviews (Miles and Huberman 1994).

While I was guided by interviewee's reports of their experiences, the chapters that follow

analyze as well as describe their experiences. Like McMahon, I created an "analysis of

women's experiences that goes beyond the description of their points of view to provide a

sociological explanation of personal experience in terms of social organizations and social

processes that shape it" (McMahon 1995, p. 31). Because I was able to compare various

women's accounts of their experiences, I am able to analyze their experiences within

patterns that are not visible to individuals.[9] Most of the women were able to name

experiences of direct discrimination or institutional norms as social pressures they faced, but

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[9] Dunne (1997) claims a similar strength of her multiple biography approach.

were less able to see features of social organization such as widely-based cultural norms about discussing sexuality in the workplace.

Sample Design and Characteristics: Finding the Interviewees

This sample was chosen to reflect a range of experiences of being a lesbian worker. I used a purposive sampling design to find workers who had varied kinds of workplace experiences, although my method of finding interviewees was a modified form of snowball sampling and referrals. When using purposive sampling, the researcher "looks for representativeness by 'purposefully' choosing a sample that typifies the population, the theoretical category, or the phenomenon to be studied" (McMahon 1995, p. 34). In this case, I chose lesbian workers in a range of organizational and occupational settings whose experiences of identity disclosure ranged from complete closeting to open disclosure of identity. It was important to have lesbian workers who fit into the middle ranges as well as extremes in terms of strategies and workplace contexts.

I publicized the study through written ads and flyers in local settings; however, no potential interviewees ever contacted me during the six months these were available. Instead, personal contacts and referrals led to interviewees. In one case, a woman heard about the project through a talk I gave on campus and contacted me to offer to be interviewed. In this case, the participant was consciously struggling with questions of disclosure and thus was more conscious of these issues than were most participants. This volunteer heard an early version of my findings presented at a talk for a UNC Women's Studies audience.

While some of the women I interviewed knew other interviewees, this was not a group of women who socialized or worked together. To avoid bias, I started with several different people and asked for referrals to others I did not know. Once prospects were identified, I contacted women by phone or letter and screened them to ensure that they fit the criteria. Only one referral refused to participate, by never returning phone calls or otherwise

following up my overtures. As the study progressed, I solicited more targeted referrals whose experiences differed from those already in the sample. For instance, I asked for referrals to those who were not out at work or not very out when it became clear that most early participants were out to some extent in their workplaces.

Several of the interviewees noted that they had agreed to be interviewed because either they knew me or trusted the person who introduced us. Reinharz (1992) reports numerous feminist interviewers who were similarly able to conduct research on sensitive topics because their interviewees knew them or trusted the referrals. Because I was not offering compensation and because the topics were sensitive, lesbian workers were willing to participate because of personal ties (to me or referring individuals) or a sense of generalized obligation to participate in generating better understanding of lesbian identity. My status as an out lesbian who was conducting interviews on lesbian issues was also a significant aspect of recruiting for at least some participants. They reported feeling that I was both less likely to objectify them and to more likely to understand their experiences. Other researchers have noted the importance of matching interviewer and interviewee characteristics when researching sensitive topics (see Reinharz 1992 for a thorough discussion of these issues).

Interviewing Practices

Following feminist interview methods, I conducted the interviews more as conversations than as question and answer sessions (Reinharz 1992; Olesen 2000). The interviews were conducted in places chosen by the subjects and included the subjects' homes, my home, and semi-public settings such as restaurants and a library office. The average interview lasted approximately 2 ½ to 3 hours while one lasted only 90 minutes and one included two sessions that lasted a total of over six hours.

All of the interviewees agreed to be tape-recorded. Of the twenty interviews, nineteen tapes were usable. One of my first interviews was not audible. I had taken notes during the

interview and wrote out detailed notes within a few days of the interview I also talked again with the interviewee to confirm information. I transcribed many of the tapes and hired medical transcribers to transcribe the remaining tapes.

In two cases, participants' partners were present; one was joint interview. The joint interview with a long-partnered couple reflected their overall perspective on sharing their lives and included several instances where they supplemented each other's stories and reminded each other of events. In the second interview with a partner present, the participant was nervous and asked her partner to sit in for support. That partner offered a few comments, but was mostly silent. Once the interviewee began speaking, she was so engaged in the process that she seemed to forget the presence of the partner whose support she requested.

Before beginning each interview, I explained that all questions were voluntary and obtained informed consent from each woman. A list of topics for the interviews was given to each participant at the beginning of the interview to orient them to the overall themes for questions. During the interviews, I used an interview schedule contained open-ended, semi-structured, and structured questions about the following topics: their current job, types of discrimination experienced, how they thought about lesbian identity, and their personal situations (Reinharz 1992).

Closed questions collected standardized information such as age, income, parents' occupations, and preferred terms for their identity. Like many feminist researchers, I used semi-structured interviewing methods guided by the interviewees' experiences. My practice was to ensure that we covered all of the topics on the interview guide, but to follow their leads in terms of what order to cover material. If they had discussed one topic already, I would either determine that I understood the topic already or check with them to see if they had anything to add on the topic. Mostly, I focused on listening and probing for clarifications of issues.

One effect of my own participation in the lesbian community was that sometimes women assumed that I understood something without their needing to explain it. Whenever possible, I asked them to further explain the situation to me, coaxing them to help me put concepts into words rather than either of us assuming I knew what they meant. This problem of assumed common knowledge affects many researchers studying people with whom they share characteristics (Reinharz 1992, Denzin 2000). .

Data analysis was conducted as an iterative process using notes-on-notes about each interview and emerging themes to do theoretical and thematic analyses (Miles and Huberman 1994). The theoretical analysis used categories derived from the literature on identity management and heterosexism in workplace settings. The thematic analysis drew on ideas emerging from interviewees' responses to highlight data about the importance of self-perceptions of appearance and of the meanings of lesbian identity for understanding identity management strategies interviewees' used. Interviews were reviewed for confirming and disconfirming evidence to support or complicate themes (Cresswell 1997; Denzin 2000).

Characteristics of Those Interviewed

The interviews gathered the experiences of 20 white lesbians who were interviewed over an eighteen-month period in the Durham and Chapel Hill, North Carolina area. The participants were all employed at least 20 hours per week. Their ages ranged from 19-45 with a mean of 34. They represented 17 workplaces including social service work, higher education, research, and business services. All identified as white and were native-born United States citizens.[10] Non-motherhood was not a study criterion, but none of the women were biological mothers or active co-parents at the time of the study. A summary of their

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[10] The racial characteristics are partly because of the ethnic composition of my own and subjects' networks and also because of a decision mid-way through collecting interviews to explore how lesbian identity was perceived by most of these white women as their main source of difference from others in their workplaces (Besant 1999).

demographic characteristics is listed in Table 3.1. Several of the categories on the table are

explored in depth in the following chapters.

Table 3.1: Selected Demographic Characteristics of Interviewees

Named Used	Primary Strategy	Part-ner?	Age at Interview	Coming Out Age	Years Since Coming Out
Angela	Norm	N	30s	Early 20s	7-10
Caitlin	Pol	Y	Late 20s	Mid Teens	10-20
Christine	Pol, Norm	Y	Mid 20s	Late teens	3 or fewer
Dana	Emb	Y	30s	Mid Teens	10-20
Diane	Comp	Y	40s	Thirties	4-7
Erica	Pol, Norm	Y	40s	Early 20s	20-30
Jackie	Pol, Norm	Y	Mid 20s	Early 20s	4-7
Jennifer	Norm/Pol	Y	40s	Thirties	4-7
Joelle	Pol, Norm	N	Early 20s	Mid Teens	4-7
Jordan	Comp	Y	30s	Early 20s	7-10
Kim	Emb	Y	Mid 30s	Mid Teens	10-20
Laura	Norm	Y	30s	Early 20s	4-7
Melissa	Comp	N	Mid 20s	Late teens	3 or fewer
Michelle	Norm	Y	Mid 20s	Late teens	4-7
Rachel	Comp	N	Late teens	Mid Teens	3 or fewer
Robin	Pol	Y	30s	Early 20s	10-20
Sherri	Norm/Pol	Y	40s	Mid Teens	20-30
Stacy	Comp	Y	40s	Thirties	7-10
Stephanie	Pol	Y	40s	Late teens	20-30
Tina	Pol	Y	30s	Early 20s	4-7

<u>Explanation of Categories and Abbreviations in Table 3.1</u>
Primary Strategies of Identity are Coded as follows: Comp=Compartmentalized,
Emb=Embodied, Norm=Normalized, and Pol=Poltical

Partner notes whether the interviewee has ever been in a partnership-type relationship.

    Previous work had tended to focus on either very accepting organizations (Weston and

Rofel 1985) or those that were unwelcoming, such as law school classrooms or the military

(Ramachandran 1998; Shawver 1995). Characteristics of interviewees' jobs and

workplaces are listed in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Selected Characteristics of Interviewees Jobs and Organizations

Named Used	Primary Strategy	Work Type	Upwd Mobile	Real Job	Org. Culture	Others Out	Dated Cowrkr
Angela	Norm	Admin	N	Y	Hetnorm	N	Y
Caitlin	Pol	Admin	Y	N	Support	Y	N
Christine	Pol, Norm	Prof Serv	Y	N	Hetnorm	Y	N
Dana	Emb	Craft	Y	Y	Support	Y	Y
Diane	Comp	Admin	N	Y	Support	Y	N
Erica	Pol, Norm	Educ	Y	N	Support	Y	Y
Jackie	Pol, Norm	Soc Serv	N	Y	Support	Y	N
Jennifer	Norm/Pol	Soc Serv	N	Y	Homoph	N	N
Joelle	Pol, Norm	Retail/Cler	N	N	Hetnorm	N	N
Jordan	Comp	Prof Serv	Y	Y	Norm/S	N	N
Kim	Emb	Soc Serv	N	Y	Hetnorm	N	N
Laura	Norm	Admin	N	Y	Hetnorm	N	Y
Melissa	Comp	Retail/Cler	N	N	Hetnorm	N	N
Michelle	Norm	Admin	Y	N	Support	Y	Y
Rachel	Comp	Retail/Cler	N	N	Hetnorm	N	N
Robin	Pol	Educ	Y	Y	Hetnorm	Y	N
Sherri	Norm/Pol	Prof Serv	N	Y	Hetnorm	Y	Y
Stacy	Comp	Admin	N	Y	Hetnorm	N	N
Stephanie	Pol	Prof Serv	Y	Y	Norm/S	N	N
Tina	Pol	Educ	Y	N	Hetnorm	N	N

Explanation of Categories and Abbreviations in Table 3.2
Primary Strategies of Identity are Coded as follows: Comp=Compartmentalized, Emb=Embodied, Norm=Normalized, and Pol=Poltical

Upwd Mobile notes whether the woman was experiencing upward mobility during the months surrounding the interview through entering a full-time job or receiving a promotion. Several were able to reflect on recent job searches or anticipated searches.

Real Job signifies whether the interview saw her present job as a job to which she was committed or whether she framed it as temporary or short-term employment. Those in 'non-serious' jobs were students, people doing temporary work while searching for better-paid employment, and those who define their job as a break between two periods of education such as college and graduate school.

Others out indicates whether there were other out lesbian or gay male workers in their current job.

Dated coworker includes past as well as present relationships. Only Laura and Michelle were dating coworkers at the time of their interviews.

Organizational cultures were coded as homophobic, heteronormative, and supportive based on categories drawn from (Lindsay 2006). Those listed as Norm/S had supportive formal policies, but heteronormative interactive cultures.

I was especially interested in learning about lesbian workers' experiences in "somewhat accepting" organizations (those that were neither formally accepting nor hostile toward lesbian employees) varied in degree or quality from the other kinds of organizations. In the table, such organizations are listed as Heteronormative under the organizational culture category. To see how workplace environments shaped workers' experiences, I sought women in a range of organizational and occupational settings whose experiences of identity disclosure ranged from complete closeting to open disclosure of identity. The interviewees' workplaces represented a range of occupational categories and organizational types, including social service provision, education, industrial work, and medical services.

Interviewees also varied in their own level of disclosure. Their level of workplace disclosure varied from never mentioning their sexual identity at work to being verbally open about all aspects of their lives. Quotes and references to subjects below refer to them by pseudonym to protect their privacy.

Naming: All Names Will Be Changed

Pseudonyms are used to identify all of the women in the study. In a similar way, I have changed the names of everyone else mentioned by participants. Participants' concerns about mentioning others' lesbian or gay identity revealed an important disclosure norm. It seemed that outing others, that is, revealing their identities without their permission was not acceptable to several, perhaps all, of the interviewees. When mentioning someone else, most interviewees either avoided saying the other person's name or confirmed that I would not use it in written reports. Unique identifying information such as job titles or career trajectories has also been altered in ways that do not change the key information.

Following feminist methods (Reinharz 1992), I asked women to provide a pseudonym for the study. In contrast to interviewees' concern about how to represent others, naming

themselves lesbian in the interviews and my reports on the interviews was less difficult.

Four women agreed to be identified by name. About half of the interviewees chose a

pseudonym, while the rest asked me to choose a name for them. For those who chose a

name, the name they chose often seemed to reveal some otherwise unacknowledged part

of themselves. One woman described her chosen name of 'Thelma' as something she:

> made up a long time ago, and I decided that someday I would become 'Thelma[11].' I think Thelma is sort of the lesbian. I have integrated them into myself as an adult, but when I was an adult [coming out], it was the sort of strong, forceful competent, assertive person, you know, who did everything perfectly and was just wonderful and cute and all these great things and I think was the strong lesbian person/persona.

It seemed clear that the pseudonym represented parts of her identity that she wanted to

emphasize. Later, the interviewee mentioned using this name in ways that identified her

publicly as Thelma, rather than her given name.

As Thelma's story shows, what I had not anticipated was that some women who did

provide pseudonyms had 'other names' that were known to others in the community. These

names were not necessarily names they used, but rather simply names they liked and might

have discussed with friends. For instance, one woman guessed the alternate name of the

woman who had referred her to me for an interview. While I did not confirm her guess

verbally, I noted to myself that using that name would identify every quote and piece of

information from the first woman to the second woman and any others who could make a

similar connection. It also might also allow people familiar with this lesbian community to

trace even those who were given randomly assigned names through references by partners

or friends. Therefore, with regret, I have included even the women who agreed to be

publicly identified and those who chose pseudonyms in the assignment by list process

described below.

Since so many interviewees did not provide alternate names, I assigned them names by

listing the subjects in non-alphabetical order on a sheet of paper and then matching them to

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[11] Thelma was not the name she used. It is also a pseudonym.

a list of women's names I drew from lists of student names. While I regret the ways that this naming process undermines the agency of women who did provide names, the process seems to best protect those women who felt most vulnerable to negative effects of disclosure.

While the possibility of this information reaching someone's workplace directly seems remote, I am aware that many of the women I interviewed or others who know them may choose to read this. As best I can, I have tried to honor their privacy by making it impossible to identify them individually rather than censoring their stories. For many years, this balancing act has felt like my own place in the disclosure dance. The process of defining appropriate disclosure circumstances applied to this writing as much as it does to workplace decisions (Denzin 2000; Fine, Weis, Weseen, and Wong 2000).

Types of Questions

The interview guide drew on theories of organizational, interpersonal, and individual experiences of heterosexism and theories of identity management (Badgett 1996; Dunne 1996; Griffin 1998; Markowe 1994). Question areas included the interviewees' experiences of coming out to themselves and others in non-work settings, workplace disclosure experiences, ways they thought about identity management at work, information about their workplace and coworkers, and information about their lives beyond their workplaces. During each interview we discussed basic background information, coming out experiences, descriptions of their workplace and jobs, specific information about lesbian issues in their workplace, relationship status, and appearance issues. I used both the interview guide and specific questions to ensure that I gathered information about each interviewee on all of the topics. Appendix A includes a copy of the interview questions. Appendix B includes a copy of the statement of informed consent.

Previous work on lesbian workers had suggested that perceptions of one's ability to pass and their gender-conformity might affect how people managed sexual identity on the job

46

(Atkins 1995; Budge and Hamer 1995). When interviewees were asked about butch and femme identity, only two women identified themselves as femme and one as butch. Most felt that these terms did not refer well to them.

I was interested, also, in whether women felt the need to adjust their appearance and self-presentation to particular job settings to either fit in or to avoid disclosure of their sexual identity. Questions such as "Do you think that you can pass as straight if you want to?" and, "Do you think that most people looking at you would know that you are lesbian?" gathered this information. The issue of appearance and ability to pass was important to several of the first women interviewed, so I asked more specific questions about this in later interviews.

Questions on self-presentation and general level of being out were asked about non-work as well as workplace settings. Because most research on lesbian coming out has focused on personal contexts, it was important to see how personal strategies might be related to ways of handling sexual identity issues at work (Markowe 1996). I expected that women who were more out in their personal lives would be more out in their work lives and vice versa, but did not have a clear prediction about how other variables such as type of work might influence this relationship (Dunne 1997; Griffin 1998; Weston 1996).

To learn about interviewee's workplaces and their perceptions of those workplaces, questions included discussions of formal organizational policies, size and type of organization, workplace culture, and relationships with coworkers. Previous studies had shown that larger organizations more often have formal policies to handle employees' needs relating to their family status compared to smaller organizations which may handle such issues on a more case-by-case basis (Charmaz 1991; Badgett 2001). Research that organizations vary in may become 'gay-friendly' to recruit gay employees by adopting either formal policies or informal cultural supports for lesbian and gay workers (Badgett. Donnelly and Kibbe 1992). Therefore, in addition to asking standard questions about the presence of non-discrimination policies in employing organizations and benefits such as partner benefits,

I asked interviewees, "What is the environment or culture in your organization related to gay employees?" Probes following this question asked interviewees to discuss whether they would describe the organization as lesbian- or gay-friendly or unfriendly. In the analysis, I have used "supportive" rather than gay-friendly to link the analysis to research on how lesbians handle information about their identities in organizations (Lindsay et al 2006).

Related to organizational contexts of workplaces, I was also interested in the types of information that were shared in jobs as part of daily work and for instrumental means. Boden's (1994) study of workplace talk showed the importance of studying the kinds of regular conversations occurring in workplaces as background for understanding studies of targeted kinds of conversations. Charmaz's (1991) study of the disclosure of illness identities suggested similarly that studying particular disclosures of stigmatizing identities should occur within a larger context. Finally, Dellinger and Williams' (2002) work strongly advocates understanding issues of workplace sexuality within the larger organizational culture. Questions asked interviewees to describe opportunities to have discussions about sexual identity such as time spent talking with coworkers as part of the work process and on shared social time such as lunches and breaks. Interviewees also described what kinds of things they discussed with coworkers in general and whether they routinely shared information about their personal lives with coworkers (Boden 1984). Workers were also asked to describe the kinds of relationships they had with coworkers. Were they colleagues, that is, as people with whom they had cordial relationships focused on work tasks, or friends or even near strangers?

Previous research had found that lesbians were more likely to have dated coworkers compared to heterosexual women workers (Schneider 1984; Weston and Rofel 1985). Questions about personal relationship status at work and in their lives as a whole were the final major category. While this study did not look at the dynamics within personal relationships, how relationships might affect disclosure decisions was explored.

In previous anecdotal reports, gay and lesbian workers often reported that a major problem in their workplace was lack of material and social recognition of their partnerships (Ruiz 1996; Weston 1996). Activism in workplaces has often focusd on gaining health care and other benefits for domestic partners that equal those accorded to married spouses (Badgett 2001). Therefore, I expected that interviewees who were partnered would desire recognition of their relationships and to want to discuss these relationships with coworkers. Conversely, I expected that partnered women might also be more sensitive to contexts where they perceived lack of comfort in talking about their partners compared to single women, because they might have specific information to share, such as travel plans or daily activities, compared to those dating casually.

Conditions of Employment

As outlined above, the data for this study were gathered from in-depth interviews with twenty adult women who identified as lesbian and were living and working in the Durham-Chapel Hill area of North Carolina. All were working at least twenty hours per week, and most were employed full-time at forty hours per week in an organization of more than five employees. Several were on salaried contracts, so their work was full-time, but often exceeded forty hours weekly. All had completed at least some college. They all identified as white racially.

The study was limited for theoretical and methodological reasons. It investigates the strategies lesbian workers used for identity management while employed by others in a workplace that included heterosexual workers or supervisors. Previous work has found that all-lesbian or all-gay environments tend to be more open and accepting, so that all workers are out in these settings (Weston 1985). None of the interviewees worked for themselves or in all-lesbian or gay employment settings, as I wanted to find people working in environments where interaction with non-gay coworkers was necessary to better study how those interactions were managed.

The sample included both full-time and part-time employed women who identified as lesbian for several reasons. First, I was interested in women's current and past experiences of workplace identity management, so having a current job to discuss was critical. Because several women were working while attending college or graduate school, their employment did not always conform to conventional 40-hour per week definitions of full-time employment, but it was a significant source of income for them and was often their primary non-family organizational involvement. Second, the participants had to identify as lesbian (although they might prefer another term such as dyke or queer in their own self-labeling). Unlike previous studies (Markowe 1992), the focus here was not on women's development of a lesbian identity or acceptance of it, but rather on what that identity meant to them and how they managed it once they had come out to themselves.

Unplanned Interviewee Characteristics

Like McMahon (1995, p. 41), I found although I selected purposefully for some characteristics, other patterns of social identity and experience also emerged in the data. Non-motherhood and education level were also not criteria, but showed definite patterns in the sample. Non-motherhood was not an initial study criterion, but none of the women were mothers. A few had co-parented others' children in the past, but none were doing so at the time of the study. Parenting children raises specific issues of disclosure for biological and non-biological mothers that were not the focus of this study (Weston 1997). Selecting only non-parents was not a conscious choice. Instead, I think it reflects the different social networks formed by those who are not parenting from those who are parenting (McMahon 1995). Having no one who was an active parent shapes these finding as previous research has found that concerns about losing custody of one's children or fear of social stigma for children often influence parents' identity management (Lewin 1993; Weston 1997).

Education level was not a criterion for participation in the study, but because of its link to class status in employment and social networks, the well-educated starting group did not

50

reach networks of women who had less than some college education or were poor non-students. Some of the students who were workers surveyed did officially fit into definitions of poverty-level income, but had been raised middle- or upper-middle class. They did not define themselves as poor, because they saw this status as temporary while they were in school.

Restricting the sample to white women began as a problem of outreach beyond the social ties of my initial sample that replicates other studies of all-white sample (Besant 1999). None of the initial interviewees referred me to women of color who might be willing to speak with me, despite requests for such referrals. As the study progressed, I realized that having a racially homogenous group allowed me to reduce variations in experience caused by experiences of racism against women of color and by residency in local communities. Approximately 85% of the interviewees had moved to the area. Observations of the lesbian of color community in the area showed a much higher proportion of native North Carolinians among that group, so their experiences might have confounded experiences of natives to the area with effects of racism.

Review of Methodology

This study focused on how white lesbian workers managed their lesbian identities at work. Emerging from the interviews were themes about appearance and passing, strategies for managing identity, meanings of lesbian identity to particular women, the importance of personal characteristics, and about workplace contexts. Although my initial interest focused on workplace contexts' effects on disclosure, listening to these interviews enabled me to see that other types of personal contexts were meaningful to women. I was also better able to describe the multiple ways that women in this study handled the daily interactions that help us to see explicit disclosure as only one aspect of identity management. This study both aims to describe the experiences these women reported and analyze those experiences sociologically. By analyzing their stories in terms of theory and others' stories, I hope to

51

illuminate ome of the patterns that are not visible to individuals examining only their own

lives.

CHAPTER FOUR

IDENTITY MANAGEMENT

Irrespective of the imagination of the observer, the butch lesbian has stood out as the clear, visually declarative statement of attraction to other women.
(Kanner 2002, p. 28, emphasis added)

[At work,] we're really involved I each other's lives. I can't remember ever [not saying something], it was always like Erica this, Erica that. I don't think--there's never actually been a discussion like 'I'm gay.' Or 'I'm a lesbian.' It's always been sort of like Erica is my spouse…Taken from Sherri's discussion of her strategies at work.

Do lesbian workers look like 'who they are' or need to tell others of their lesbian identity to be identified? The power of visual marking as lesbian for the women who fit butch lesbian stereotypes has been discussed in parallel with a frequent contrary statement that lesbians are an invisible minority who can enjoy the benefits of heterosexual privilege if they refrain from mentioning their lesbian identity (Badgett 2001). In this chapter, I describe the identity management strategies interviewees used most often and explain how their perceptions of their abilities to pass as heterosexual influenced the strategies they used.

Sexual orientation is often imagined as invisible and contrasted to other supposedly visible identities such as race and sex by those suggesting that lesbians and gay men are protected from discrimination by their invisibility, unless they reveal their identities (Badgett 2001). Badgett (2001) notes that this myth of protective invisibility suggests that unless they reveal their identities gay people are protected from discrimination. Many writers assume that all or nearly all lesbian workers pass if they wish to do so (Andriote 1995; Badgett 2001; Britton and Wiliams 1995; Ellis 1996). Britton and Williams (1995), for instance, argue that lesbian and gay people face a different situation from visible ethnic minorities, because their minority status may not be easily coded based on visible cues. According to reports by

lesbians in research studies, other workers and supervisors often perceive lesbian workers, especially those who are younger and more feminine in appearance, to be heterosexual (Loulan 1990; Munt 1998). This generalized assumption, sometimes called the myth of protective invisibility, has been questioned by those who explore the links between media representations of lesbian identity and individuals' experiences (Cottingham 1996).

Women who argue that they cannot pass as heterosexual have challenged this myth of invisibility. Researchers note how this myth highlights lesbian disclosures as unusual rather than as part of the general sexualization of workplace talk (Williams, Giuffre, and Dellinger 1999). Badgett (2001) also notes that this myth reflects a double standard of talk about sexuality and a larger discomfort with the idea of sexuality in the workplace. The double standard requires gay people to closet themselves for fear of discrimination and highlights the sexual content of lesbian and gay workplace disclosures while normalizing the speech of heterosexual employees (Badgett 2001, p. 52). An instance of differently coding speech by employees might occur when a lesbian talks about a partner and her discussion is coded as talk about "the bedroom" while similar discussions by a heterosexual employee may be seen as non-sexual discussions of family life. The myth of invisibility then, has been noted as problematic both because some lesbian workers feel that they do not pass as heterosexual and because it presumes that lesbian workers should hide their lesbian identity.

Kanner's claim (2002) above emphasizes the ways that women who fit butch lesbian stereotypes interpreted as having made a "clear, declarative statement" about their sexual attraction to women. These butch stereotypes of masculine-looking women with short hair and no makeup who never wear dresses lead women who fit such stereotypes (whatever their own sexual orientation) to be seen as lesbian. The potential stigma they face as a result of their appearance as visible lesbians have been marked by their visual appearance, discrediting them from a non-stigmatized identity (Goffman 1963). Other lesbian workers do not feel visually marked as lesbian. As discussed below, many, perhaps most lesbian

54

workers can and do find that their appearance is not interpreted as immediately marking them as lesbian (Dunne 1997; Griffin 1998). For these women, identity management follows different patterns as lesbian workers seek to manage identities that are not visible. Much of this visibility is linked to gender conformity with lesbians who do gender conventionally more likely to be seen as heterosexual than those who do a butch form of gender (Kanner 2002).

Women who think they can pass at heterosexual use strategies that conceal, reveal, or imply their lesbian identity through the use of symbols and language. The second quote above notes one common strategy lesbian workers used to implicitly disclose their lesbian identity. In this comment, Sherri, whose appearance does not immediately mark her as lesbian, mentions her partner Erica to coworkers. Her indirect strategy allows her to honor their relationship and discuss daily life with her coworkers without ever explicitly naming herself lesbian. Other strategies also allow workers to blend their desire for integrity with their need to conform to workplace conditions (Griffin 1998). What are the range of ways women manage lesbian sexual identities and identity information at work? What identity management strategies are available to them?

Because sexual orientation is not always immediately visible, those seeking to understand how workers experience discrimination look at when the identity is concealed or concealable and when it is revealed. Work on lesbian identity disclosure draws heavily on Goffman's (1959, 1963) work on stigma contrasting discredited and discreditable identities. Within this framework, research has focused on ways that lesbians manage potentially discrediting information in varied settings. Goffman's (1963) explanation of how identities that are evident or already revealed differ from those that are invisible or not yet known flows from this assumption. Using these distinctions and exploring the strategies lesbians use we extend Goffman's model to look at how lesbians manage their identities at work.

<u>Possibility of Passing</u>

The majority of lesbians, in this study and others, believe that they can pass as heterosexual and find their identity as heterosexual women unquestioned. For them, passing may be a process of actively creating the fiction of a heterosexual identity or of simply allowing others to assume they are heterosexual (Ward and Winstanley 2005). In previous studies, the proportion of respondents ranged from 28 to 72 percent who reported that they actively concealed their lesbian identity (Badgett, Donnelly, and Kibbe 1992). They do not explain how all of these studies measured concealment. As noted below, concealment may range from active creations of fake heterosexual identities to allowing others to assume heterosexuality by not mentioning lesbian identity. This range may help to explain the wide variations in results found in past studies (Badgett, Donnelly, and Kibbe 1992).

The methods of presenting oneself visually, verbally, or interactionally as lesbian varied among respondents. Butler (1997b) and Ward and Winstanley (2005) have focused on such presentations through discussions of performativity. Their studies combine a clear analysis of the symbols people use to display and negotiate identity with a sense of lesbians as active agents. Butler emphasizes the choices people hoave about how to present their gender identities and sexual identities in ways that create new possibilities of representation (Butler 1997b). What Butler's work, in particular, misses, however, are the limitations to free play of gender displays and identity creation that may limit the kinds of identities people can perform (1997b). Ward and Winstanley (2005) are more aware of the limits imposed by organizational heterosexism and individual appearances in their explorations of how lesbian workers use symbols and language to manage their identities in the organizations they studied.

As discussed below, respondents in this study reported that they passed not because of

56

active concealment, but because of others' assumptions about them as heterosexual. Their gender and sexuality performances were within the range of heterosexual performances so that others assumed they were heterosexual (Ward and Winstanley 2005). Similarly, Griffin (1998) reports that most of the lesbian coaches she studied did not actively seek to create a lesbian identity, but did rely on others' assumptions of their heterosexuality. The interplay of heterosexual assumptions and varying abilities to pass as heterosexual suggests that workers negotiate their identities within a complex context of compulsory heterosexuality. The assumptions others use in interpreting lesbian workers' appearance and behavior allows some lesbians to pass as heterosexual and ensures that coming out verbally is a primary way they will be identified as lesbian.

For lesbian workers who believe their appearance does not signal their lesbian identity, a combination of willingness to disclose must be matched with opportunities that the worker saw to disclosure (Boden 1984)? Workers varied in both their overall willingness to disclose, often from concern or fear of others' reactions. They also interpreted conversational openings differently and may have overlooked some potential disclosure chances. As noted in Messinger and Topal's study (1998), some people interpreted questions about one's marital status as opportunities to disclose while others feared that such disclosures would be seen as inappropriate talk about sex.

During the study period, few interviewees reported the coworkers offered them disclosure opportunities. While lesbian authors wrote frequently about lesbian invisibility in the 1990s, this topic had nearly disappeared from academic discussions by 2000. At the same time, visibility of lesbians in entertainment and media has grown exponentially. While Ellen Degeneres made the cover of national magazines when her sitcom character and the actress came out in 1996, by 2005, Ellen was hosting a daily talk show and media awards shows. Likewise, public attention to lesbians who are not celebrities has also grown, so heteronormative assumptions may be changing as audiences try to discern individuals'

57

identities (Dalton and Bielby 2000). Further study is needed to explore how the shift from lesbian invisibility to lesbian visibility may affect individual workers.

Not all lesbians experience themselves as able to pass as heterosexual and not all who could pass choose to do so. This research cannot comment on what their audiences interpret from their appearances, but focuses on what sexual orientation the lesbian workers thought their appearance indicated. Some interpret their appearance or other features as markers of lesbian identity that others may see as lesbian (Kanner 2002). For some women, such markers were within their control and could be modified to fit their context by wearing dresses on 'appropriate' occasions or allowing their hair to get longer. Other women saw their gender presentation as so naturalized that they did not seem to envision ways of presenting themselves any differently. Theories of performativity are less helpful in understanding such women's experiences of self and appearance, because they do not perceive themselves as able to change their gender or identity performances, but rather feel fixed in the presentations they have.

Through the worker interviews, I found that fourteen of the twenty interviewees felt that passing is an option given their appearance and personality. These results are summarized in Table 4.1. Of the six who thought that they did not pass, four said that they did pass sometimes or in some groups of people. Only Dana and Kim believed that they were always visibly lesbian and unable to pass. Among the interviewees, interpretations of their own looks seemed to rely on cultural stereotypes of lesbians as butch or masculine. Comparing themselves to butch stereotypes, women interpreted their self-presentations (Budge and Hamer 1994, Cogan 1999, Cottingham 1996, Dugger 1996, Erickson 1999, Strickland 1999). These individual interpretations of their appearances and abilities to pass as heterosexual often conflicted with my interpretations of their looks and, in some cases,

with others' interpretations of their looks.[12] For instance, Diane reported that she was nearly always able to pass as heterosexual; however a coworker of hers reported knowing that she was lesbian as soon as they met based on Diane's appearance. Stephanie, on the other hand, believed that her appearance usually let others know she was lesbian, but reported at least two instances of people with whom she worked being surprised when they learned she was lesbian. They had not read her appearance as signaling lesbian identity as Stephanie assumed.

Table 4.1 Possibilities of Passing

Named Used		Primary Strategy
Angela	Passes	Normalized
Caitlin	Passes	Political
Christine	Passes	Political, Normalized
Dana	Doesn't Pass	Emb
Diane	Passes	Comp
Erica	Doesn't Pass	Political, Normalized
Jackie	Passes	Political, Normalized
Jennifer	Passes	Normalized (Political)
Joelle	Passes	Political, Normalized
Jordan	Passes	Comp
Kim	Doesn't Pass	Emb
Laura	Passes	Normalized
Melissa	Passes	Comp
Michelle	Doesn't Pass	Normalized
Rachel	Passes	Comp
Robin	Doesn't Pass	Political
Sherri	Passes	Normalized (Political)
Stacy	Passes	Comp
Stephanie	Doesn't Pass	Political
Tina	Passes	Political
	6 Think they don't pass **14 Think they pass.**	

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[12] For most women, I do not have co-workers' reactions except as reported by the worker herself. Diane's case suggests that women often do not see themselves as others see them.

Among those who feel that they cannot pass, managing an already revealed identity (Goffman 1986) leads to particular strategies of carefully choosing a workplace that will accept their lesbian identity and then being verbally out in indirect or direct ways. Those who perceive that they do not pass are discussed below and in the next chapter's section on lesbians who share an embodied meaning for their lesbian identity. The self-perception of their bodies and ways that lesbian workers described their ability to pass was intricately related to the ways that they described their methods of managing a lesbian sexual identity in the workplace.

Doing Gender and Sexuality at Work

To some extent, lesbian identity management is about how actors do sexuality in the sense that doing sexuality is seen as acting in certain ways to claim and enact an identity (Ingraham 2001). Female adults' efforts to "do gender" in ways appropriate to their workplace norms, senses of personal identity, and complex patterns of race, class, and job positions are also central to their construction as lesbian or heterosexual persons. Most researchers exploring lesbian identity management emphasize that lesbian, gay, and bisexual people can and do pass as heterosexual (Badgett 2001, p. 51). Badgett suggests that the absence of visible characteristics means that lesbians can and do pass as heterosexual much of the time which means that not identifying to others as lesbian could be a strategy for avoiding discrimination (p. 51). Ingraham (1999) and others (Hearn 1996; Messinger and Topal 1998) argue that most observers still rely on heteronormative assumptions. For many audiences, doing gender appropriately also leads to presumptions that the actor is heterosexual (Dellinger and Williams 1997; Ingraham 1999). Thus, unless a person explicitly discloses homosexuality or provides a large numbers of indicators of gay identity, people will assume that person is heterosexual.

Previous studies (Markowe 1996) have focused on how lesbians are often invisible or seen only when they match particular stereotypes of lesbian identity (Budge and Hamer

60

1994; Atkins 1999). Among themselves, lesbian workers may not only differ in appearances, but also differ in their perceptions of their ability to pass as heterosexual and the degree of agency over their appearance (Budge and Hamer 1994; Goffman 1964).[13] How does a worker's belief that she passes affect the identity management strategies she uses at work?

Some women, lesbian and not, however, may fit social stereotypes of lesbians (Erickson 1999). For them, heteronormative assumptions about how 'real women do gender' may lead to a presumption of lesbian identity (Erickson 1999; Esterberg 2000; Halberstam 1998). These stereotypes are linked to images of 'butch' identity or female masculinity (Esterberg 2000). Women who deviate from gender norms may be assumed to be homosexual or transgender (Creith 1996; Kunkel 2003). For some women, this gendered presentation feels like an expression of their deepest selves (Erickson 1999; Halberstam 1998), while others adopt the presentation with a sense of performing an identity (Crawley 2001).

Both those who believed that they could and the six that believed that they could not pass were likely to mention their appearance as the most important aspect of their visibility or invisibility as lesbian. When I probed for discussions of what a lesbian looked like, they offered lists of characteristics that focused on a generalized butch stereotype. They did not offer examples of media images of lesbian fashion as described in articles on lesbian chic, a concept that lesbians were becoming a fashionable "in" group (Cottingham 1996).[14]

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[13] This chapter also briefly problematizes self-perceptions of appearance, since some individuals' perceptions did not match those of other observers.

[14] In the following discussion, I distinguish between butch, femme, and androgynous lesbian identities briefly, but do not discuss the related issues of transgender identification. Among the lesbians I interviewed, all were clear that they identified as female people in female bodies. As transsexual and transgender identities have become more visible, more accounts of the overlaps between butch lesbian and transgender identities have been written (Califia and Califia-Rich 2003; Halberstam 1998). Especially in larger cities, many butch lesbians have come out as transgender and some have transitioned to male bodies (Califia and Califia-Rich 2003). Even so, Kanner (2002) and others argue that butch identity remains a significant marker of lesbian identity. In this analysis, I focus only on the ways female-bodied lesbians experience their bodies and mannerisms as coded within a community and a time where transgender identity was rarely discussed.

A variety of distinctions in hair length, clothing choices, and other markers signaled

lesbian identity to observers. They defined a lesbian look as being similar to what they

described as: "stereotypical butch characteristics", "short hair", and "usually or always

wearing pants, not dresses." Hebdige (1981) found a similar set of subtle distinctions and

differences in audience responses to alternative youth groups in London. Hebdige (1981)

notes that even the turning of a collar conveyed significant amounts of group membership

information to informed observers while the uninformed might simply see groups of youths in

similar white shirts. Sally Munt (1998) and others draw on Hebdige's tradition of symbolic

analysis to argue that cultural codes about lesbian appearance shape how lesbian identity is

interpreted. Kanner (2002, p. 28) states, "The butch lesbian always looks like who she is, to

natives [lesbians] and non-natives alike." Kanner's (2002, p. 29) semiotic study of butch

identity describes short hair and wearing men's or masculine clothing as the chief features

of butch identity while suggesting that athleticism and ways of holding one's body may affect

interpretations.[15]

Munt (1998) says audiences often conflate lesbian with butch, leading to the invisibility of

femme women and women who are androgynous. This tendency to conflate butch

appearance with lesbian may also lead to the labeling of butch straight women as lesbian as

well as marking butch lesbians as lesbian more often than other lesbians (Erickson 1999).

For instance, butch lesbians and women who fit the butch stereotypes argue that they are

seen as lesbian whether they wish to pass as heterosexual (or present an authentically

heterosexual identity) or wish to present a butch lesbian identity (Esterberg 1996).

The conflation of feminine masculinity with lesbian identity and conventionally feminine

appearance with heterosexuality appears to be common in many workplaces (Dellinger and

Williams 1997; Dunne 1997; Munt 1998). Chapkis (1986) explains the pressure this

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[15] Dugger (1996) satirizes these stereotypes by drawing images of famous figures such as the Mona Lisa with lesbian-identified hairstyles such as the mullet. Her ability to publish a book mocking these stereotypes suggests that they are well-known and widely circulated.

conflation may create for women who want to cover signs of lesbian identity. They may, for

instance, feel pressured to modify their appearances to be more conventionally feminine to

fit workplace norms. Strickland (1996) noted that she felt pressured to wear feminine suits

and pantyhose in her job as a career counselor; although these were not clothes that felt like

authentic expressions of her preferences or of her sense of herself as a sexual and

gendered person.

Women who identified as femme and those who were seen by others as femme,

defined this category in less specific terms than those used for butch identity. Femme is a

form of lesbian gender that uses many conventional markers of feminine identity, though

sometimes in ways different from those used by heterosexual feminine women (Cogan

1999). Recent definitions of femme struggle to distinguish the socialized gender aspects of

the identity from the assumptions about physical sex and sexuality others impose on those

lesbians who appear feminine. For them, femme usually means not only following

traditional feminine gender socialization appropriate to their race, class, and age, but also

fitting into "the way female-bodied persons are encouraged to present themselves to the

world. By this, I mean not only in appearance but also mannerisms and character traits

such as voice, language, hobbies, and interests" (Andre and Chang 2006, p. 255). What the

concepts of butch and femme suggest are the need to look more closely at the interactions

of sexual orientation and gender presentations. One interviewee offered a clear example of

these patterns. When asked to describe why she thought she looked lesbian, Robin

included several of the items these studies had described.

> KS: What cues do you think they pick up about you that make you think [you don't
> pass]?
> ROBIN: I don't wear makeup. My hair's short, not as short as it used to be. I have a
> certain walk. I don't walk like a girl. Those are probably--my clothes used to be
> much more of an indication. I used to wear jeans and t-shirts, dyke t-shirts.

Robin compared her appearance to a list of characteristics of used to signal butch

identity and reports that moving away from butch characteristics makes it more likely that

she will pass as heterosexual. She also notes that her appearance has changed over time, so that she looks less identifiably lesbian than she used to look. Robin continued:

> Probably now I could pass. [My partner] still tells me I still can't pass. I probably couldn't pass in a group of lesbians. They'd figure it out pretty quick. But a group of unsuspecting straight people? [Her laugh and tone implied that an unsuspecting group would not be able to tell her sexual identity.]

Robin assumes different skills at reading her appearance among lesbians and "unsuspecting straight people," that is, people who are not part of lesbian culture. As Kanner's studies of lesbian types shows, subtle distinctions in appearance and manner as well as differences in audience responses affected whether a woman was identified as heterosexual or lesbian. Kanner's (2002) studies of lesbians and others finds more awareness of variations in types of lesbians and somewhat less reliance on stereotypes than among groups of non-lesbians (Kanner 2002). In a similar way, Robin and other interviewees expected that lesbian viewers would be able to read signals of lesbian identity more skillfully than would non-lesbian viewers.

Most interviewees who felt that their appearance did allow them to pass did not identify themselves as femme lesbians or as particularly feminine. They simply saw themselves as somewhere in the range of acceptable appearances for their workplaces when I asked them to compare themselves to women coworkers. Instead of seeing themselves as butch or femme, this larger group felt that their appearances did not fit them into a particular category, meaning that they did not feel marked as lesbians so could fit ambiguously into other groups. Loulan (1990) conducted a convenience sample of lesbians and found similar results. The majority of women responded in that study that they were feminine or androgynous, but neither femme nor butch (Loulan 1990).

Women who saw their bodies as more femininely coded did find that they sometimes felt invisible both within the lesbian community where other lesbians sometimes saw them as straight women and in the broader community where others' disbelieved their claims to

lesbian identities or simply assumed that they were heterosexual. Similarly, Cogan (1999) writes that many women who identify as femme or appear more conventionally feminine feel less visible as lesbians than do butch women.

Caitlin, a thin, long-haired woman in her late 20s expresses the difficulties such invisibility created both among lesbians and among straight co-workers. She noted, "When I go out to bars, women sort of ignore me. One time I wore a baseball cap backwards with a t-shirt and jeans, because I wanted to be more visible." Like Robin above, Caitlin assumed that her straight coworkers and lesbians at a bar would look for visible signals of her sexual identity. In trying to meet a potential date at the bar, she chose to emphasize lesbian-coded appearance issues rather than present herself as she might at work or in other settings.

For Caitlin, her physical appearance also increased the likelihood that co-workers would think that she was straight. In a previous social service job, she worried that explicitly coming out might jeopardize her job, so she refrained from making any specific statements about her sexuality. At that workplace, she also did not speak about the woman she was dating. As a result, her co-workers at that job seemed to have seen her as an attractive young, single heterosexual woman and attempted to schedule dates for her with their male friends and relatives. In her present job, Caitlin is explicitly out to her co-workers and employer, in part, because of Caitlin's interpretations about another worker's apparent sexuality based on her appearance and because she does not want to repeat the discomfort of those previous interactions.

When Caitlin went to her present small academic setting to interview for a job, she sought to learn whether the workplace would be a place where she could be openly lesbian as her political commitments urged her to do. "When I saw 'Diane' in the [workplace], I knew that it would be an OK place to work," she said. When I asked Caitlin to tell me what she meant, she explained that Diane's appearance was to her "clearly lesbian." Caitlin described Diane as rarely wearing makeup, as wearing tailored women's or men's clothing, and as

65

moving her body in ways that seemed somewhat athletic. Diane seemed very comfortable

at this workplace and was obviously held in high regard by other workers.

Diane reported in a later interview, however, that she did not believe that others knew

anything about her sexual identity either through her appearance or her other actions. As

noted in the table, Diane believed that she passed unless she explicitly told others of her

sexual identity. She seems to have read the visual cues she was sending differently from

her lesbian audience [Caitlin] and possibly from other audiences as well. I have found other

examples of this type of variation between how lesbians reported others saw them through

informal discussions.

At the other end of the passing spectrum, were two women who felt that they could not

pas as heterosexual in most, perhaps any, circumstances. Kim and Dana felt that their

bodies were explicitly coded as lesbian or even "dykey." Kim and Dana are both larger

women in their 30s with wide shoulders and small hips. Kim was clear in describing her

belief that she is "always out even before I open my mouth" to nearly everyone she meets.

Kim even calls her hips, "lesbian hips," because she believes that people looking at her

body can tell that she is a lesbian. "I just look dykey, even my body is lesbian. My hair, my

clothes, my hips."

While Kim said that she had lesbian hips in an exaggerated manner to show she was

joking somewhat, she returned to this notion of the ways that lesbian identity was written on

her body and influenced her visual self-presentation. She also suggested that such images

were not completely within her control, but are simply a part of who she is. For instance,

Kim claimed that her hair length and style were simply the way her hair was and that its

appearance was immutable. She seemed to deny that she might be able to grow it longer

or modify it through cuts or permanents to look different. This seems to reflect a naturalizing

move denying the possibility of change or agency in her self-representations. Dellinger and

Williams (1997) reported that many of the women they studied felt similarly 'natural' when

describing their use of makeup. These women reported that their use or non-use of cosmetics was out of their control, rather than a practice that they might select or reject. For at least fourteen of the women, managing how visually identifiable they appeared was a constant process. Four others saw some aspects of their appearance as malleable, so sometimes chose to look more or less lesbian, by wearing particular clothing or not wearing other things.

Managing Appearance Expectations at Work

People use various appearance management strategies in the workplace as they try to fit into organizational expectations for appropriate workers. This section focuses on the ways people responded to the often-unstated workplace appearance norms. These sometimes intersected with attempts to pass, but were also a key component of meeting organizational expectations of them as workers. Interviewees expanded on the theme of pressure to conform to workplace dress norms. I asked them to compare themselves to other workers, especially other women workers. Most were in jobs that other women also held or where they had female coworkers. Dana worked in a production job where her only coworkers were male. They were expected to wear a uniform which she refused, partly because she found it ugly and partly because it seemed to be of lower quality than her clothing. Her actions were also a form of resistance.

> DANA: They keep saying, 'Uh you need to be wearing a uniform.' I'm like. Yep. I'm not going to wear it. It's terrible; khaki pants or navy pants, I think, and the shirts are either light blue or white. But they're just, they're not one hundred percent cotton. They're not mine; they're rented clothes. I'm not wearing them. I have dress pants that I wear everyday and a dress shirt, button down. I don't have anything that's a solid. I have one white solid shirt. I have one navy solid shirt but pretty much all my shirts are prints.
> KS: Have you ever worn [the uniform] or you just didn't start?
> DANA: I never wore it. I said to them, 'I would hate to have to go to work somewhere else.' But it's also hard to have one person who doesn't. But I'm also a woman. I think that may be the only reason they let me get away with it. It's really kind of a man's, although I'm wearing the exact same thing. It's just mine. I don't know if they're letting me get away with it because I'm a woman or not. I don't know exactly what the deal is.

Dana refused to wear the uniforms required of her male coworkers. She does follow the

general theme of the uniform and notes that the clothes she does wear are very similar to

the uniforms, although her shirts are mostly print button-down styles instead of white or light

blue. Her example suggests the awareness of the importance of cues such as fabric

content and shirt style that mark someone as following group norms (Hebdige 1981). She

was not sure whether it was her threat to leave the job or her sex that enabled her to avoid

disciplinary action for refusing to wear the uniform. Dana's actions also suggest that

appearance norms are not simply restrictive, but may also create opportunities for

resistance and self-expression. Dana was clearly aware that her willingness to take risks

was tied to her ability to find another job should her resistance efforts fail.

> DANA: When there's a lot of jobs in the Sunday paper, I do a lot of things on that
> week that I wouldn't [usually] do. When I look through the Sunday paper and there's
> not a lot of jobs, I always tuck my shirt in; I wear my belt; I wear my dress pants.
> When there's a lot of job in the Sunday papers, I might untuck my shirt. You know
> what I mean? I kind of--I don't know what the hell that's about. It's psychological
> warfare in my head. It works.

Dana tied this discussion to a mention that her field had zero unemployment, and she

was very well-qualified. She felt confident that she could find a reasonable alternative job

easily. This economic situation gave her confidence that she could find another job if her

current job imposed rules she preferred to ignore.

As mentioned above, gender non-conformity has also been used as a marker of lesbian

identity, by those wishing to mark themselves as lesbian and by others interpreting women's

possible sexual identities (Budge and Hamer 1995; Butler 1997). Although most of the

interviewees described themselves as fitting into the dress code or general expectations for

women's appearance in their workplace, they also described patterned boundaries around

dresses and skirts in ways that mirrored the patterns of professional norms described by

Dellinger and Williams (1997) where some women accepted the norms, others followed

them without fully accepting them, and others disregarded them entirely. Among the

interviewees, only Caitlin mentioned dresses as regularly enjoyable and acceptable clothing

for work. Tina mentioned them as regular choices as well, although her level of expressed

pleasure was not as great as Caitlin's.

Many other women explicitly mentioned rejecting dresses, either lifelong or since coming

out, while a few wore skirts or dresses when workplace occasions "demanded" them. In the

section on hiring interviews in Chapter 7, I have described some workers' strategies

regarding "appropriate" clothing choices. For other women, dresses or dressy pants were

considered part of the normative appearance for their workplace (Dellinger and Williams

1997).

> STEPHANIE: Most of the people [where I work], you wear a tie if you're a man
> everyday and you dress decently if you're a woman everyday.
> KS: Does that mean usually a skirt or nice pants?
> STEPHANIE: If you are just [at the office], women wear anything from slacks to
> jeans to shorts. I don't ever wear shorts to work. I've worn shorts to work maybe
> once in my life. But that's in part because I don't shave my legs and in part because
> I was taught growing up that shorts were inappropriate to wear in public.
> KS: So that still sticks. Well you hardly wear them in your private life either, as I
> recall. Does that include does being "decently" dressed include makeup and stuff
> too?
> STEPHANIE: If I have a meeting, I wear lipstick at the least and sometimes more.
> This morning I got up and put on eye makeup and whatever. It just depends on my
> day. It includes jewelry.

In this section, we can see how that pattern links to her clothing choices to present a

"decent" image of professional attire. For Stephanie, dressing professionally had moral

boundaries which she defined as decency that reinforced gendered presentations of her

body. She balanced her decision not to shave her legs with looking professionally

appropriate, by avoiding shorts and wearing pantyhose to cover her legs. As noted later,

Stephanie often wore makeup to work and was one of the few interviewees who reported

consistently wearing makeup.

Like Stephanie, Christine had internalized certain appearance norms as part of her

upbringing and professional training. At the time of her coming out during her

undergraduate college years, Christine was far from the butch stereotype of lesbians

69

discussed earlier. Although she later wore less makeup and had shorter hair that looked

closer to the butch stereotype, during her initial coming out period, Christine reported that

she looked very conventionally feminine when she first came out. She participated actively

in a sorority and wore conventional clothing for her activities in a sorority job and in her daily

student life. The arc of her progress from sorority woman to butch college student outside

her sorority activities to young lawyer showed how development of her physical appearance

intersected with her movement through different stages of lesbian identity development and

career development (Markowe 1994).

    After Christine came out and become more comfortable with her lesbian identity, she

also named her discomfort with wearing dresses. For a short period, she adopted a fairly

butch style of short hair and unfeminine clothing, especially avoidance of dresses.

However, by the time of the interview, Christine had entered law school and was being

mentored into appropriate dress and appearance norms for this new professional role.

Christine noted that students, especially women students, were coached to use their

clothing choices and other appearance matters to assist in presenting a professional

appearance that would have particular effects on the judge and jury. Cautionary tales about

judges who disapproved of women lawyers wearing pants also circulated among young

lawyers. Christine noted her own discomfort in wearing a dress when working as a law

student in courts or in practice cases. Wearing a dress felt alien and as if she "were in

drag," she said casually. However, her contention was that wearing dresses or skirts

necessary for women lawyers to be taken seriously. She shared examples of judges

reacting negatively to lawyers whose appearance did not meet their standards.

> KS: Do you feel like there's a gender difference in how you're instructed to do that,
> or in the kinds of responses that that evokes from the judge? Are women lawyers
> treated differently than men in any way?
> CHRISTINE: I don't think I have enough experience in the court room to answer that
> yet. But I have heard of judged telling women their dress is not appropriate for the
> court room. I've heard of one time of a judge telling a man when he was wearing
> sort of denim material pants instead of dress pants that that wasn't appropriate. But

you hear more about that with women. Like you can't come before me in this tribunal wearing that.
KS: And what would "that" be? What are some of the stories that you've heard?
CHRISTINE: A pants suit. Pants, mostly. There's sort of some whispering about a certain attorney I know who wears these kind of seamed stockings, sort of like, I don't know about that. There's a student in the clinic who has a nose ring. I've heard a lot of mutterings about that, that she shouldn't wear it out in the court room. I'm sure, you might have heard some—.
KS: I haven't heard that much. And I do keep this all confidential, so if that helps.
CHRISTINE: A woman who was a judge a couple of years ago actually ripped the blouse of another woman attorney, just like, you know, this [blouse] is not appropriate.

Christine's stories showed that people training her to be a professional worker explicitly coached her in perceived clothing expectations and that cautionary stories provided further guidance. From her examples, it seems that a professional appearance included wearing a dress, but not wearing clothing that might be coded as "too sexual" for the workplace (e.g. the seamed stockings). Christine was verbally out in some settings, but felt that she needed to present an appropriately feminine appearance in her court work settings. She presented these requirements as something of a personal struggle, because she felt uncomfortable in dresses, but also as simply playing by the rules of the game during her work in court. Her stories suggested that lawyers who did not abide by these rules might be disregarded or even harassed by judges. As an ambitious young lawyer, she seemed to accept the appearance rules she was taught.

As Lyons, Brenner and Fassinger (2006) noted in their study of workers' fit with organizational cultures, those who did not fit their organization and who found no way to align themselves with the organizational culture generally left the organization or reported dissatisfaction. Christine's situation seems to show us a snapshot of how someone entering the practice of law learned to accommodate herself to its rules as a condition of admittance.

In addition to clothing, interviewees frequently mentioned appearance issues such as their use of makeup and their shaving practices. Dellinger and Williams (1997) also found that makeup-wearing was so normative in many workplaces, that not wearing it could signal

a woman's lack of conformity to gender norms and often was seen as implying lesbian identity. Williams notes that while some women wear makeup to work to look more attractive, many women wear makeup at work to conform to workplace expectations, either to avoid sanctions or simply conform to the letter of the norms without investing much energy in creativity (Dellinger and Williams 1997). I found several instances of women who refused to wear makeup at work, despite a general use of it by other women workers in their organizations. Others noted that makeup use was less normative in their workplaces, so they did not feel unusual in not wearing it. Similar to Dellinger and Williams' (1997) respondents, a few of the interviewees noted wearing makeup either to look good or because they enjoyed its effects. Caitlin, for instance, noted that she often wore "professional clothes and some makeup," in order to interact with the public in her job. In a professional service job, Stephanie reported that she strove to look "decent" which seemed to convey adherence to an unarticulated set of norms for professional women's dress.

> KS: Does being "decently" dressed include makeup and stuff too?
> STEPHANIE: If I have a meeting, I wear lipstick at the least and sometimes more. This morning I got up and put on eye makeup and whatever. It just depends on my day. It includes jewelry.

For Stephanie, lipstick was the minimum for days when she would meet with other professionals. She also seemed to choose other ways to wear makeup depending on her own mood.

Interviewees reported that shaving their legs was another often significant appearance issue. For women, shaving or not shaving legs and armpits could mark physical appearance in ways that signaled lesbian identity. Chapkis (1986) notes American women treat shaving their legs as an important practice in creating a feminine appearance. Feminist critics have decried the practice for various reasons, noted Chapkis. In common stereotypes that conflate the categories of lesbian, feminist, and women who refuse beauty norms, women who do not shave are often pictured as lesbian (Chapkis 1986). Therefore,

women with hairy legs may be marked as lesbian. Jordan was sensitive to this hairy-legged stereotype and its effects on her workplace interactions. While describing her usual workplace clothing as similar to that of other women, she noted that she never wears dresses or skirts at work because she doesn't shave her legs and finds it difficult to hide this fact when wearing skirts. While she did not regret wearing pants to work, she did comment on a benefit she lost because of her unwillingness to show her legs at work.

> JORDAN: It does mean that I don't really work out in the gym.

> KS: At work?
> JORDAN: Yes, we have a workout center that I could use, but then everybody would see my hairy legs and so they'd probably know.
> KS: You think they'd know you were lesbian because you don't shave?
> JORDAN: Well, I think they'd have a good idea or start to ask some questions. And I don't really want to have that conversation. I'd rather just be able to go in and work on building up my legs.

Although Jordan later explained that she has specific fitness goals which would be easier to meet using the company's gym, her concerns about how her legs in shorts might mark her as lesbian meant that she chose not to use the gym. For her, wearing shorts in a setting with colleagues would instantly mark her as having unconventionally feminine appearance and possibly mark her as lesbian. Others have noted that some people, especially those in the middle and upper middle classes often identify unshaven legs with lack of care for a woman's appearance (Chapkis 1986). Challenging gender norms and especially looking like one "does not pay attention to her appearance" can have negative professional consequences for women workers, even when this lack of attention is not also linked to potential lesbian identity (Dellinger and Williams 1997; Strickland 1999).

These women's experiences suggest that appearance norms, and especially adherence to gendered notions of appearance, are often very important to women's interactions with coworkers. While studies of workplaces sometimes treat the experiences of all women in a workplace as similar, lesbian workers' varied experiences with hair styles, clothing, makeup,

and shaving practices highlight some of the ways workers manage their physical appearances as part of their workplace interactions. This discussion also shows that gender and sexuality markers tangle together in women's appearances at work. The discussions of identity management below draw on Goffman's work on managing stigma, but pay less attention to the ways that the physical appearances of those managing stigma affect their identity management. The chapter concludes by suggesting that future studies must attend both to the ways that physical appearances allow people to hide stigmatized identities and to models of identity management that focus on levels of outness (revelation) of stigma through symbolic and verbal means as well as visual appearances.

Methods of Identity Management Elaborated

Many models of identity management have been offered to explain how lesbians manage their identities in personal interactions along a continuum of disclosure. Two such models (Griffin 1998; Lindsay et al 2006) are helpful in understanding this study's findings. Lindsay and her co-authors (2006) focused on how lesbian-parented families interacted with their children's schools to explore the interplay between parents' preferred strategies and the school context. Their model creates a range along which we can discuss different levels of being open about lesbian identity. They identified three strategies of disclosure lesbian-parented families used with school authorities, 'private,' 'selective,' and 'proud' (Lindsay et al, p. 1064). The private strategy was the most closeted since it involved deliberate non-disclosure. The 'selective' strategy was sensitive to the specific situation with families' concealing or revealing lesbian identity depending on the context. Finally, the 'proud' strategy involved an individual or families' consistent disclosure of lesbian identity (Lindsay et al 2006, p. 1064). This model importantly notes the need to explore how situational contexts such as school settings or workplace cultures interact with individual and families' preferred methods of identity management. In Chapter 7, we will return to their model to

explain this interaction; however, it lacks the fine-grained details of identity management at work.

Pat Griffin's (1998) study of lesbian coaches' and athletes' identity management strategies offers a detailed typology for discussing lesbian identity management of work that helpfully relates workers' strategies to their perceptions of safety and ability to pass as heterosexual. Griffin (1992) built the typology first based on the experiences of lesbian schoolteachers in the late 1980s and applied it to lesbian coaches in more detail. As she notes, predominant stereotypes about athletics as a masculine and masculinizing pursuit have labeled women athletes and women coaches as lesbian (Griffin 1998, p. 30). Many schools and other organizations that employ women as coaches have strictly heterosexist policies. They resist hiring known lesbians or allowing those lesbians who do work in their organizations to be openly lesbian (Griffin 1998). Therefore, lesbian coaches have long found ways to manage the contradictions between their lesbian identities and their workplaces, usually by separating their professional and personal lives (Griffin 1998, p. 134-5). In a similar way, schoolteachers have often reported similar pressures to be closeted in order to continue their work (Griffin 1992; Khayatt 1992; Kissen 1996). Griffin (1998, p. 158) noted significant change had occurred as more coaches were challenging the previous silencing.

Griffin reported that coaches used a range of strategies to manage their lesbian identities and that these varied depending on the coaches' beliefs in their ability to pass as heterosexual, their comfort with their lesbian identity, and their beliefs about the usefulness of being out. Griffin describes lesbian coaches' strategies based on their ideas of what to share. "These processes involve self-monitoring as well as monitoring each new relationship or situation a lesbian encounters," she reports (Griffin 1998, p. 135). Based on these observations, coaches determine the level of safety for sharing and test it against their perceptions of what is appropriate to share.

Drawing on Griffin's (1998) discussion of lesbian coaches' strategies, I discuss workers who are completely closeted, actively concealing their identities (replacing her passing as heterosexual), passing as heterosexual (replacing her covering lesbian identity), implicitly out symbolically, implicitly out linguistically, explicitly out, and publicly out. These strategies are summarized in Table 4.2. Griffin (1998) did not discuss anyone who felt that she could not pass if she chose to, so her typology applies to workers who are managing an identity that they assume is not already known. In Griffin's study, workers did not have a fixed strategy they applied to each job, but rather improvised strategies that fit particular workplaces. A significant issue for these coaches was the widespread climate of heterosexism and the lack of legal protection which meant that being lesbian could lead to job loss or other negative consequences. Because of this fear, very few lesbian coaches were explicitly out or publicly out. Most coaches she studied were passing as heterosexual, covering lesbian identity, or implicitly out (p. 137).

Table 4.2 Lesbian Workers' Identity Management Strategies
Based on Griffin (1998) Table 8.1: Lesbian Coaches' Identity-Management Strategies

Completely closeted	Concealing lesbian identity from all in work context
Active concealment *(Passing as heterosexual for Griffin's model)*	Intentionally leading selected others in work context to see self as heterosexual through misinformation
Passing as heterosexual *(Covering lesbian identity for Griffin's model)*	Concealing lesbian identity from selected others in work context through not telling selected information
Implicitly out: Symbolically	Allowing selected others in work context to see self as lesbian without naming self: through use of lesbian-coded symbols or appearance
Implicitly out: Linguistically	Allowing selected others in work context to see self as lesbian without naming self: through use of conversations or specific information on written documents such as resúmes
Explicitly out	Intentionally revealing lesbian identity to selected others in work context
Publicly out	Revealing lesbian identity to everyone in work context

Note: In my typology, active concealment replaces passing as heterosexual and passing as heterosexual replaces concealing identity to better reflect the terms used by interviewees.

Griffin's two most closeted options, being completely closeted and passing as heterosexual (listed as active concealment in Table 4.2), were not claimed by any of my interviewees. These two categories included coaches' active attempts to have others see them as heterosexual. Being completely closeted meant that the coach would conceal all markers of her lesbian identity. Passing as heterosexual in Griffin's (1998) framework involved intentionally leading selected others in work context to see self as heterosexual. For instance, lesbian coaches might use masculine pronouns when describing a date or actually date men to project a heterosexual image (p. 136). These strategies were used in very homophobic coaching situations to hide coaches' sexual identities.

In Table 4.2 and the discussion below, I refer to Griffin's strategy of "passing as heterosexual" as active concealment, because it involved clear attempts to mislead others' about one's identity. During interviews, the term "passing as heterosexual" was used by my respondents to refer to less active attempts to be seen as heterosexual through allowing others' to infer heterosexuality. Rather than dating men or creating active alternate lives, those who were passing as heterosexual in my study used the methods of "not telling" selected information that would allow others to see them as lesbian.

Being implicitly out meant that the coach allowed selected others in her work context to see her as lesbian without naming herself lesbian (Griffin 1998). People in this range of strategies often kept their social and professional lives separate. Many reported that they found the separation acceptable. They often believed that others, such as administrators, athletes, or athletes' parents might know that they were lesbian, but they were "abiding by an unspoken contract not to be too open and not to make demands that force others to deal with homosexuality directly; the essence of the glass closet compromise" (Griffin 1998, p. 155). While this group made no efforts to manufacture a heterosexual appearance, they

also did not openly claim a lesbian identity. This allowed implicitly out coaches to return to the closet and cover their identity if needed and also have a greater feeling of integrity because she was not lying about their identities (p. 143).

The implicitly out category was widely used in Griffin's study. I have sub-divided her category of "implicitly out" into two parts, symbolic and linguistic, to reflect the range of ways interviewees were implicitly out. The symbolic aspect refers to the use of signs of lesbian identity such as rainbow flags or lesbian-themed jewelry that others could interpret as lesbian if they knew the meaning of such symbols (Kanner 2002; Kulick 2001). As noted in the introduction, this study took place during a period of growing visibility of lesbian identity. Symbols and codes that had been part of a secret lesbian and gay subculture were becoming known to many heterosexuals through media discussions and political action. For instance, the rainbow flag was an in-group symbol whose significance was largely known by those in gay communities and their allies. By the late 1990s, rainbow flags were far more widely known as symbols of gay and lesbian identity outside lesbian and gay communities (Kulick 2000).

Being implicitly out in a linguistic sense, meant that lesbian workers talked about partners, girlfriends, or aspects of lesbian identity without explicitly using a word like lesbian. They allowed listeners to interpret these symbols as markers of lesbian identity if they wished, but also left room for returning to the closet if need be. Part of the usefulness of such a strategy was that it allowed lesbian workers to circumvent codes about talking about sexuality at work. As noted above, Badgett (2001) found that mentioning lesbian identity directly was often interpreted as introducing an inappropriate discussion of sexuality into the workplace. Workers who used implicitly out strategies emphasized the non-sexual aspects of their relationships and lives which decreased emphasis on the sexual connotations of their information. Such implicit disclosures were also similar to the indirect ways many

heterosexual sexuality disclosures are made by talking about dinner with one's husband or an engagement party rather than one's sexual practices.

Being explicitly out was the next more out step. In this strategy, lesbian coaches told selected others that they were lesbian (Griffin 1998, p. 143). This step meant that the coach could not 'go back into the closet,' since she had directly stated her identity. In Griffin's work (1998) such disclosures were experienced as permanent and likely to follow someone from job to job, because of the ways that coaching networks tended to pass along information. Such information-sharing appears to vary among types of jobs, depending on whether information is shared from one job to the next. Some of my respondents had learned that if they were out at one job, their next employer would know while others found that the information did not get shared. This appeared to be related in part to the types of references and information considered appropriate to share between jobs. Those, such as academe, with tighter connections shared more information between jobs than those in service industries like restaurant work.

Finally, a few lesbian coaches were publicly out to everyone. They had told their employers, colleagues, and athletes (Griffin 1998). Many were also involved in lesbian advocacy efforts as trainers on diversity issues or mentors to gay athletes (Griffin 1998, p. 168). This category describes those who have made public statements and are verbally or symbolically out regularly. Because of workplace turnover, even those who were publicly out sometimes found that coworkers had not received the information. This is fundamentally different from the implicitly out group who expected listeners to make connections and inferences from indirect information, and instead refers to problems of transmission where the content of the message is clearly that the lesbian worker is lesbian.

Griffin developed a similar typology of lesbian athletes. Their strategies were similar to those of lesbian coaches, but included more overt and covert revelations of lesbian identity. She notes that some of this increased level of outness may be because of their younger age

79

(most were in college) or because the lesbian identity is newer to them (Griffin 1998, p.

146). Other studies have found that those newly adopting a lesbian identity are more likely

to consider the identity a highly important part of their life to share with others compared to

those who have been out longer (Markowe 1994). The lesbian athletes were also revealing

their identities to coaches and teammates rather than coworkers, so the types of

relationships were different from my workplace focus. My respondents had all been out for

at least at year or more. They were not in the coming out to self stage of development, so

were less consumed by the salience of a lesbian identity (Markowe 1994). Their increased

integration of lesbian into their identity structures often changed their strategies for identity

management psychologically, just as experiences with managing the identity in

interpersonal situations might change their strategies (Markowe 1994). As Markowe notes,

as women integrated lesbian into their intrapersonal identity, they were able to offer a wider

and more flexible set of interpersonal enactments of the identity. During the coming out to

self period, lesbians often were eager to display their lesbian identity. In most cases,

however, this openness was mostly a private phenomenon and less common in their

workplaces (Dunne 1997).

    Griffin (1998) only discussed coaches who felt they could pass if they chose to, so her

typology applies to workers who are managing an identity that they assume is not already

known. Using Griffin's typology, I next discuss the overall findings among the interviewees.

Except where noted, I discuss how lesbian workers managed their identities relative to

heterosexual coworkers, since all of them reported being out to other lesbians and gay men

in their workplaces when they had gay or lesbian coworkers. In discussing identify

management, I include both disclosure through verbal means (coming out) and other

methods of both revealing and concealing lesbian identity from specific others in the

workplace (Griffin 1998; Gross 1993). From the interviews, I learned that women expressed

or concealed their identities in complex ways. Their methods ranged from verbal disclosure

80

of one's lesbian status to wearing "gay-themed" jewelry that others could interpret as lesbian if they had the insider knowledge to do so.

<u>Avoiding the Topic and Passing as Heterosexual</u>

Griffin's two most closeted options, being completely closeted and passing as heterosexual (active concealment), were not claimed by any of my interviewees. Passing as heterosexual in Griffin's (1998) framework involved intentionally leading selected others in work context to see self as heterosexual. For instance, lesbian coaches might use masculine pronouns when describing a date or actually date men to project a heterosexual image. Among interviewees, I found no one who was completely closeted to the point of concealing lesbian identity from everyone in her work context. In contrast to describing instances of active concealment, nearly everyone volunteered at some point in the interview that she would not lie if asked directly about being a lesbian. The idea that they would tell someone who asked directly seemed to reflect a clear norm for interviewees. Lying about or even omitting to tell someone they were lesbian in such a context was considered immoral or inappropriate, based on several interviewees' assertions that they would never lie which was said with clear judgment of those who would.

Social desirability bias may have reduced interviewees' likelihood to describe such examples, because they knew the study was about disclosure and ways of managing lesbian identity. To counter this tendency, I encouraged such examples and emphasized that my interest was in a range of patterns. How much this overcame possible reluctance is impossible to gauge.

With the exception of women who had faced questions from parents or hostile authority figures several years in the past, none of the women had been asked directly if they were lesbian. Kim, whose father asked her directly if she were a lesbian, did come out to him. Stephanie refused to define herself as lesbian when asked by someone conducting what she described as a 'witch hunt' in her school many years ago. To herself, Stephanie's

definition was that she was simply in love with another girl. Her definition of lesbians did not

then include people who were feminine like herself, but only butch athletes. Therefore, even

though she had not told school personnel about her relationship with another girl, she did

not feel that she had misled them or lied about her identity.[16] Other than such authority

figures, no one asked such direct questions about lesbian identity. As Tina notes, she was

sometimes asked whether she was married (especially after she began wearing a ring to

signal her partnership), but she was never asked directly if she were lesbian. Social norms

appeared to prevent such direct question to women, even if others suspected they were

lesbian. Because they were not asked directly if they were lesbian, interviewees had to

recognize often ambiguous opportunities for coming out.

As mentioned above, no one in my study reported actively misleading others or being

put in a spot where they were directly asked in workplaces about their lesbian identity;

however, many described themselves as passing as heterosexual in ways similar to Griffin's

(1998) covering lesbian identity. Griffin (1998) defines covering lesbian identity as intending

to project a heterosexual image without actively promoting a heterosexual image. Because

passing as heterosexual is a more commonly used term for such behavior, I will refer to

passing or passing as heterosexual rather than concealing in the following discussion.

Those who are passing do not create fictitious boyfriends or change pronouns, but do

"prevent others from seeing any evidence of their lesbian identity. Instead, they avoid

referring to any significant personal relationships at all or downplay a woman lover's

importance by calling her a "roommate" or describing her as a casual friend" (Griffin 1998, p.

138). Ward and Winstanley (2003) found that varied types of silence figured importantly into

many lesbian and gay workers' methods of managing identity. Their research found that

workers used silence as a way to avoid potentially dangerous disclosures, but also that

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[16] This situation may also highlight the importance of knowing the meaning of 'lesbian identity' to understand their actions and their interpretations of those actions.

workers' silence and the silencing of discussions of homosexual identity issues in workplaces were responses to suppression of non-heterosexual identities by workplace cultures (Ward and Winstanley 2003).

In the following example, Melissa, a traditional college-aged student worker, uses opportunities for silence in her workplace. She discusses how the lack of interaction with supervisors and permanent workers in her workplace offers her a chance to conceal her identity from those with power over her. Melissa does not actively mislead others, but she does conceal clues of her identity from older people in her workplace. She also notes that there is no clear context for such disclosures to occur with the older workers in this setting. In contrast, Melissa is out to her younger co-workers, noting that age and a similar status made it easier to be out with them.

> MELISSA: [I do independent work] and like the interaction is kind of strange, like, just, the people I work with aren't very socially skilled. And so you're just like, there's lots of awkward pauses in conversations, and just like, okay, it's just kind of awkward. But they don't, I don't know, like, they definitely don't know that I'm lesbian. Like, well, I haven't said anything about it. And I do conceal it kind of. Well, the younger people that I work with, like people who are on my level, like there are very few, I don't work with very many people, there's like Sandy, who (works in the) library. (They) just kind of keep to themselves. She's the one who tells me what I have to do.
> There's a lot of other students that I work with, maybe like three other students that work there. And they know. We talk, and chitchat. So I don't really conceal it from them, it's just that like the other people, like the adults, I just don't think it's really relevant like, I don't know. I wouldn't have a context that I could really say that in.

By minimizing the importance of disclosure in this setting on the grounds of poor relationships with coworkers and lack of overall interaction, Melissa describes the ways that she conceals her lesbian identity from selected others. She also emphasizes how not having a more general context of talking with older coworkers makes it possible to avoid disclosure (Dellinger and Williams 2002).

Cathy Charmaz (1991) refers to such strategies as "avoiding disclosure," while Ward and Winstanley refer to them as silencing (2003) Charmaz argues that avoiding disclosure can be planned or the result of a spontaneous decision (Charmaz 1991, p. 110). People

may avoid disclosure in order to distance the stigmatized identity from their sense of self, for themselves and others (Charmaz 1991, p. 111). Charmaz noted that people also avoided disclosure in situations where telling others about the stigmatized identity felt too difficult, such as when their contact would be fleeting with someone or when they felt too ill or too tired to disclose. Charmaz's ideas point attention to the ways that silence may be chosen by workers who feel that the effort or cost of such disclosure outweighs the benefits of such disclosure in a particular instance (see also Badgett 2001).

Silence about relationship status or not participating in discussions of dating is also a way of projecting a heterosexual image (Boden 1994). Lesbian workers who thought they could pass usually assumed that others saw them as heterosexual if they did not mention girlfriends. Given the prevalence of relationship talk in some settings, failure to participate may instead be interpreted as a symbol of lesbian identity (Griffin 1998, p. 148).

As described above, many women believed that their appearance allowed them to pass as heterosexual. Therefore, such women sometimes passed as heterosexual to others or at least thought that they did pass. This group of women was more likely to fit conventional norms of feminine appearance. They managed their lesbian identities by not talking about girlfriends or lesbian-identified information. A few actively chose clothing that seemed to signal heterosexuality or avoided clothing that might make them look lesbian.

For Caitlin, passing as heterosexual was not her stated goal, but her appearance seemed to signal that she was heterosexual to many people.

> KS: Do you think you pass for straight if you choose to?
> CAITLIN: Easily.
> KS: Easily?
> CAITLIN: Unfortunately. My heart doesn't want to but--.
> KS: Most people say that. How do you try not to?
> CAITLIN: It's just a joke with my friends. They'll try and make me look more dykey or butch looking. They say forget it. Your gestures are very funny, movement everything. They laugh at my pitiful attempts.

Just as Dana earlier described her lesbian identity as expressed in her very appearance, Caitlin described her own passing as heterosexual seemed to her beyond conscious control. Even when she tired to look more "dykey or butch looking" to go to lesbian bars, her appearance and mannerisms were questioned by friends and onlookers.

Tina also noted that changing her appearance by growing her hair longer and wearing dresses in a new professional role tended to make it easier for her to pass as heterosexual. Tina reported that being less identifiable as lesbian was disappointing in her daily life and in her efforts to network in her fairly gay-positive professional life. At the same time, being able to pass worked well for her in situations where she was working with less accepting clients.

> TINA: I mean, it's a trade off. In an [organizational setting] where I feel generally pretty safe, I want to be out. I want the other lesbians I see walking around [to see me]; I want them to sort of catch my eye. I want to know other lesbians in my profession. And so it's really important to me there [at networking events for our organization.]
> But, you know, if I'm going out doing [client interactions] and I'm in a rural area, I'm pretty glad that people don't know, that people won't necessarily assume I'm a lesbian and don't think that I'm a lesbian. And sometimes it's useful. And it's not so imperative here for people, because, yeah, I think I do have enough friends, and I have a partner, and there's no need for me to go looking for lesbians.

Tina's comments nicely summarize the tradeoffs professionally for her in passing. While she felt less identifiable to colleagues, she also found being able to pass useful when working with clients who might have prejudices against lesbians. In those cases, her appearance served as a workplace asset. Other interviewees who thought that they might pass based on others' perceptions of their appearance chose to be implicitly out linguistically or symbolically, leaving it to their listeners to make connections between what they were saying or the symbols they used and the idea that they might be lesbians.

Implicitly Out: Linguistic Strategies

The tagline for a popular tee-shirt, "I'm Not a Lesbian, but My Girlfriend Is…" summarizes the most popular way for women to disclose lesbian identity. Many women reported that mentioning their girlfriend either in specific ways that indicated their romantic

linkage or in general ways that allowed others to make the inference about the relationship was their primary way of disclosing identity to others.[17] This strategy allowed lesbian workers to discuss their girlfriends without specifically naming the relationship as sexual or romantic.

Many of the interviewees reported being out to anyone who could "put two and two together," that is, anyone who could make inferences about their lesbian identity based on symbolic information or linguistic information (Boden 1994; Griffin 1998). The lesbian workers were aware that their method of disclosure required active interpretation on the part of listeners. It also required that listeners have the cultural knowledge to interpret their ambiguous statements or behavior as signifying a lesbian identity. This active interpretation required that the listener be aware enough of lesbian existence to imagine their coworker might be lesbian and accepting enough to put the information together. Some women presented this as a way of allowing listeners to hear only what they were ready to accept. By putting the responsibility for knowing in the minds of their listeners, lesbian workers could feel that they had not hidden their lesbian identity or girlfriend, while imagining that hostile or clueless listeners would not hear the disclosure as a statement about lesbian identity. This sort of implicit strategy (Griffin 1998) combined a feeling of greater integrity than covering lesbian identity, but also did not require the risks of openly acknowledging lesbian identity.

One example of the use of implicit strategies emphasizes listeners' and viewers' roles in sharing information. Tina shared a story of wearing a gay pride tee-shirt to her office job one day which emphasized that coworkers needed to be aware of the signals being sent.

> TINA: One day I did wear a gay pride tee-shirt into work when I expected that I'd mostly be working alone in my office. Later that day, I was talking with coworker and looked

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[17] In this section, I will refer to "girlfriends" as the primary identifier for interviewees' romantic or sexual partners and use other terms only when used by interviewees in direct quotes. For some women, "girlfriends" designated a woman's non-romantic friends, but it was used commonly in the lesbian community to refer to romantic relationships. Naming of relationships was sometimes contested, variable, and politically loaded. This was a historical period when Carrboro, North Carolina had made national news for allowing domestic partner registration.

86

down at my shirt and said, 'Maybe I shouldn't have worn this in to work.' She responded, 'I know what you mean. I'm always worried when I wear a tee-shirt to work too.' I really don't think she even got that I wasn't thinking about wearing a tee-shirt, but about what it said.

In this case, Tina's shirt included a printed message about gay pride; however, her coworker seemed to have missed that message completely. Tina was out to this coworker and did not think the woman was simply pretending to ignore the message, but rather that its message did not pierce her consciousness. In a similar way, without more information about coworkers' interpretations of lesbian identity management, some slippage is likely between what is being sent by lesbian workers and what others receive. Because implicit strategies require that others interpret signals, these strategies are especially prone to miscommunications.

Implicit strategies allowed women plausible deniability if being lesbian became problematic. Given Markowe's findings (1994) that lesbians tended to define lesbian identity in terms of relationships and shared lives, while heterosexuals tended to define lesbian as solely sexual, such a strategy focused the listener's interpretation on a specific relationship not an abstract idea of lesbian desire. Name-dropping or mentioning a girlfriend rather than naming oneself lesbian, for instance, claimed the significance of a relationship while not explicitly labeling it romantic or sexual. As Badgett (2001) notes, lesbians' disclosures are often labeled overly sexual in workplace settings, so implicit talk of relationships blunted some of the possible criticisms about 'flaunting' lesbian identity. Having specifically disclosed that one has a girlfriend, lover, or partner was much harder to plausibly explain as non-lesbian, if one met a homophobic reaction than was talking about having dinner or attending social events with another woman who might be a casual friend. As Erica noted:

> I think being part of a couple sort of puts you out there in different ways. I don't try to actively closet myself when referencing myself. I usually don't mention her name per se but my partner, so [they] could figure it out if they needed to.
> For Erica, this kind of visibility allowed her to balance a professional demeanor at

work with being able to mention her partner. Interestingly, her partner Sherri also used the

implicit disclosure strategy of not directly coming out, but disclosing nonetheless, by her

repeated mentioning of their daily activities to her coworkers.

> We all, we're together a lot. We like each other. We're really involved in each other's lives. There's always discussions about [who's doing what], like they'll know if Erica's sick or I know when they're sick or they're visiting or their granddaughter's coming in. We're really involved I each other's lives. I can't remember ever [not saying something], it was always like Erica this, Erica that. I don't think--there's never actually been a discussion like 'I'm gay.' Or 'I'm a lesbian.' It's always been sort of like Erica is my spouse.

For those who were in long-distance relationships and did not share daily life with

their partners, disclosing identity through the "name-dropping" strategy could be more

difficult. As Robin notes, having to signal a partnership without having the partner present

highlighted the use of the name-dropping strategy. In speaking about her difficulties

adjusting to a new job while her lover was in another town, she described this dilemma.

> I've been trying to sort of carve this professional life without having my lover here either. So, I'm kind of out as a lesbian, but I don't have my partner, so people aren't forced to deal with me as part of a couple.
> That's new too. I've usually been part of a couple. I've almost always been part of a relationship. Very short period of times [have occurred when] I'm single and usually always somebody there.

Robin described her pattern when her partner was present, as simply expecting

others to adapt to them as a couple. They would attend events together and exchange

news of shared daily activities. With her partner's absence making such moments

impossible, Robin found it harder to share information about her partner.

For many others using the name-dropping strategy, mentioning their partner

decreased emphasis on the sexual aspect of the relationship. Robin's experience suggests

that mentioning a partner or even identifying a woman as someone she was sleeping with

was easier for her than naming herself as lesbian.

> Love me love my partner, deal with it. I could come out by introducing, 'This is my partner.' or 'This is my lover.' That's an easy way to come out. Instead of saying, 'Hi, I'm "Robin", I'm a lesbian,' I say, 'Hi, this is Sybil who I sleep with.'
> So, I don't have that. I have these decisions about coming out.
> KS: You don't have to decide if she comes to this event or that event?

ROBIN: I don't have to decide that, but I do have to decide am I going to come out to this person in the absence of really needing to, since I don't have to explain why she's there. Which sounds like a trivial thing but in a way it's really not. I've really experienced that. It's very interesting. I don't have to come out here, but sometimes this relationship feels like a potentially significant relationship, and I always come out to people who are potentially going to be in my life in some important way or another. What do I do? I have an easy excuse [because Sybil isn't here].
KS: So how do you handle that?
ROBIN: I usually come out. It's funny sometimes I just say, I'm a lesbian or still use my partner (by mentioning seeing her)….
[Robin reports that the partner asks Robin.] Why do you use me to come out. 'Why don't you just talk about yourself?'
She's right but it feels so much easier sometimes. Maybe it's the L word or maybe it's killing two birds with one stone. I'm neither single nor straight, so they're not assuming. I don't know. I don't know why I do it. I often do that.
[Jokingly, she imagines an alternative direct statement.] I'm a lesbian, how are you?

As Robin notes, the partnership strategy allows women to signal their lesbian identity and partnership status in a few words. Robin notes that naming a relationship with another person is easier emotionally than making a direct statement about her own identity. Robin also points out that using her partner's name allows her to avoid saying the L word of lesbian about herself. Although Robin refers to sometimes telling others directly that she is lesbian, when imagining making such a statement, she feels nervous enough that she says it in a joking manner, not as a neutral comment.

Caitlin used a similar strategy in dealing with a male coworker who had pushed the limits of their friendship. He had not made direct overtures for a date or romantic event, but had repeatedly sought to extend their time together into non-working hours.

I know he did make inappropriate comments. Just [about] how pathetic his social life was and I know he made some [comments] about me and I know that he made some about the other woman to me. Just things like someone thought that the other woman was his wife. And he said, 'No I'm not that lucky.' That's inappropriate to me. Borderline, but I think it is inappropriate especially to say that in the workplace. But I know he made some inappropriate remarks.
And finally I said to him once, 'Please don't call me this weekend.' Because Monday but it's my one year anniversary and we're going to be celebrating, and I don't want to do any work.
He got this real confused look on his face. I could see him try to figure things out. He said, 'But, what you, you and who.' I said, 'Meredith.' He said, 'Oh, oh oh, okay,

okay. That's fine. I won't call you.' He never called me at home or very rarely maybe once every three weeks and he got much more appropriate.[18]

The name-dropping strategy mentioned above was the most common implicit strategy. As discussed above, it allowed lesbian workers to discuss their girlfriends without specifically naming themselves lesbian. In a few cases, interviewees spoke of using other types of words to reveal lesbian identity.

In a few cases, interviewees spoke of using other types of words to reveal lesbian identity. Tee-shirt slogans and bumper stickers could signal lesbian identity. As Tina notes, during her time as a part-time student worker, she often used tee-shirts to declare her commitment to lesbian and gay-related issues. She noted, "I was wearing gay and lesbian tee-shirts all the time. AIDS tee-shirts and, you know, sort of pride tee-shirts, and all sorts of shit like that." Others reported using tee-shirts with slogans about gay pride as markers of identity.

Interviewees such as Robin, Jackie, and Tina used implicit disclosure strategies by listing items on their job applications or résumés that might link them to lesbian and gay organizations. Listing gay and lesbian organizational affiliations or research interests on a résumé was considered a way of indicating lesbian identity---or at least interviewees assumed that such lines would signaled this identity to readers, as Robin explains:

> I had two versions of my C.V. One had on it that I [had participated in a gay-identified organization]. Little thing, not a big deal. Then I put it on there. I was very conscious I did that…It was interesting because I didn't really like plan it ahead of time? My queer packet and my non-queer packet. I realized later [that I had done that.]

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[18] Interestingly, the only women who specifically mentioned disclosing their lesbian identity to men were those who wanted to ward off male interest, those disclosing to a mixed-gender group all at once, and those who were disclosing to gay men. I did not probe for specific examples of disclosing to men or women, so this is merely a point for further research. It might be explained by the gender segregation common in these women's workplaces.

For Robin, this textual reference to lesbian and gay organizations was seen as a clear indicator of her lesbian identity in the academic jobs to which she applied. Her strategy is one way workers respond to their perceptions of possible discrimination based on written applications. Tina and Jackie both were both entering the job market for their first career-path jobs. Tina initially created a résumé that omitted her previous work that specifically identified her as lesbian, but found that doing so underestimated her qualifications significantly, because many of her qualifications were related to lesbian and gay organizations. Finally, she decided to list a key qualification that identified her as lesbian and then decided to list all of her gay-related experience, since the first would identify her to anyone reading closely to determine her sexual orientation.

Jackie, similarly, decided to list her relevant volunteer experience with a lesbian organization on her résumé.

> JACKIE: So, I'd done some volunteer work for [a lesbian organization]. And I think that's one of the reasons that I was hired, because I have done workshops and have some [leadership experience]. So, I was out on my résumé, and I was out through my interview process and that felt good to have---there was a way that I was out. I mean, I didn't say, 'I'm a lesbian. I work for [a lesbian organization.] But, I said, 'Well, I do this work,' and they can assume that I'm a lesbian through that.

Jackie's experience showed the benefits of listing her lesbian-related volunteer work. Her strategy was implicit, because she did not directly state that she was lesbian, but allowed the interviewers to infer it from the position. She later learned that her supervisor was impressed that Jackie had already done work similar to her new job, but cautioned Jackie to avoid being out in her interactions with clients in the new job. Because of her résumé, Jackie was identified as lesbian immediately in her new social service organization, and this shaped others' reactions both positively and negatively. Jackie was offered options to continue her work with lesbian clients, but was cautioned to add it to the job's previous requirements rather than dropping any of the past work to make room for serving lesbians.

As Taylor and Raeburn (1995) noted disclosures of lesbian identity often were noticed

by those reading curricula vitae. In their study of sociologists, people in hiring positions reported noticing such disclosures and a majority of respondents preferred not to hire those with activist lesbian and gay affiliations. Their findings suggest that activist affiliations are less acceptable even than simple statements of lesbian and gay identity. Approximately a third of respondents would hire someone with signs of gay or lesbian affiliation if the organizations were not activist-oriented (Taylor and Raeburn 1995). Other studies of discrimination have found that employers make assumptions about workers' competence, productivity, and commitment to work based on their gender and status as parents. Correll, Benard, and Paik (2007) found that mentioning involvement in parents' groups, and thus suggesting that workers were parents had significant negative effects in on mothers, but not fathers' desirability to employers reading applications that listed either male or female names but otherwise similar qualifications.

These studies suggest that even small amounts of information signaling that an applicant is a member of a stigmatized group may be used to deny them employment or to rank them lower as potential employees (Correll, Benard, and Paik 2007). Therefore, some interviewees, especially those in higher education and professional jobs where written summaries of their qualifications were the norm, sought to manage or even disguise evidence of lesbian identity in their written documents. As Tina's case illustrates, omitting evidence of lesbian and gay affiliations could lead applicants to present themselves as less-qualified than applicants who listed their own experiences. Therefore, this attempt to manage expected heterosexism by hiring committees could lead lesbian applicants to miss job opportunities for which they were qualified if all of their experiences were considered.

In a less common linguistic strategy, Dana used a necklace that spelled 'dyke' to display her identity. Because the word was difficult to read from a distance, people's attempt to interpret the letters led to frequent conversations about the necklace. As she noted, coworkers commonly noticed and commented on the necklace.

DANA: I have a necklace that is says 'Dyke'. Unless you ask, you can miss it. It says 'DYKE' in one clump.

KS: So it's subtle.

DANA: I have a necklace that is says 'Dyke'. Unless you ask, you can miss it. It says 'DYKE' in one clump.

DANA: So it's subtle.

DANA: It's very subtle. You know what, almost every time I wear it somebody asks. I say, 'It says Dyke' and they go, 'It does, doesn't it.'

Unlike symbols that were designed to display pride through in-group symbols, this necklace used a word that group outsiders were likely to interpret correctly as signaling her lesbian identity. As such, it was more explicit than the other uses of jewelry. Because it was somewhat difficult to read, the necklace also offered her a chance to discuss it with them and model her own casual reaction to being out as lesbian. Other people used symbolic markers of lesbian identity that required interpretation.

Implicitly Out: Use of Symbolic Markers

As Hebdige (1981) notes, group membership markers are often powerful signals of one's place in an identity group. Symbolic strategies relied on the use of images, appearance, or other markers of lesbian identity that the audience had to interpret to know that the worker was lesbian (Griffin 1998; Hebdige 1985). These symbols included symbols like rainbow flags and wearing their short hair in a 'lesbian' cut (Dugger 1995). Like the trendy young men Hebdige studied, the lesbian workers in this study drew on broader cultural norms about personal appearance, gender, and appropriate workplace appearance in crafting their personal appearances. Jewelry, hair styles, and clothing signaled information ranging from relationship status to culturally sanctioned taste to political beliefs (Dellinger and Williams 1997). In the following sections, I describe how interviewees used appearance issues to navigate identity management. As discussed above, these symbolic uses took place within workplace contexts coded by gender norms and sexuality norms. Some of the symbols, such as a lesbian-themed t-shirt, might be used in private settings

and discarded in workplace settings while others, such as hairstyles, carried over from private contexts to work contexts.

Wearing rings might signal lesbian identity or commitments to a specific woman. A few women wore single gold or silver rings on their left hand ring finger; while others used the right hand ring finger, or other fingers. Others wore multiple rings. As in heterosexual communities, most often wearing a ring on the ring finger was a signal of coupled commitment. In the late 1990s, some heterosexual and lesbian women used their right hands for wearing rings as a conscious variation on the traditional left hand used by marriage ceremonies. Others chose the left hand to specifically mark their symbols and thus their relationships as equal (through sameness) to those of heterosexual couples (Ayers and Brown 1999).

For instance, Dana spoke about the ways that wearing rings had both signaled a connection to her partner of several years and marked a cooler period in the relationship. In contrast to other couples who exchanged rings during formal ceremonies, Dana describes a casual process that reflected her and her relationships' overall style.

> DANA: Now Terry and I in the past have worn gold bands. I have had some question about that and we wore them on our right hands. People had asked about that or certainly took noticed of it. Some people have asked.
> We never did get married. We went and bought rings and came out of University Mall.
> [They exchanged a brief agreement to be partners.]
> Then, we gave each other rings and that was pretty much it, out in front of University Mall. But that was as formal either one of us is pretty much.

With equally little ceremony, the couple quit wearing their rings during a shift in the relationship. Although they discussed wearing them again, they each chose to wear one of a pair of earrings instead. As Dana notes, this latter symbol was less visible to others. Wearing the earring at work did not signal her relationship status (or create questions about it) as much as wearing the gold bands had.

> DANA: [After a brief vacation], when I came back I didn't have my ring on and neither did she. We hadn't really [discussed taking them off]; we have talked about putting

them back on…[A hard time they shared] brought us closer together, but I don't think we ever got back to a place where we even knew how to put the rings back on. We even talked about it like, 'We could put the rings back on.' Even last weekend, we were looking at rings. We go to look at them. We liked that--it really did kind of bond us together.
Although we bought a pair of diamond earrings and we each wear one of those. So that's kind of--it's sort of between us and nobody else really knows. The people at my work don't know necessarily that she's wearing the other one at her work. The rings are a lot more obvious. I don't know where we are in that. I know we both have them in our little jewelry trays. I don't know what's going to happen with that. We'll have to see.

Regardless of commitment to another person, rings, necklaces, and other jewelry signaled lesbian identity to some in this group. There were no clear patterns in wearing jewelry other than to mark committed partnerships. In the early 1990s, pink or black triangles, labryses, women's symbols, and rainbows, were all available for purchase at lesbian and gay events. Flyers for Gay Pride Festivals sometimes traced the history and meaning of various symbols.

Some interviewees wore jewelry specifically designed with lesbian words or symbols, while others did not. Like not wearing makeup or not shaving, not wearing any jewelry sometimes was used to mark lesbian identity (Dellinger and Williams 1997). As Robin noted in discussing her decreased interest in being emphatically out all the time, interviewees may also have been less interested in signaling their lesbian identity because they were not seeking new sexual partners or were developing a less salient lesbian identity (Markowe 1994).

For Stephanie, wearing lesbian-identified jewelry had been important in the past. Some of this declining importance she attributed to having fewer options that looked attractive. This shift also seemed linked to her efforts to fulfill professional appearance norms in her recently acquired professional position. She also mentioned that she was less inclined to use such signals now that she was out so visibly in other arenas.

STEPHANIE: I wear the same rings ninety-eight percent of the time. I have a couple of other rings that I'll add to what I wear everyday. I don't usually take off any of these but I may add other rings to them.

KS: Do you ever wear gay identified jewelry like triangles?
[Rather than continuing the discussion of jewelry, she shifts to symbols in her workplace.]
Jewelry, I used to wear rainbow earrings but I lost one of them. Most of the gay identified jewelry I have is not in good enough shape to wear anymore. But I'm adverse to wearing it. I don't really wear pink triangles because I don't care for that.[19]
STEPHANIE: I think at one time I did. Yeah. At one time I wore buttons. I had a button I used to wear on my jacket, my winter jacket everyday that said, 'Love Happens' and the v in love was a pink triangle. I also wore one that said something that said 'Crack is Peace' and I wore those everyday, but I don't anymore. I think I take myself more professionally now and buttons aren't a piece of that. I don't have any nice gay or lesbian identified jewelry.
KS: So it's more a function of trying to look professional and carrying--
STEPHANIE: If I did I would. If I had a bracelet or something I would.

Stephanie had been out for many years and attained a job position that required professional appearance norms. Michelle was a student worker who used an in-group symbol as a first step in coming out at work. At that time, she was not dating anyone seriously, so the indirect disclosure strategy of mentioning a girlfriend was not available.

MICHELLE: I don't know. How did I come out at work? I had a necklace. I had a Pride necklace[20] that I wore sometimes. So, whoever realized what it was, I guess, knew from that. And then I guess that is letting them put two and two together. But, yeah, I've never really explicitly come out to anyone at work. Either they've just, yeah, they've all just kind of picked up on it or been told by someone else.

Like Stephanie's jewelry, Michelle's necklace required that viewers interpret the symbol as signaling of gay pride, not simply see a series of rainbow-colored rings on a chain. Jennifer also used a Pride necklace to signal lesbian identity to her coworkers in her homophobic workplace. She suspected other gay men and lesbians worked in her large organization, so she wore a pride necklace to encourage them to identify themselves to her. Jennifer also made sure that her car was out. She had a rainbow bumper sticker on it and enthusiastically noted this as evidence that she was partially out at work. When I asked

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[19] Gay activists adopted the pink triangle symbol that Nazis assigned to gay men to subvert the negative meanings. Nazis used black triangles to mark lesbians and other sexually 'renegade' women. Lesbians have used them in an effort of reclamation.

[20] Pride necklaces included rings or other shapes in the rainbow colors of the Gay Pride flag. These ranged from inexpensive metal dog-tag styles to elaborately worked rare metals.

whether she thought coworkers would be able to put her together with her car in the large

parking lot at her organization, she agreed that it was unlikely. For her, both the necklace

and bumper sticker seemed to be important as efforts to make contact with others and to

make herself visible, more than simply communicative messages. These symbols were

aimed primarily at people who knew that rainbow imagery was associated with lesbian and

gay issues. When rainbow emblems were interpretable only by people in or conversant with

the lesbian community this functioned as an in-group symbol. As more people learned

about such symbols, the audience who might interpret them as symbols of lesbian identity

widened (Kulick 2000).

   Bumper stickers and tee-shirts with sentiments that were not overtly lesbian or gay could

also be used as symbols of lesbian identity. Stephanie noted:

   STEPHANIE: I have some stuff up in the [office]. I have Action Equals Life with

pink triangle. I have rainbows, a couple of small rainbow things.^a

   KS: That you have on the walls?
      STEPHANIE: That I have in my office. The Action Equals Life I have up in the
      [shared area of the workplace]. I have a couple of other bumper sticker type things
      in various places in the [shared space].

Like other symbols, these signs were visible images relating to gay and lesbian themes, but

they required that viewers interpret the meaning to fully recognize the signals she believed

that she was sending.

   As mentioned above, the lesbian workers who were implicitly out navigated cultural

norms about personal appearance, gender, and appropriate workplace appearance in

staging their personal appearances and conversations (Dellinger and Williams 1997). The

degree of conscious effort they put into these performances varied, but reflected skill in

balancing preferences with workplace contexts. While the final group who were explicitly

out was also sensitive to workplace contexts and norms, they crafted workplace identities that included explicit acknowledgment of their lesbian identities.

<u>Explicitly Out</u>

Being explicitly out meant that participants had directly told others they were lesbian or that they had others learned through their behavior that they were lesbian (Griffin 1998). Women who believed that they did not visually pass as heterosexual or who were politically motivated to disclose were most likely to be explicitly out. These women often used other strategies, such as being implicitly out, but had directly disclosed their lesbian identities to employers or coworkers, at some point. Those using the explicitly out strategy intentionally revealed lesbian identity to select others included both direct declarations of lesbian identity, directly naming another woman as a lover or girlfriend, and participating openly in lesbian-identified activities (Griffin 1998). A subset of this group was explicitly out to only a few people in their workplace. Being explicitly out to selected others was especially common for those who came out to specific friends as their relationship deepened from coworker to friend.

Laura's experience of explicitly coming out was motivated by a desire to reveal several parts of her identity at once. She had been working in a job for over two years and not disclosed her identity to others, until a series of events led her to shift her relationships with coworkers. After a difficult ending of a partnership, Laura took a short vacation from work for addiction counseling and to recover from the breakup. When she returned to her workplace of more than two years, she decided that she would no longer be closeted. At a staff meeting, Laura told everyone in her work group.

> I just put myself on the agenda. When we got to that, I told them that I had been gone because I was a lesbian and an alcoholic. Both had been really hard to

conceal from them. I knew that other people there had similar issues with drinking, so I thought it would be okay.

Laura's coworkers and supervisor reacted supportively and affirmed her as a valuable worker and person. She noted that she had worked in this setting for awhile before she came out, so felt that everyone knew and respected her. The workplace had a family-like feeling and tended to be supportive, she said, which may have influenced her decision to come out.

For Laura, coming out at work created an even more supportive work environment and lessened her struggle to conceal her troubles. Her story was significant because of its links to her own understanding of how lesbian identity fit into her work life. After that incident, she was out at work in subsequent jobs and felt that she better integrated her lesbian identity into a holistic view of herself rather than having it as a separate secret. For Laura and others who were explicitly out, telling their coworkers and supervisors made it possible to quit censoring information about their lesbian identities with those who knew their identity. They did not necessarily, however, come out to others outside of their closest coworkers.

Jennifer and Jackie shared stories of coming out to challenge heterosexism. Jackie spoke generally about her efforts to share information about lesbian issues in her workplace as an out lesbian. Jennifer reported that a male coworker with whom she was having a casual conversation was "spouting off" to her about gay issues and presenting himself as an expert because he had a gay family member. She felt that several of his ideas were incorrect and disclosed her own identity to gain authority as a lesbian insider to correct him.

JENNIFER: I just said, 'Well, I'm a lesbian, and I don't think that [view you just expressed] about what all gay people want.' I went on to explain that not every gay man likes to go to drag shows and that he was just making some really ignorant comments.

Jennifer spoke in response to this coworker's comments. She had not planned to be out in the organization because of its clear anti-gay policies which made her own disclosure somewhat risky; however, the coworkers' attitude of expertise in dispensing what she saw

99

as inaccurate information prompted her to respond. Her comments seemed to have

stopped the conversation, since the coworker and she never 'really talked' after that event.

Another final reason for disclosing lesbian identity explicitly was the desire to avoid

pressure to date men. Caitlin and some of the women who were young or conventionally

attractive found that direct invitations from men or on the men's behalf from their friends

were reasons to disclose their sexual identities. In most cases, a single instance of

invitation was not a reason to come out to avoid a date. Rather, it was a possible strategy

when repeated refusals were rebuffed or ignored. Beyond being explicitly out to specific

others, workers were sometimes publicly out to people in their workplaces or communities.

<u>Publicly Out</u>

A few of the women were publicly out to everyone in their workplaces and beyond. Their

visibility included not only a specific workplace setting, but also larger audiences. For them,

educating others about lesbian identity included participating in public events such as

speaking engagements and newspaper articles which identified them as lesbians. As

discussed in chapter five, Tina and Stephanie and others had strong political commitments

to identifying as lesbian in all aspects of their lives. While they were explicitly out to their

coworkers, their visibility extended beyond a specific workplace setting. For them, educating

others about lesbian identity included participating in public events such as speaking

engagements as out lesbians. After these events, they tended to assume that everyone

interested in their lives knew they were lesbians. Occasionally, they were surprised at

needing to tell someone else. Even for those who are committed to being publicly out,

because of staff turnover, coming out may be a continuing process (Dunne 1997).

Tina, taught college students and served as a guest speaker in college classes. She

referred to such guest speaking engagements as being "queer for a day" to reflect the ways

such talks prioritized her lesbian identity over other aspects of her life. In her own classes,

Tina had incorporated being explicitly out where appropriate. Sometimes this included

explicit naming, such as, "As I lesbian, I think…" Other times, she simply presented her

situation matter-of-factly as class members discussed their relationships or families.

> And this semester, I basically came out on the first day. Um, not like making a big
> announcement, but sort of using it in my discussion and my examples.
> If people talked about their families I talked about my families. 'Cause I asked them
> to draw their families [on the board] and then somebody said, well aren't you going to
> draw yours?
> And I said, do you want me to draw mine? And he said, yeah. And so, I drew my
> family on the board, and that was me and my girlfriend and our dog, and so I drew
> the picture on the board. (She continued lightly, but with some anxiety in her voice.)
> And I drew her parents and her sibs and my parents and my sibs and so…you know.
> It was….I was out the first day.
> Which was different. I didn't plan on it. But, I've now gotten to the point where it's
> not weird. And I'm not worried and if they've got a problem they can leave…

Tina had learned to adapt to opportunities to come out and take them when they

occurred. She also knew that her department would support her if students complained

about her coming out in the classroom, so she was cautious, but not frightened of potential

student complaints. Like Tina, Stephanie has been out in various settings for several years

and was politically committed to sharing information as a form of consciousness-raising. In

a then-recent mainstream newspaper article, she had been identified primarily as a lesbian

and not by other traits that were significant to the article's focus.

> KS: You kind of were saying the other day, you kind of felt like the newspaper had
> framed you in that way as a lesbian first.
> STEPHANIE: Right.
> KS: That that kind of undercut some of your efforts to be known otherwise too.
> STEPHANIE: Absolutely. Sort of like coming out to people after they know you a
> little bit because when you do that in my mind you change their perception of
> lesbianism. But if you come out to them first, you just change their perception of you.

Even for someone as explicitly out as Stephanie was, it was important to be able to

control how others saw her, especially when they might have a negative view of lesbianism

and thus develop a negative view of her before getting to know her. She also wanted to be

able to choose not to tell those she felt might hold prejudices. In another perspective, she

was confident that people who knew her before knowing she was lesbian would improve

their images of lesbians after meeting her, so she wanted opportunities to meet people without her lesbian identity preceding the meetings.

Respondents from a range of workplace settings had strategies that reproduced some of Griffin's (1998) typology of lesbian coaches' identity management strategies. The major difference between her work and the information from these respondents was that unlike some of the schoolteachers and coaches Griffin studied these interviewees did not feel pressured to create fictional heterosexual identities. Instead, interviewees were more likely to use linguistic and symbolic implicitly out strategies. A few were explicitly and publicly out as well. My findings support the idea that interviewees used strategies which de-sexualized discussions of lesbian identity or which allowed audiences to infer lesbian identity from mentions of partners or friends were more popular than explicit verbal coming out conversations.

<u>Outing Others</u>

In addition to managing their own lesbian identities, interviewees also reported on how others managed their identities in some of their answers. Interviewees' concerns about mentioning others' lesbian or gay identity revealed an important disclosure norm against outing someone in a public setting. Outing others, that is, revealing their identities without their permission did not seem to be acceptable to the interviewees. At the time of the interviews, a few theorists (Gross 1993; Signorile 1993) were suggesting that outing prominent people would promote greater lesbian and gay acceptance and punish gay people who promoted anti-gay agendas, but interviewees did not generally share such views. Control of information was very important to lesbian workers. They wanted to control who knew their status where possible and feared having this identity revealed by others without their control. When I asked a few of the interviewees specifically about their opinions on outing others, they responded that they did not support the practice generally. Comments like, "I think people have to decide what's best for them," and "I wouldn't want to

hurt someone else," and "You just never know what people are dealing with," showed their willingness to allow individuals to determine how to manage their identities in their own situations. A few of the interviewees did support Signorile's main point that outing gay men or lesbians with political or economic power who were supporting anti-gay agendas could be appropriate.

In other ways, interviewees expressed their sense that each person should be able to decide how to manage her or his own identity information. While interviewees were comfortable talking about their own experiences, they routinely did not name other lesbian or gay people by name without assuring themselves that this information would never become public or get back to the person mentioned. This was true even when the other person was out in the workplace herself or himself. For instance, in talking about an out gay coworker, one respondent described someone as "just very out. He kind of flames a little bit, doesn't he? He's one of these warm, kind of charismatic people that hides nothing." As she thought of an important story regarding him, she confirmed again that I would change names. Then, she described what she and coworkers had known about "David's" relationship problems, continuing in a whisper despite the fact that we were in a closed room. Other respondents would begin a story and stop themselves when realizing that they were sharing information about someone else. I found that reminding them that names would be changed enabled them to share the information---and confirmed that their concern was protecting others' privacy.

The importance of this norm about outing others was further confirmed in another interviewee's situation. This woman was publicly out herself and comfortable talking about her own lesbian identity, but she did not expect that her partners would necessarily be as out as she was. She discussed the fallout in a previous romantic relationship where she had mentioned someone she was dating in a public forum about gay and lesbian families' struggles for legal recognition. Her feeling was that the story had not disclosed any

information about her girlfriend, but the girlfriend's concerns over being outed ended the

relationship. Following is her description of the situation.

> Without using any names, I said, 'Well I'm involved in someone who has kids and I
> tell you that's really changed my perception about the [family] law [on adoption]'
> because what I'd come to realize was that I could lose. It could hurt them; things that
> I say and do could have an effect on their lives and that's changed my perception
> about things.
> Well, [Natalie] wasn't there; she got there late. When she got there, I had already
> spoken, so I said to her, 'Well I talked about you and your kids.' She was furious. I
> never got a chance to explain how I talked about her and her kids. She left and we
> walked out together. We were going to her house, but we were in separate cars, and
> by the time I got to her house, all my stuff was on the porch.

This example also showed the power that past disclosure events might have on present

and future methods of handling identity management, since the interviewee reported that

this had shaped her later methods of talking about girlfriends. She also she later chose to

date only those who would be out in ways similar to her own strategies of public disclosure.

<u>Review of the Methods of Identity Management</u>

This chapter has discussed the issue of passing as heterosexual as a central concern in

literature on lesbian workers. Some lesbian workers reported that they did not pass

because they perceived themselves as fitting stereotypes of lesbian workers. Among those

who do not feel that they pass, managing an already revealed identity leads to particular

strategies of carefully choosing a workplace that will accept their lesbian identity. Lesbian

workers who believed that they could pass used strategies ranging from passing as

heterosexual, through being implicitly out, to being explicitly out. The most popular forms of

disclosing identity were indirect---either through dropping clues about lesbian issues or

mentioning a partner. A few women used direct statements to reveal their identities to

others.

H

ow lesbian workers managed their identities at work varied depending on what they thought

they were managing. In the following chapter, what it means to women to be "lesbian" and

how it intersects with their workplace identities is explored in more depth. As mentioned above, interviewees who believe that they are immediately visible as lesbian, may consider their identity an open secret since their appearance 'gives them away.' For some women, being lesbian is a problematic identity while for others it is simply a part of their overall identity. Other lesbians saw their identity as a part of their holistic self or as personal information that did not belong in the workplace, or as a politicized identity whose revelation might change social acceptance for all lesbian and gay people. Each of these meanings had significant effects on the daily identity management strategies women used in their work interactions.

CHAPTER FIVE

MEANINGS OF LESBIAN IDENTITY

Most of the research on lesbians at work has focused on how lesbians disclose their identities and under what conditions such disclosures occur. While this project continues those efforts, this chapter expands the focus to ask, "How do lesbians' understandings of their lesbian identities influence how they manage these identities?" This chapter explores interviewees' perspectives on two central issues: the meaning of lesbian identity in their lives and how those meanings affect their workplace interactions. While Chapter Four focused on how lesbian workers enacted their identities in their workplaces, Chapter Five shifts the frame from people's reports of their actions to the meanings they gave those actions. This analysis suggests interviewees sought to enact their identities in ways that supported the kinds of identities they claimed. As discussed in the literature review, some of these choices were conscious and strategic, but I will suggest that many of their actions were reflective of efforts to sustain identities that were not consciously enacted and were more similar to improvisations on expected dance routines than on calculated action (Swidler 2000).

In the study by Lindsay et al (2006) described in the literature review, lesbian-parented families described their strategies of disclosure in mainstream school settings. Their analysis sorts through the many ways lesbian-parented families could seek to share information about their families. Similar differences in strategies of disclosure also affect lesbian workers' interactions. For instance, someone who thinks about lesbian identity as an essence which

her body illumines may enact lesbian identity differently from someone who believes that personal information should be kept separate from workers' work contexts, no matter what the personal information is.

Lindsay and her coauthors (2006) suggested that creating a typology of the ways lesbian-parented families preferred to interact with mainstream authorities helped them differentiate individuals' and families' understandings of sexual orientation rather than simply seeing them as responding to their organizational contexts. I propose that using their typology of private, secretive, and proud to forms the basis for a typology of strategies of disclosure in workplace settings (Lindsay et al 2006). In describing these strategies, I use the terms embodied, compartmentalized (private), normalizing, and political (proud) to reflect the ways interviewees described their strategies of disclosure. A summary of interviewees' primary strategies is listed in Table 1. My typology does not include a secretive group who talked about hiding their identities from others that Lindsay noted. The compartmentalized group did seek to keep private information, but did not report actively lying as some of the families in the Lindsay study did. Lindsey and her co-authors (2006) also did not discuss the experiences of families whose members might have felt immediately visible as lesbian. For some of the women I interviewed, this sense of visibility led to particular strategies of disclosure leading me to describe them as an embodied group. Finally, both their category of proud and mine of political draw attention to the strategies of disclosure of lesbians who are proud of their identities as lesbian; however, I chose the name political to highlight that feminist or anti-oppressive ideologies were motives interviewees in this group discussed, not simply an apolitical pride in themselves. Because of the relatively high number of feminist academics and non-academic politically active interviewees in my sample, I believe that the sample may have had a higher proportion of politically-motivated lesbians than in the general population.

Like most scholarly and popular press accounts of sexual identity in the mainstream settings, Lindsay et al (2006) leave unstated their assumption that lesbians who wish to do so can appear to be heterosexual to heterosexuals.[21] Britton and Williams (1995), for instance, argue that lesbian and gay people face a different situation from visible ethnic minorities, because their minority status may not be easily coded based on visible cues. In this way, lesbian and gay identities are assumed to be discreditable identities that can be managed using identity management strategies rather than being visible stigmas (Goffman 1963). My findings suggest a linkage between workers' interpretations of their identities as manageable or visible does affect identity management, but also that those who feel that their appearance allows them to be presumed heterosexual have diverse understandings of the meanings of sexual identity in their lives.

Vera Whisman's (1996) study of whether lesbians and gay men thought their homosexuality was a choice showed that people's interpretations of the cause of their homosexuality linked to differing understandings of that identity. When people thought homosexuality was determined by some force outside themselves (biology, nature generally, or other factors), they acted like those with discredited identities in Goffman's sense by managing the spoiled identity and sometimes trying to change the meaning of the identity. As Whisman (1996) demonstrated, people who see being gay or having a gay identity as a choice had more politically nuanced interpretations of their identities than did those who saw gay identity as something out of their control. What I suggest below is that the women in the embodied group perceived their lesbian identity as somehow 'written on their bodies' and not within their control. Whether or not their visible or behavioral

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[21] Whether other gay people can determine a person's sexual identity without disclosure remains a hotly debated topic. In this paper, passing refers to passing as heterosexual to heterosexuals.

108

characteristics were interpreted by others as identifiably lesbians, these women believed

and acted as if they were visibly lesbian.[22]

Published accounts of lesbian and gay men's coming out processes at work have

been highly selective in the groups of workers they interviewed and have generally

uncritically advocated for clear positions on coming out either for or against coming out in all

settings (Friskopp and Silverstein 1995, Lonberg and Philips 1996, McNaught 1993, Winfeld

1995). Those in the gay press have usually been highly in favor of coming out in all or most

settings as a move for visibility and increasing non-gays' awareness of the numbers of gay

people. They also have tended to frame gay and lesbian people's claims to equality in the

workplace around models of sameness. These models argue for giving lesbian and gay

workers equal treatment to heterosexual workers (Winfeld 2006). These accounts rarely

question the larger issues of why sexuality is part of organizational culture or why things like

marital status rather than choice of dependent are the basis of daily practices and

institutionalized policies. A representative collection of workplace coming out stories had

the following comment from a gay man named Michael Andriote. He said:

> I felt frustrated that I couldn't discuss anything about my life—from the mundane to
> the intense—with my coworkers. I felt disconnected, alienated, and awkward, as if I
> were only half there. It may seem like a trivial complaint to be unable to talk about
> my personal life at work, but as I thought about it, I realized that straight people enjoy
> an openness with one another that is fundamental to any relationship. I was feeling
> dissatisfied because I couldn't have that too. My personal life is not strictly
> personal…(Andriote in Rasi and Rodriguez-Nogues 1995)

Comments like Andriote's commonly contrast gay men and lesbians' experiences at

work with those of non-gay or lesbian people whom he and other writers presume do not

face such conflicts about what parts of their personal lives to share at work. These accounts

also highlight the role of coming out in making it possible for lesbian or gay workers to

experience either an ability to share information such as weekend plans with co-workers or

to be treated in a discriminatory fashion. In the chapter below, I explore how people using

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[22] Again, I had access to little information about how others saw these interviewees.

normalizing strategies like Andriote who want to be treated like their co-workers disclose

their lesbian identity, while those with other views of the place of lesbian identity at work

pursue different identity management strategies.

        To help explain women's interpretations of the meaning of their identities, I identified

four strategies of disclosure that help to categorize how lesbian workers described their

identity management strategies. I categorized participants into these groups based on their

discussions of identity and the strategies that they reported using most frequently. None of

them used one strategy exclusively. Their strategies are summarized in Table 3.1 and in

Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Interviewees by Rhetoric Type

Pseudonym	Primary Strategy	Ever Partnered
Diane	Compartmentalized	Y
Jordan	Compartmentalized	Y
Melissa	Compartmentalized	N
Rachel	Compartmentalized	N
Stacy	Compartmentalized	Y
Dana	Embodied	Y
Kim	Embodied	Y
Angela	Normalized	N
Laura	Normalized	Y
Michelle	Normalized	Y
Jennifer	Normalized (Political)	Y
Sherri	Normalized (Political)	Y
Christine	Political, Normalized	Y
Erica	Political, Normalized	Y
Jackie	Political, Normalized	Y
Joelle	Political, Normalized	N
Caitlin	Political	Y
Robin	Political	Y
Stephanie	Political	Y
Tina	Political	Y

        Note: Those whose names are in bold type (Dana, Kim, Michelle, Erica, Robin and
Stephanie) believe that they often do not pass. Stephanie and Robin answered that they
thought they could not pass when asked directly, but later offered examples of others
assuming that they were heterosexual.

Calling these strategies of identity embodied, normalized, personal/professional, and political highlights the ways that interviewees' understandings of identity and workplace situations led to different strategies of action (Swidler 2001). These strategies led them to see different numbers and kinds of openings for disclosure as well as leading to varied methods of 'doing lesbian identity' in their workplaces. Drawing on West and Zimmerman's discussion of doing gender (1987) and later applications of these ideas (Zimmerman 1992), the discussion looks at how women enacted identities.

How interviewees interpreted their identity helped to shape how they managed that identity in their workplace. Whether they saw being a lesbian worker as 'stamped on their foreheads,' as a piece of personal information irrelevant at work, as a relevant part of their total life where personal and work issues overlapped, or as part of a mission to change social norms, these meanings influenced what they did at work and what those actions meant to them. As discussed in detail below, the embodied group felt they were managing an already disclosed identity. The normalized group saw lesbian identity as an ascribed identity which they expected to be treated similar to others' sexual identity. The compartmentalized group, as their name suggests, believed that lesbian identity was a personal identity to be kept separate from their workplaces. Finally, the political strategy group saw lesbian identity through a lens of power and tended to follow the dominant lesbian political ideas of the time which advocated coming out to others as a way of building lesbian visibility and acceptance.

Looking and Acting Like a Sexual Being

Much of the work about sexuality in workplaces has focused on sexual harassment issues, so less is known about the consensual practices and daily enactments of organizational sexuality (Hearn and Parkin 2001; Wiliams, Giuffre and Dellinger 1999). Other authors have

111

suggested that mainstream organizational literature assumes that workers are ideally

heterosexual men whose sexuality is subsumed in workplace interactions (Hearn and Parkin

1995). However, as Wiliams and her co-authors note, feminists have challenged this

perspective to show that workers not only 'bring in' their sexuality when they enter

workplaces, but also engage in a variety of sexual practices at work, some pleasurable and

some distressing (Wiliams, Giuffre and Dellinger 1999). They call for more discussions of

the ways that workers understand and enact their sexualities in organizational settings

through ethnographies of how workers manage public and private settings and especially of

how those with marginalized sexualities manage these identities at work (Wiliams, Giuffre

and Dellinger 1999, p. 78). Before turning to the specific meanings workers gave to having

lesbian sexual orientation, I will briefly note the ways that workers' sexualities may be

submerged in desexualized framings of their bodies and identities or highlighted by their

visibility as sexual minorities.

Disclosure of lesbian identity was not always within the workers' control. Women's

sexual orientation is sometimes revealed through discoveries of workplace dating or sexual

relationships. In this study, I found no evidence of unintentional disclosures either through

relationships becoming known. Others report on women whose identity is revealed through

revelations of affairs or other evidence of lesbian activity (Britton and Williams 1995, Dunne

1997). None of the women in this study had their lesbian identity revealed through

disclosure of dating or other activity, although Stephanie was questioned about whether she

was lesbian when a college professor suspected she was dating a friend. Unlike other

studies (Schneider 1984, Weston 1995), I found only two cases of interviewees dating

coworkers at the time of the interview and three others who had previously dated coworkers.

In one on-going couple, the interviewee and her girlfriend worked in the same setting,

though not directly together. In the other couple, the women worked for the same large

organization, but did not work in the same area of the organization. Both sets of women

kept the information secret from coworkers. Both relationships were relatively recent at the time of the interview, and neither believed that anyone else knew they were dating coworkers Therefore, the discussion of women's dating practices explores only the context of interviewees' dating of people outside their employing organizations.

The interviewees reported on varying levels of feeling like sexual beings at work. As discussed below, interviewees in the embodied group felt that their sexual identities were visible or noticeable to everyone. Whether they downplayed the sexual aspect of that identity by talking about non-sexual issues relating to their partners or introduced a playful banter about sex, they saw themselves as markedly sexual beings. Other interviewees reported that coworkers seemed to interact with them as either non-sexual or as heterosexual. In talking with women about whether their coworkers saw them as lesbian or heterosexual, Stacy observed:

TACY: They see me as fat. That trumps everything else.

S: So, they don't see you as lesbian?

TACY: I don't think they think of me in that way at all.

Stacy's experience had been that her coworkers tended to think of her as asexual or as outside of the dating world they sometimes discussed. Although no one else was so direct in analyzing her marginalization in workplace relationship conversations, the lack of questions about dating or marriage aimed at many interviewees suggested that they were not being seen as part of heterosexual dating life.   As Stacy suggested, this pattern of 'not asking' may also have been coworkers' belief that these interviewees were not attractive to men. Pitman (1999) suggests that many observers conflate conventional attractiveness with heterosexual identity, so that women who do not fit appearance norms may be assumed to be lesbian or simply as a woman who cannot get dates with men.

Heterosexuals who are coworkers of women they suspect are lesbian may be avoiding potentially difficult conversations. Initiating dating talk with someone they suspect may be lesbian follows norms about not asking someone directly about their sexuality. Other norms about what can and cannot be comfortably asked may lead coworkers to ask whether someone is married, but not to probe for other relationship types (Messinger and Topal 1998).

Comparing Stacy's comment to reports three other women made of overtures for heterosexual dating, suggests that lesbian workers face differing opportunities for relationships with men and therefore have different identity management opportunities. Those who reported overtures from men, did so in the context of explaining how they had disclosed their lesbian identities to avoid further dating requests. Other moments of men's interest, such as reciprocated flirting, were not offered in interviews.

Caitlin, Robin, and Stephanie were attractive women by mainstream heterosexual standards. All of them reported being able to pass as heterosexual and felt that they did pass to most people. Caitlin had emphasized how her appearance often led lesbians and heterosexuals to assume that she was heterosexual. The others reported following many feminine appearance norms when talking about their appearance, and mentioned instances where men in their workplaces had seen them as possible dates. All three also had male coworkers or business contacts, in comparison to some of the interviewees who worked in all-female settings. From the interviews, it is not clear what signals other than appearance their behavior created to allow male coworkers and clients to assume their interest in dating. To manage male interest, each of them had disclosed her lesbian identity to manage dating invitations or perceived interest in her as a potential date.

As noted in the section on implicit strategies, Caitlin mentioned an anniversary party with her partner as a way to defuse her male coworker's interest. She explained that he had made several comments she felt were inappropriately personal, not directly sexual

harassment, but as borderline to sexual harassment and inappropriate for the workplace. For Caitlin, clarifying that her housemate was also her romantic partner reinforced boundaries against dating her coworker. This event allowed her to continue working with someone who had ignored her previous indirect attempts to avoid his invitations and bids for non-workplace attention.

Caitlin had a past history of problems managing potential male interest in her workplaces. In her previous social service job, women workers often socialized with each other and discussed their heterosexual dating experiences. In that job, Caitlin's co-workers attempted to schedule dates for her with their male friends and relatives. She described these repeated attempts as very uncomfortable for her, since she was afraid that disclosing her sexual identity would cost her the job. Instead, of telling her coworkers she was lesbian or simply not interested in dating, she used indirect statements, remained socially distant from coworkers and changed jobs as quickly as possible. Remaining socially distant often has economic consequences as well as social ones if the worker is seen as unfriendly and as not fitting into the organization (Badgett 2001; Friskopp and Siverstein 1999). Because the job had provided unique career opportunities, Caitlin also found her long-term plans stalled when she changed jobs to avoid the frequent discussions of heterosexual relationships.

Stephanie also reported more than one experience where men expressed interest in dating her. Generally, she simply expressed disinterest and deflected the overtures. For instance, after agreeing to have dinner with a client from out of town, she realized he thought they were having a date. The most troubling of these stories concerned a sexual assault by a powerful man in a previous organization. She reported the situation to supervisors, but he claimed that it had been a consensual encounter. Initially, authorities believed his claim that event had been consensual, but she convinced them it had been unwanted.

The irony in Stephanie's situation was that her lesbian identity provided a measure of support in her claim that it had not been consensual. Because she was out in the organization and was well-known for her work with gay and lesbian causes, the organization eventually believed her account of the assault. He was not disciplined directly by the organization and ignored orders to keep his distance from her. This experience had long-term consequences as she later was unwilling to take desirable jobs in organizations where he worked. It also interrupted her own career trajectory, because the incident interfered with specific time-sensitive career plans for her.

Stephanie's story echoes those of women in Beth Schneider's (1984) study of lesbian and heterosexual women workers' experiences. Schneider found that lesbian workers reported higher rates of sexual harassment than did heterosexual workers. In her study, it was not clear whether lesbian workers were specifically targeted for harassment or whether, as she argued, they were more likely to report harassment instead of taking it for granted. This question deserves further study.

Even if lesbian and non-lesbian women are equally vulnerable to sexual harassment, lesbians may report at higher rates because their disinterest is more likely to be believed by others (Williams 1992). Lesbians also may be less likely to blame themselves for the harassment than are non-lesbian women who may feel responsible for some part of the encounter, especially if they had enjoyed parts of it such as casual flirting (Phillips 2000).

Robin less directly noted that she felt the need to manage men and women's interest in dating her. She reported that she finds it useful to situate herself as both lesbian and partnered. Robin described how she told people, especially those with whom she expected to have a significant friendship relationship about her partner as a way of coming out. She did not mention a specific dating invitation, but she noted that discussing her long-distance partner allowed her to signal her lesbian identity and partnership status in a few words. Robin was the only lesbian employee in a job where personal issues were often discussed

openly and extensively with coworkers. Like the editors at a feminist magazine in Dellinger and Williams (2001) study, she faced an organizational culture that made such identity disclosures not only relevant, but nearly mandatory.

Like Caitlin's mention of her anniversary party, Robin's discussions of her partner situated her as lesbian and partnered rather than as single and lesbian or single and heterosexual. Rather than waiting for a specific invitation to occur, Robin forestalled such invitations by coming out as a partnered lesbian. This strategy was clearly used by others who avoided questions about dating by defining themselves as partnered, but Robin was most emphatic about making her interactions easier by defining herself as not-single.

While the majority of interviewees felt that they could pass as heterosexual and some even dealt with heterosexual dating offers, the degree to which each interviewee interacted with others as a sexual being varied. Some seemed invisible as sexual beings while others were visible as lesbians or presumed to be heterosexuals eager to participated in courtship rituals at work. In the following sections, we explore how lesbian workers interpreted the meanings of their lesbian identity and how these interpretations shaped their identity management strategies.

Embodying Lesbian Identity

The women whom I categorized into the embodied identity group believed that their appearances usually signaled that they were lesbian. For them, the challenge of identity management at work and elsewhere was managing how people would respond to their lesbian presence. These women believed that their bodies fit social stereotypes of lesbians (Erickson 1999; Esterberg 2000; Halberstam 1998). The stereotypes they used were historically specific links to stereotypes of identifiable lesbians as linked to butch imagery including short hair, wearing mostly masculine-coded clothing, and refusing certain feminizing practices such as wearing makeup (Esterberg 2000; Kunkel 2003). For these women, this gendered presentation feels like an expression of their deepest selves

117

(Erickson 1999), although they may also note that there are times when they are performing in ways that reinforce this image (Crawley 2001). For this group, the key issue was how women who believe that their bodies are marked in some way as lesbian manage their identities at work?

The embodied group of women argued that their bodies and their appearance marked them as lesbians.[23] The embodied group felt that their bodies would not allow them to pass, so that being out was the only option they had. Kim and Dana offered the clearest articulation of the embodied strategy of disclosure of lesbian identity. Another woman spoke of her body as looking lesbian sometimes, but did not elaborate even after further questioning.   As mentioned, these women believed that others could tell that they were lesbians based on visual markers. "Look at me. How could they not know?" was Kim's comment when I asked whether she was out at work. She pointed to her denim overalls and short hair as she spoke.

For Kim, this sense of her body extended to thinking about how the shape of her body, a non-curvy, heavy body with large "lesbian hips" that made denying or hiding her lesbian identity impossible. Dana, likewise, felt that her appearance marked her as a lesbian. Both women also noted that their usual clothing, including overalls, pants, and button-down shirts as well as short hair marked their appearances as lesbian.

Dugger's 1996 satirical *The History of Lesbian Hair* plays with this widely held belief that lesbians could be identified by certain physical markers. For instance, the book's cover art revises the Mona Lisa by giving the subject a supposedly lesbian haircut that was short on the sides and long on top. As noted in the previous chapter, short hair was widely linked to lesbian identity in this group, despite the fact that many of those who felt they could pass had hair as short as those who felt distinctly marked. Interestingly, for the women in the

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[23] They also used the term "dyke" to refer to themselves. It was an in-group term that felt more comfortable for using in talking with a lesbian interviewer than did lesbian, according to Dana and others.

embodied category, hair length and clothing styles were naturalized as parts of themselves and were reported as unchangeable in contrast to the women in other categories who felt more able to actively manage their identities. Dana did report some differences in her past and present clothing choices, but saw all of the range as marking her as lesbian.

Their direct disclosures were based on assumptions that people already knew, so that they were not really disclosing new information as much as building on shared knowledge. Many of the day-to-day experiences they reported reinforced the notion that others already knew they were lesbian. Kim, for instance, spoke about routinely being greeted as an in-group manner by other lesbians whom she did not know. At work, managing these already-revealed identities led to talk about their partners in ways that clearly marked their relationships as lesbian partnerships. For instance, Dana reported talking with coworkers about her partner in detail including what they had for dinner. She also used comments about her happy home life to offer advice on work-family balancing to a male coworker who she felt was spending too much time at work and jeopardizing his marriage. He also was pressuring Dana to work longer hours to match his.

> DANA: I've tried to tell him. I have a fulfilling personal life and a person who really loves me and that I really love. We kind of cherish the time we spend together. You're going to have to put up a nice pretty picture to compare with it. We bought a hot tub… We get in it and we spend time like when we get home from work and it's a great time to visit. We both get in it and we talk about our day and how it's going and it's just been a real good thing physically and mentally. It's a good--it's a very smart thing to do. I told Mike I was like, 'You're competing with the love of a good woman and a hot tub. So good luck to you.' And he knows. I think he is a little off-guard that I am so out.

Dana's talk about her partner both drew on her coworkers' knowledge of her lesbian identity and on an idea that her partnership was not only equally valid as his, but perhaps of a better quality. She used humor to make the point, saying 'You're competing with the love of a good woman and a hot tub," but refused to work longer hours on the grounds that it would interfere with her relationship and personal time. As noted in the previous chapter, disclosing that one had a partner was a common strategy.

While other groups of women used talk about partners to disclose lesbian identity, they often did so in ways that remained somewhat oblique. For the embodied group, partners were described to others as partners or girlfriends, and direct strategies were used. After mentioning that she tended to talk directly about her partner, she reported her male coworker's discomfort with her ease in mentioning that she is attracted to women.

> DANA: I think he is a little off-guard that I am so out. I'll say things that are probably not all that PC. They talk about this woman who is the muffin lady who obviously to the men she's really, really good looking. I've seen her. She's just not my type. She's straight. I'm not that attracted to straight women, which is probably a blessing. Tim said, 'She was looking at me the other morning.' I said, 'Actually she was looking at me.' I can tell everybody goes [She mimes taking a second look.] and then they'll kind of laugh. It does, you know what I mean. It takes them--
> KS: And it kind of calls them on that…
> DANA: I don't think they know exactly what to do with it. Sometimes I don't know what to do with it. I'll say what they say sometimes. Because I could tell 'Bob' was like, 'Hehehehehe.' You know, it was funny but he wasn't sure if it was funny or not. It takes them off guard. I like it. I feel some freedom. There's freedom in being out. It makes them--they're the ones that have to be the uncomfortable ones. I'm not going to be uncomfortable anymore. Not that I ever really have been but I've seen people who were.

For Dana, making comments that positioned her as a sexual being who finds women attractive offers a sense of freedom. Being out as lesbian means that she does not have to hide or be uncomfortable and makes her coworkers responsible for managing their feelings. This is one of the few examples I gathered where lesbian workers increased the sexualization in their workplaces instead of desexualizing their conversations.

Dana and Kim both related instances of sharing information about their personal lives with partners in ways that assumed that others already knew they were lesbian. Kim noted, too, that others varied in their ability to read her presentation as lesbian. She found that older women were most likely to assume that she was heterosexual. Some of them, she argued, relied on cues other than her appearance such as her work for a religiously-affiliated organization to assume that she must be heterosexual. At the same time, she clearly believed that her body was marked as lesbian. This kind of inconsistency appeared

among interviewees in each group. While the dominant meaning they used for interpreting lesbian identity might be apparent, they would sometimes adopt other interpretations when describing particular situations. Overall, however, the insistence of the women who felt that their bodies were clearly marked all the time and those who felt that some aspects of their identity might be marked, are important because they contradict the idea that sexual identity is invisible.

<u>Normalizing Lesbian Identity</u>

Five of the interviewees treated lesbian identity as a sexual orientation that was part of a range of acceptable variations. They saw lesbian identity as an ascribed identity which they expected to be treated similar to others' sexual identity. As Whisman (1986) notes, this normalizing strategy has been a prominent theme in mainstream gay rights organizations and has wide acceptance by many lesbians and gay men. Gay and lesbian rights organizations have often used a normalizing strategy to argue for equal treatment of gay and lesbian relationships to those of heterosexuals (Andriote 1993, McNaught 1993, Winfeld 2006). The dominance of normalizing rhetorics in mainstream discourses meant that all of the interviewees mentioned normalizing strategies occasionally, even when their overall attitude toward lesbian identity was embodied, compartmentalized, or political.

Focusing on a normalizing view of lesbian identity framed lesbian identity as being about relationships, not sexuality, in ways that desexualized their disclosures. Many used the implicitly out strategy of mentioning partners and allowing others to interpret such mentions as disclosures of lesbian identity, if they chose to do so. For instance, Erica and Sherri whose stories are shared in the implicit disclosure section often talked about their daily lives as partners to coworkers.

For lesbian workers using this strategy, comparisons between the behavior of lesbians and heterosexuals were often made to show that the lesbians were acting like their co-workers. "When they are talking about their weekends, or what they did on their dates, I

just join in and talk about what 'Susan' and I did over the weekend," noted Jordan of her co-workers at a large company. For women in the normalizing group stressing the common themes between their lives and those of their co-workers were common. For instance, they might discuss dealing with everyday relationship conflicts or problems with a partner's parents. Tina's story of coming out to her class by discussing her family including her partner and their extended families (see page 101-102), was another example of framing lesbian identity in a way that normalized her family's structure and presented lesbian sexual orientation as tied to a family relationship not sexual practices.

These women tended to be in long-term partnerships with other women and tended to find their relationships parallel to those of co-workers who were married or cohabiting. While they were not unaware of economic and political differences in the social legitimacy of their relationships compared to those of co-workers, such differences were usually mentioned only in non-confrontational and even what they termed "educational" ways to co-workers. During the interview, for instance, Erica carefully detailed the extra expense she and her partner had undergone to protect each other financially that would have been automatic if they could have married. She noted that she tended to talk to her coworkers not about these issues, but about her daily life with her partner. Overall, these women tended to focus on building mutually supportive relationships with others at work and integrating partners into workplace social networks of talk and participation in events rather than on political analyses of their situations.

Because they saw lesbian identity as parallel to other forms of sexual orientation and their relationships as similar to heterosexual partnerships; lesbian workers who saw lesbian sexual orientation in a normalized way managed their lesbian identities to emphasize how they were similar to heterosexual relationships and identities. They treated lesbian identity as equivalent to heterosexuality and talked about relationships in ways similar to those heterosexuals use to discuss their relationships. Their specific normalizing strategies varied

122

depending on the dominant dating and partnership discourse in their particular work groups. These interviewees framed lesbian identity as a situation in which the only difference between lesbians and others is the gender of their partners. Suggesting that "We're just like straight people, except for who we date," gave several of the women a reference for how much to disclose based on how much their heterosexual coworkers spoke about their partnerships. At times, this highlighted heterosexist assumptions in a workplace or work group, but the normalizing group were less likely than the politically-oriented interviewees (discussed below) to emphasize the discrimination they experienced. Instead, they focused on sharing stories of their individual experiences. These stories might include information about inequalities, but they tended emphasize commonalities. In the following example, Lisa used a normalizing strategy while Jackie framed the issue in a political way.

Jackie reported watching a senior coworker model how to respond to heterosexist statements by coworkers in a normalizing way. Jackie and 'Lisa,' the only other lesbian employed at the all-woman organization were attending a workplace social event during Jackie's first week of work. Several of their heterosexual women coworkers were discussing wedding gifts and ways to "go whole hog because you're never going to have that experience again." Jackie reported that the women were not considering that the two lesbians present were unable to marry and were unlikely to receive equal social rewards for their partnerships. As Jackie struggled with how to respond to her new coworkers' comments, Lisa spoke using a normalizing strategy that showed the parallels and differences between her experiences and theirs.

> JACKIE: I felt frustrated because I wanted to say something. And I would, in so many other settings. But as it was my first professional job, I was feeling the constraints of, "Okay, what is this going to be for me?"
> KS: Right.
> JACKIE: And my co-worker said, 'Ha, that's really funny, when my partner and I had our commitment ceremony we got like six bird feeders and seven wind chimes.' And I [was amazed at how laid back she was about it. She was] laid back and kind of said it like, 'Huh, you know, its' really funny, you know, here's what our experience was like.' And I heard someone…say, "Oh, well did you register?"

123

And it was just classic. I just was like, 'Wow, that really sums it up, right there.' Their lack of awareness and understanding about the differences between us [as lesbians] and the privilege that they had as straight people getting married. And just to talk about it, you know, to the queer woman at the table, and talk about it so casually and so unthinkingly, just [a shock] to me.

KS: Has it been like, do you feel heterosexuality is assumed there?

JACKIE: [Many of those people have left, but] in their era, it was a whole, an entirely straight workplace. And it's not that way anymore.

Lisa shared the humorous complaining about duplicate gifts, but contrasted her bird feeders and wind chimes to the coworkers' more expensive appliances. Lisa framed her experiences as another example of wedding talk, while Jackie emphasized the heterosexual privilege she noticed. This discussion took place at a mandatory workplace social event and made Jackie feel less welcome and safe in that environment. She reported talking about it later with friends both as an example of heterosexual privilege and as a concern in her new job. Lisa had longer-term coworker relationships with the other women present and seemed to have a less intense reaction to the event. Jackie noticed that Lisa's 'laid-back' style had a long-term effect of increasing coworkers' acceptance of her as a lesbian, but also tended to depoliticize any differences in their lives. While the normalizing strategy allowed lesbian workers to discuss their partners and some aspects of their personal lives, it did so in ways that made naming discrimination or criticizing gender relations difficult. Seeing lesbian identity in normalized terms tended to also erase key aspects of lesbian workers' identities as sexual beings in workplace settings. Others have noted a similar domestication of women's sexuality when they are labeled as mothers rather than as wives or sexual partners (Hearn and Parkin 2001; Rich 1980). In both cases, relational roles are emphasized to diminish individual sexual identity and agency.

Compartmentalizing Lesbian Identity

Lesbian workers who adopted a personal/professional split in their identities were similar to the normalizing group in their tendency to see lesbian identity as an individual characteristic and to see their personal appearance as allowing them to control when they

124

would disclose information. The five women in this group believed they passed as heterosexual to others. The compartmentalized group members were more likely, however, to limit the times when they felt that sharing such information was appropriate in a work setting. They sometimes talked about what sorts of information were "professional" or "appropriate" to share in ways that highlighted their expectation that professionalism was an attitude of avoiding personal considerations in workplace settings (for a similar attitude, see Williams, Giuffre and Dellinger 1999, p. 86). Some of them illustrated the efficacy of this norm against disclosure by identifying that their heterosexual co-workers' were similarly reticent or by noting "unprofessional" problems created by heterosexual workers' disclosures. Friskopp and Silverstein (1995) similarly found closeted lesbians especially did not wish to introduce their own sexual identities into their workplaces and wished that everyone else would leave their private lives private as well.

These interviewees said that their lesbian identity was simply another "private" aspect of themselves that was rarely relevant in their workplace interactions similar to their religious identity or their hobbies. Rachel, for instance, noted that her lesbian identity was simply not important in her role as an executive assistant. That role called for her to manage her emotions and personal presentation to let others shine while her identity was mostly submerged. Like other pieces of information, lesbian identity might become relevant in some situations, but their focus on work tasks meant that they did often not find situations where lesbian identity intersected with work issues.

Their compartmentalizing strategy was not uniquely about lesbian identity; many workers create divisions between the interactions they have in their personal lives and work lives (Hochschild 1995). Often such divisions are created in order to manage potentially problematic intrusions of personal experiences or stigmatized identities into the workplace. Hochschild (1995), for instance, found that workers sometimes compartmentalized their work lives from their home lives as a way to gain relief from chaotic home lives in the orderly

125

nature of their work. Kelly and Stambaugh (1991) noted that workers also used compartmentalization as a way to diminish the spillover between their roles in families and organizations. Women workers were especially likely to worry that their gender roles and family roles would be seen negatively in their workplaces, so they attempted to selectively control what information from their family lives was shared with those in their workplaces (Kelly and Stambaugh 1991).

This compartmentalization seems to be useful for workers whose persona lives might be seen negatively by employers or coworkers. Correll, Benard, and Paik (2007) found that mothers were judged negatively in matched comparisons of applications and in employers' actual decision-making, even if their behavior at work was not affected by their motherhood. These previous studies suggest that compartmentalizing personal and work lives is a common strategy for workers who fear that their workplace will treat them differently if their personal information is known; however compartmentalizing can create the perception that the worker is unsociable or not a good fit for the organization. They may be caught in a double bind where disclosing lesbian identity creates sanctions, but not disclosing lesbian identity leads to a perception of unfriendliness that creates other problems (Williams, Giuffre and Dellinger 1999, p. 87).

Even beyond specific workplace or individual framings of lesbian identity as separate from workplace issues, the larger culture uses discourses of separation of public and private lives (Swidler 2001). Skidmore (2004) found that this type of compartmentalizing rhetoric was a common legal framing of gay and lesbian rights and identities in his study of legal cases. In such cases, lesbian identity was framed solely as a private identity without relevance to public policy or people's daily interactions outside their families.

Those who saw their lesbian identities as compartmentalized in the private sphere were mostly employed in support roles and in semi-professional occupations, such as social service workers in organizations with clear guidelines on appropriate sharing of information

126

with clients. These guidelines allowed them to think of themselves as having specific codes of conduct about separating the "personal" and work concerns in their lives. When workers were employed in subordinate roles and in temporary jobs they were more likely to report compartmentalizing their private and public lives. As noted above, Rachel's position as an administrative assistant encouraged her to diminish her own individuality relative to her more powerful coworkers. Others in this group in subordinate roles such as office staff member and student worker in a library saw their individual identities as not relevant to their work. Not all people in such roles defined their support work as meaning that their individual identities were irrelevant. Laura, the woman who put her coming out on a meeting agenda, worked in an administrative role. She had, however, been in that job for over two years and considered it part of her long-term career path rather than a means of supporting her education or 'real' goals for her work life. The workers who were in temporary jobs such as varied student work or summer jobs also noted that they tended to compartmentalize their personal lives from their work lives, except when they developed friendships with coworkers. Melissa, for instance, was out in a restaurant job to other gay and lesbian servers, but compartmentalized her identity during her temporary work in an office. Jackie reported similar strategies of compartmentalizing her 'real' personal life from her temporary work in varied jobs.

For compartmentalizing women, lesbian identity became an issue to disclose to co-workers when their personal and work lives began to mix. For them, most coworkers were simply coworkers with whom they spent little time. When they became friends as well as co-workers with others at work, they often disclosed their lesbian identities. As Laura's example suggests, length of time in a job allowed workers to build relationships with others and begin to trust that they would be seen as individuals who were lesbian rather than primarily as lesbians. The increasing verbal intimacy of friendly relationships was often signaled by time spent together outside of work. When they socialize with coworkers

outside work, they were then likely to tell close work friends about their partners or lesbian

identity. This compartmentalized identity group saw their lesbian identity as an issue that

was part of their personal lives and only relevant when they became friends with others. As

Diane noted,

> That's just not information that I think people should have about me. If we become
> friends, then I'd tell them, but generally, it's not appropriate for a workplace
> conversation.

> Unlike Diane, Stephanie was generally open about her lesbian identity; however

Stephanie noted that she did not feel it was appropriate to share information with coworkers

with whom she did not have a professionally close relationship.

> Yeah. If they asked me if I were gay or lesbian, I'd say yes. If I were put in the
> situation where it was going to matter, I'd say something. If somebody were trying to
> introduce me to a man or something, I'd say something. On the other hand, it seems
> extraneous to my relationship with these people. I mean, my boss I have thirty-
> minute conversations with once a month or once every six months. What's the
> point? And those thirty-minute conversations we talk about the four issues I need to
> discuss with him about work and that's it. I don't ask--I don't know anything about his
> personal life except what I've heard through the rumor mill and I'm sure he's heard
> rumors about me.

> Stephanie's comments suggest both that she sees personal conversations with this

boss as outside the scope of their relationship. Like those in temporary jobs, she maintains

a focus on the limited work relationship they have and does not include personal

conversations in their meetings.

> Jordan shared a specific example of how developing closer relationships might lead

to shifting away from compartmentalizing her lesbian identity from people at work. After

spending several weeks working with three women colleagues on a task, they attended a

conference together and socialized each evening. They shared stories of workplace

intrigues and began talking about their home lives. After two of the other women talked

about their struggles in getting the men in their lives, a live-in boyfriend and husband, to

finish building projects, they asked Jordan how she managed such tasks. Her ability to

motivate people was well-known in the company, so they implied that she must use those

skills at home with her presumably-male significant other too. Jordan described her answer

in this way,

> I told them that 'It's not really a problem for me,' (and they nodded as if I was really good at sweet-talking people.) Then, I said, 'because I date women. Usually if there's something like that to be done, then we do it together.' They blinked a bit and then nodded and said that they'd never thought of it like that. We went on to continue telling stories, and they seemed to think that in some ways, I had it better than they did.

As Jordan's friendly relationship with these women continued to grow stronger, they

treated her and her girlfriend just as they did heterosexual couples in their organization. To

some extent, they even treated the lesbian couple as somewhat exotic and especially

interesting (Williams, Giuffre and Dellinger 1999). While Jordan continued to pass at

heterosexual to other workers or at least compartmentalize her lesbian identity from her

work identity with most people, with these women, she was out and accepted as a partnered

woman.

Two of the women in the compartmentalized strategy group linked their tendency to

keep personal and professional matters separate to their own shyness or feelings of

reticence rather than to workplace situations. Diane, for instance, described herself as a

very private person. When asked why she did not disclose her lesbian identity to co-

workers, Diane remarked, "I just don't want them to have any information about me. I don't

want them to form any impressions of me based on that." For her, this disinclination to

share personal information extended to other matters such as health issues that she was

unwilling to share with co-workers; it was not only about lesbian identity issues. In general,

she preferred to keep separate what she saw as different spheres of her life. The next

section discusses the strategies of disclosure used by the women who saw lesbian identity

as a political issue.

Politicizing Lesbian Identity

In contrast to the guardedness of the compartmentalized group, eight of the women had a clear commitment to coming out in order to increase lesbian visibility and free themselves to speak out more widely on gay/lesbian and bisexual issues. Four of them fit the description below, but also often spoke in normalizing language that suggested their daily lives were shaped by normalizing lenses of relationships and individual issues; however they could and did analyze lesbian identity issues with an awareness of heterosexual privilege.

While these women varied in how they expressed their identity (through verbal strategies or using symbols like pro-lesbian literature or rainbow flags), all of them had a clearly articulated sense that their identity was not simply a personal trait but also an identity that had political meaning. They spoke more about their overall political analysis of lesbian identity through feminist lenses instead of only their individual relationships or experiences. For them, a broad academic feminist analysis of gender and sexuality had created an understanding of lesbian identity as a stigmatized identity whose meaning could be shifted as part of larger identity politics work (Broad 2002; Dellinger and Williams 2006). Speaking openly about their lesbian identities and educating others (formally and informally) about lesbian and gay issues was central to this group's sense of how to be lesbian. These discourses also sensitized these interviewees to issues of heterosexism and heterosexual privilege present in their workplaces (Dellinger and Williams 2006).

For some interviewees, like Christine, the political implications of their identity were embedded in organizational situations. In Christine's career in law and especially during the law school process, questions of sexual identity were common themes for action and debate. Others have written about the ways that many law schools' expectations that students will use their own experiences to reason about laws often leads to pressure to come out, which can be very difficult for those who prefer a compartmentalizing strategy (Ramachandran 1998). Christine, however, took a political stance and was actively involved

in contemporary situations about questions of sexual identity under the law that affected her

graduate program. She helped lead activism to restrict the United States military's Judge

Advocates General group from interviewing job candidates on campus because of the

military's ant-gay discriminatory policy.

For Christine, learning the law was also a radicalizing set of moments in which she

was challenged to reflect on anti-gay discrimination. In many classes, gay and lesbian

issues were discussed in terms of their relevance in setting or changing case law. As she

noted, debates about such decisions often caused heated debates among her classmates.

> CHRISTINE: Yeah. So at times like that you see people's feelings come to the forefront, and also, for example, in constitutional law class, you really discuss gay rights, because that's sort of, you know, the next group to consider, are they a suspect class? Should they get, should they get that status? It's (a common comparison) for example, to race.
> KS: Right.
> CHRISTINE: That we should give strict scrutiny to laws that affect their—so that's the next big question in the law.
> KS: So did that get debated and discussed as a test case and all those kind of things?
> CHRISTINE: Right. Right. Yeah. It comes up in many areas for the law, for example, now I'm taking family law, and now we are focusing on marriage and so we just focused on same sex marriage. So in class, that's when you really, you know, feel (people's ideas) percolating about the issue, and the feelings come to the forefront.
> KS: So you get a sense of who are the allies, who are the—?
> CHRISTINE: Right. You already pretty much know, but, you know, the topics get heated and they sort of, people can't help themselves, and they make sort of statements, you know, that reveal their ideology.

Christine offered a clear linking of legislative politics with her own developing identity

as a lawyer. As Ramachandran (1998) notes, law students are socialized through Socratic

debates that require them to take specific stands. Ramachandran (1998) found that law

students who were closeted often found taking such stands difficult, but that gay and lesbian

students who were out were sometimes marginalized for their ideas. What Christine's

example suggests is that her particular law school experience was shaped in many ways by

sexuality debates both as they played out in students' interactions and in the curriculum.

For Christine and for others who saw lesbian identity in political terms, language was often an important symbol of identity politics both in public settings and in private interactions with family and friends. In the following comments, she discussed how her parents have responded to her coming out to them. Christine reasons from specific examples to their political implications. She rejected and would not accept their use of euphemisms about lesbian identity, "your friend," because she saw such statements as connected to larger explicitly political questions.

> CHRISTINE: But there is just a little trouble talking about it, and certainly trouble making the connection politically. You know, I remember in the last election my parents were going to vote for Jesse Helms, and I said, you know, "You need to understand that I'm not comfortable in this home if you're supporting the biggest antagonist in the fight for gay rights." And, you know, so there's a lot of denial and just trouble addressing the topic. You know, my mom will say, "Are you going to have a friend home when you come." And I'm like, "No my lover Ann is busy," you know. So a lot euphemisms and I think, I think, you now, that the pretend that it's a friend on a certain level, while, of course, they know at another level that it's not.

Christine focused this example on her experiences with her parents, but others noted how similar wording choices could indicate others' perceptions of lesbian issues. Jackie whose volunteer experience with a lesbian organization had helped her gain her job felt that her supervisor Sally used wording choices that indicated that she refused to see lesbian-only organizations as valid.

> JACKIE: One time Sally said, 'You know, it seems like you could, like your organization could benefit a lot by serving women,' like not just serving lesbians...[Sally could not understand why lesbian-only organizations might not be open to her as a heterosexual.] It's another area where straight people just don't really understand.
> KS: Um-hmm.
> JACKIE: Why there needs to be Lesbian Health Resource Center. Just for lesbians, that says lesbian. And that serves lesbians, God forbid. And why, you know, we need a space, like a women's bed and breakfast. Why that would be open only to women and not to 'Barry' [Sally's partner].

Jackie had very strong feelings about this situation and about Sally's continued pressure on her to reduce her professional volunteer work with the Lesbian Health Resource Center. However, because she feared Sally's power to fire her or decrease her ability to take comp

132

time from her paid work to work with the Center, Jackie did not express her feelings to Sally. Sally also monitored Jackie's clothing and interactions with clients to ensure that Jackie was passing as straight. Sally claimed that having someone who looked too lesbian-identified (whether straight or lesbian) would reflect badly on their service organization and possibly harm its relationships with funders or other organizations. For Jackie, these conflicts marred her interactions with Sally. For Jackie, these were not simply personal disagreements, but politically charged interactions with her supervisor. They affected her access to resources such as time of and her supervisor's evaluations of her work. These interactions also tended to reinforce Jackie's analysis of the pervasiveness of heterosexism in organizations.

In general, women who had strong political commitments to lesbian visibility seemed to see openings and opportunities to work lesbian identity into conversations that interviewees in other groups did not see, perhaps because their consciousness of heterosexism or desire to disclose heightened their awareness of disclosure opportunities.

These politically-oriented workers often found ways to signal their lesbian identity either verbally or non-verbally. For instance, Stephanie was listed on her organization's website as a supportive mentor for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer workers. She was politically active in mainstream politics and in progressive politics within the lesbian community and has been publicly identified as lesbian in newspaper articles about her local political posts. Her workplace offered a sexual orientation non-discrimination policy and benefits for same-sex domestic partners, so that she feels that her disclosures are unlikely to hurt her career. She links her wide-ranging political commitments to her disclosure in the workplace.

Robin, another woman in the political identity group described shifts in the ways that she enacted her commitment to being out in her work and personal lives. In this statement, she contrasts her current less urgent need to disclose identity, with her past feelings of the urgency of being constantly lesbian-identifiable.

Nothing's so [urgent]--when I first came out, I was a lesbian. I was nothing else -- lesbian, lesbian, lesbian. And that was it. That was all I thought about. I ate, thought, drunk, slept lesbian. That's just not where I am anymore.
It's hard to distinguish the out issues of identity I guess out issues from aging and having more straight friends in my life and being perfectly content about that.

As Robin notes, while her political commitment had remained constant, the ways that she shared this information were changing over time. Stephanie noted similar variations in her strategies in various times and places. For her educating others and working to eliminate bias was a central commitment in her life. Stephanie carried this pattern into interactions with her supervisor.

A couple times since then, he's made a couple of really homophobic remarks and I've called him on them. One, he's in a position of leadership [here] now, and one of the comments he made was in a group of leaders at [our organization], and I was in that room. To my knowledge, there were three other lesbians in the room. I don't know how many others.
But he made this really homophobic remark and so the next week when I was talking to him. I said, 'Do you remember that meeting, blah, blah, blah? I said, 'Do you remember that comment you made?' Because I was sitting right next to him and I repeated the comment.
He said, 'Yeah.'
I said, 'Do you see where that would've made me feel very uncomfortable?'
He said, 'Well, yeah. I can see that.'
I said, 'Well, you're in a position of leadership now and I might not have been the only person in that room who was offended by your comments. You really might want to stop and think about those kinds of things before you say them now that you're going to be taken as a public spokesperson for all this stuff.'
He apologized.
Maybe I've been slightly educative.

Stephanie pointed out his behavior privately after the public event and drew on her knowledge that other lesbians were present and "others who might also have been offended" to suggest a subtle form of community pressure. Like Tina, Stephanie was skilled in adapting her tactics to specific situations. Both of them linked their commitment to lesbian visibility to commitments to feminism, anti-racism, and other efforts aimed at ending discrimination. For instance, Stephanie noted that being open about her identity had become "part of who I am."

.   I think being out is just so much a part of who I am that I don't meet--like [new coworkers], I've never said to them, 'By the way, I'm a lesbian.'

When people come into the [workplace she supervised], I do say is that 'You need to know that one of the things that I don't tolerate in this [area] is people expressing their personal biases against other people on the basis of who they are, whether that has to do with race, class, gender, or sexual orientation or whatever. If that's going to be a problem for you, you need to know that before you come into this [area].' That's what I do.

Stephanie described a number of ways she directly and indirectly disclosed her lesbian identity and the commitments to which it related. She was consistently focused on living an ideologically consistent life, and therefore had both an extensive vocabulary for describing her experiences and had tested her actions against those principles for herself. Swidler (2001) noted similar facility with and commitment to ideological principles among the relationship experts such as ministers, workshop leaders, and counselors, and the committed evangelical Christians in who shared their views of proper relationships. Like Swidler, I found varied levels of concern for such ideological purity with most interviewees only moderately concerned that all aspects of their lives fit their principles.

Other women in the political category had less articulated ideologies and strategies based in those ideas; however, they often shared Stephanie's ideas that educating those who were ignorant about lesbian life was an important responsibility. For Jennifer, a political commitment to educate others about their misconceptions about lesbians provided an impetus for coming out explicitly to a co-worker as described in Chapter 4. Jennifer came out to him, because she thought his ideas were based on inaccurate knowledge. For her allowing someone to promote wrong information could hinder gay rights. Coming out to this man was a way of claiming her expertise in the gay community and educating this co-worker. Other women in the political strategy category agreed that choosing one's time and place for explicit disclosures were important, but they tended to seek out ways to disclose verbally or through symbols.

Review of the Implications of Studying Meanings of Identity

135

Examining strategies of lesbian identity suggests that the question of how to manage lesbian identity at one's workplace is based in part on how a lesbian worker thinks about what place her lesbian identity has at her workplace. Women like Kim and Dana view their bodies as inscribed with their lesbian identities. For them and other women who hold the embodied lesbian identity, coming out is experienced as a part of daily interactions. The information about their sexual identity is something over which they have no control. They assume that others will read their bodies as lesbian, and they prepare to interact accordingly by choosing jobs where this identity is not problematic and by treating the information as an always-already-present part of their total identity.

Laura and other women in the normalized identity group tended to believe that they could pass based on their appearances, but felt that doing so was politically or personally disempowering. For them, talking about their partners in ways that signaled the similarity of their relationships to those of their heterosexual peers was an important way to affirm their lesbian identities and to reinforce the idea that sexual orientation was less important than relationships' existence and quality.

The compartmentalized group members were less likely to share information with co-workers and felt that lesbian identity was an aspect of their "personal" lives that did not belong in purely work settings. Thus, these women only disclosed their sexual identities to others when they also shared a friendship with them.

The political group members were most likely to be explicitly out in any given setting. Many of the women in this group believed that their appearances would allow them to pass as heterosexual, but either chose to alter their appearances to proclaim their identities or to make clear claims of lesbian identity to avoid passing. For this group, educating others and raising lesbian visibility were important reasons to come out in their work places. They often not only recognized possible opportunities to discuss lesbian identity, but also strategically created such opportunities.

In the following chapters, understanding the meanings of identity helps to show how meanings interact with personal and workplace contexts. The next chapters focus directly on how personal and workplace context create situations within which women managed their lesbian identities.

CHAPTER SIX

PERSONAL CONTEXTS OF IDENTITY MANAGEMENT

> I think being part of a couple sort of puts you out there in different ways. I don't try to actively closet myself when referencing myself. I usually don't mention her name per se but my partner, so [they] could figure it out if they needed to. *Erica*

> I know that when I was dating, or not seeing anyone, I was much more quiet about, I was quieter about my life…I think that partnerships are something that straight people can understand on some level. *Jackie*

These comments reflect the importance of partnership status in workers' identity management strategies. Further exploring women's personal contexts shows how a woman's chronological age and the length of time since she came out as lesbian, affect her identity management. While keeping the workplace and work issues central, I discuss how differences in age between respondents who ranged from 19 to 45 years old are important both in terms of identity development and occupational development. Partnership status was another characteristic influencing interviewees' identity management strategies and opportunities for disclosure. Partnered workers were more likely to find opportunities for disclosure as part of their daily work lives and to compare themselves directly to heterosexual coworkers. As Andriote (1991) notes partnered lesbian and gay employees often analogized their relationships to those of heterosexual couples in determining a 'standard' level of disclosure. When that level of disclosure was not available to them, some lesbian employees perceived themselves and their relationships to be experiencing discrimination.

<u>Age and Cohort Issues</u>

Studies of coming out in private settings have also explored the effects of age at coming out (to oneself or a specific audience) on methods of identity management (Dunne 1997; Markowe 1995). This literature has explored the developmental issues showing that women tend to come out in their late teens on average (Kingsley 1996; Markowe 1995). According to recent studies, the age of coming out appears to be declining over time, with the median age dropping slightly (Black, Makar, Sanders, and Taylor 2003). They suggest that younger women are defining themselves as lesbians at younger ages than did women who are currently over 35. Researchers suggest that the growing visibility of lesbian identities and the increasing sexualization of adolescents may be encouraging teenagers to come out at younger ages than in the past (Black, Gates, Sanders and Taylor 2000). Previously, women, especially those attending college prior to the early 1990s, often reported having little knowledge of lesbians before attending college (Griffin 1998). However, my study suggests that rather than a large shift in the typical pattern, previous studies were shaped by social contexts such as the women's movement which encouraged some women to come out after their mid-twenties and by women's differing paths to clam a lesbian identity (Rust 1993; Whisman 1996). Whisman (1996) found that lesbians included both women who felt that they had always known that they were lesbian and those who described discovering or claiming a lesbian identity later in life.

Table 6.1 Ages of Coming Out

Age of Coming Out	Frequency	Percentage
Mid-Teens (before age 18)	6	30
Late teens (18-20)	4	20
Early 20s (20-23)	7	35
Thirties	3	15
	N=20	**100**

Interviewees' coming out ages varied from approximately fifteen to thirty-five years old. I have aggregated their ages in Table 6.1 to show the patterns of ages of coming out without revealing specific information about particular interviewees. Table 6.2 shows the lengths of time women have been out.

Table 6.2 Ranges of Years since Coming Out

Years since coming out	Frequency	Percentage
1 to 3	2	10
4 to 7	4	20
7 to 10	7	35
10 to 20	4	20
20 to 30	3	15
	N=20	**100**

Although my study was not large enough to be representative, I did find that both those who are now in the older range in the study (late thirties to forties) and those in the younger range were mostly likely to have come out in their late teens or early twenties. The modal experience for women in this study was coming out when one was in high school or college with 85% of those interviewed being out by age 23. There was not a noticeable shift or decrease in coming out ages over time.

This group also included three women who came out at later ages, often after significant heterosexual dating experiences. They discovered in their thirties that they were lesbian. The coming out experience is shaped not only by personal developmental factors, but also social context (Rust 1993). Previous work has argued that lesbians' ages of coming out are influenced by some women's acceptance of lesbian identities as a result of feminist movements in the 1970s and 1980s (Rust 1993); however, we must be cautious about attributing feminist activism as the motivation for middle-aged women's coming out. While three of the women over forty in this study had been involved in feminist activities in the late

1970s and 1980s, all of those women had come out before age 23. The three women in this study who came out after age thirty were inspired by personal exploration and love for specific women rather than politics (Rust 1993).

Age of coming out was important for understanding lesbian identity management at work because age is related to career preparation (Dunne 1997). Lesbians who came out at younger ages were more likely to be able to make career choices with their lesbian identity in mind. While some interviewees reported no relationship between lesbian identity and career choice, one noted that lesbian identity had led her away from a career in school teaching where discrimination was widely reported. Kissen (1996) found similar choices to leave the profession by lesbian school teachers. Links happened both as women avoided certain jobs that were reportedly difficult environments for lesbians to succeed and as they prepared themselves to be self-supporting or to partner with women who might be expected to have lower average wages than men (Dunne 1997).

In exploring links between career choice and lesbian identity, researchers have suggested that lesbians may also be more likely to enter male-dominated jobs, either because they follow stereotypical gender roles less closely, are motivated by the higher pay in men's jobs, or because they do not have to factor in a male partner's possible disapproval (Dunne 1997; Weston 1996). Some of Dunne's (1997) English informants were clear that they had entered male-dominated jobs because they did not need to remain conventionally feminine to attract male partners. Other researchers have noted how lesbians have been encouraged to break out of stereotypical roles, especially during the high points of feminist organizing (Weston and Rofel 1984). None of the women in this study reported feeling explicit encouragement from feminist ideas to enter particular careers.

One of the important differences between Dunne's (1997) British study and my own findings were the different expectations informants' reported about their childhood and young adult career aspirations. Dunne found a much stronger link between economic self-

141

sufficiency and lesbian identity than seemed present in my interviews. A portion of Dunne's informants had expected to be housewives, perhaps working for a while in a service job before marriage and child-rearing, but primarily being supported by their husbands (Dunne 1997). For the women she interviewed who were working class and lower middle class as well as middle and professional class women, lesbian identity and economic self-sufficiency were closely related. Some women reported changing their job and career plans once they discovered they were lesbian and thus would probably not marry. Others, Dunne reported, began to imagine lives 'beyond heterosexuality' after they gained jobs that allowed them to be self-supporting alone or with another woman's income.

In my study of middle-class US lesbians born between the 1950s and 1980s, there were no reports of anyone expecting to be primarily a housewife. Even though their ages ranged by only 25 years, women of the older and younger cohort faced different employment situations faced when entering the college/post-college labor market (Dunne 1997). Those who were in their early forties had entered the post-college labor market in the late 1970s and early 1980s while those then in college were facing the late 1990s labor market. Women's labor force participation had risen steadily during this time, as had the divorce rate. Younger women were especially likely to have had divorced parents or seen divorces among their friends' parents to illustrate the dangers of relying only on a husband's income.

The interviewees all reported that they had been brought up to expect to work for pay. As McMahon (1995) notes, for middle-class women long-term workplace participation is a commonplace expectation. For some, the childhood expectation was that such work would be combined with child-raising, but others had less clear expectations of whether they would have children. In contrast to earlier generations of white middle class women, these women expected to work for pay, even if they also raised children (McMahon 1995). All of them said that their parents had expected them to prepare themselves to work, with the younger women even more likely to report that they expected their economic contributions would be

142

important to their own upkeep and any marriage they entered. This early expectation meant that women I interviewed did not experience major economic epiphanies that either led to their coming out or was facilitated by it; however, the economic effects of sexual orientation discrimination and lack of legal rights and marital benefits did affect their plans for work and family.

This idea of a link between lesbian identity and career choice suggests that people who came out at younger ages, especially those who had not yet prepared for a field or career, might take lesbian identity issues into account in making job and career choices (Badgett 2001; Black et al 2004). The interviewees appeared to be operating with a clear unwillingness to see themselves as potential victims of discrimination. Even as lesbian workers and students reported worries about job discrimination against lesbians, they also reported that their own career choices were only marginally affected by such concerns. Griffin (1996) found a similar approach in her study of lesbian coaches. Many of the coaches reported focusing on doing high-quality work with the assumption that this would allow them to enter workplaces that would reward that work and ignore their lesbian identity (Griffin 1996, p. 158).

Those who do seek advice on how to manage their lesbian identities in choosing careers or jobs often find little specific advice. Social work students whose profession clearly states a commitment to ending heterosexism and empowering social workers to contribute to their profession regardless of sexual orientation has no guidelines for mentoring gay and lesbian students. As Messinger (2004) notes, students in professional internships reported individual, interpersonal, and institutional concerns about how sexual orientation issues arose in their placements, but few received formal mentoring on these issues and only a handful received informal support. Available information on gay and lesbian career planning is largely available through advocacy organizations on the internet and through often-dated public information books (Mickens 1994; Winfield 1995; Winfield 2005). Furthermore,

evidence suggests that many young women who identify as lesbian find little information or support in planning their careers in a heterosexist context. At public speaking events at colleges on workplace issues for lesbian, gay, and bisexual students, I have often found that traditional age college students, even those who attend such events, usually assume that they will face no particular problems with discrimination. The information documenting past discrimination and suggesting persisting patterns of institutionalize heterosexism from quantitative studies (Badgett 1997, 2001; Black 2003; Blandford et al 2003; Gluckman and Reed 1997 and Lyons, Brenner and Fassinger 2005) and occupational case studies Besant 1999; Griffin 1997; Khayatt 1992 and Kissen 1996) has not been widely disseminated. Very few young people report ever having a college adviser, family member, or other older person discuss how lesbian identity might influence their job experiences.

Alternatives to Work

The importance of paid work varies among individuals depending on whether they are self-supporting or being assisted by others. As noted above, each of the interviewees expected to work for pay, but they varied in how important paid work was for maintaining their lifestyles. A few studies have reported on class variability among lesbians, usually from anecdotal evidence, arguing that inherited resources offered some women more flexibility about employment (Krieger 1991). Among interviewees, two women also reported having inherited wealth that allowed them more choices about employment. For them, this financial cushion was not sufficient to avoid paid work altogether, but the money did reduce their anxiety about losing their jobs or enable them to take less lucrative employment while maintaining their standard of living. One woman noted, for instance, that having a family-provided trust fund had enabled her to return to school for training after her first career choice was unsatisfactory. The second interviewee with inherited wealth, noted that her inheritance had enabled her to travel and experience leisure in her twenties that led to a career shift. These women's experiences suggest the need to explore the relationships

144

between lifelong career preparation and shifts not only in the context of age, but also of available financial resources.

Lesbians may also gain economic support from partners or others. Such support is especially common if they are raising children or attending school (Blumstein and Schwartz 1983; Dunne 1997). They may also receive financial support from family or loans for other reasons, such as while attending school. Receiving such support may create certain expectations about how to manage lesbian identity without jeopardizing the support. For instance, lesbian college athletes who were receiving athletic scholarships were more likely to monitor how their coaches might respond to their lesbian identity disclosures than were non-scholarship athletes (Griffin 1997, p. 108). Those athletes remained closeted and reported that they feared taking risks through which they might lose their scholarships. Students who did not receive athletic scholarships and those with supportive coaches did not face such potential losses.

Lesbian students receiving financial support from parents often control their disclosures to avoid loss of such aid (Markowe 1994). At the same time, having parents who are paying for the majority of college expenses may free people from fearing that those in their workplace will learn of their lesbian identity. Three of the younger women interviewed received financial support for their educations from their families. Each of them worked part-time during the school year, and two worked full-time in temporary summer jobs. For these lesbian workers, the jobs were necessary but extra income and jobs were not expected to be long-term. Such freedom allowed them to experiment with how to manage their identities with little fear of serious financial repercussions.

Young Lesbians and Disclosure

One of the differences between younger and older interviewees was that all of the women over thirty had experiences as partners. See Tables 6.2 and Table 1 for summaries. The older interviewees were currently in or had experienced some form of long-term

relationship with another woman. The younger interviewees, those less than 24 years old, had fewer opportunities to experience such relationships. Four of these women (those out less than five years) had dated other women, but never been in a relationship they considered a partnership or long-term. (There was no precise definition of long-term or partnership used by all women, since I allowed them to define which relationships they had that fit into this category.)

As previous research has shown, many lesbians participate most actively in lesbian community organizations and social groups while they are newly out (Markowe 1994) or are seeking dates (Kennedy and Davis 1993). Seeking dates creates the impulse to be identifiable as lesbians, especially in settings where they hope to meet someone to date (Dunne 1997; Kennedy and Davis 1993). Those who were dating other women also faced the question of whether they wanted to talk about these possibly impermanent relationships with others at work. At such times, the identity of lesbian may be more salient as a sexual identity, because it is less tied into particular relationships or daily activities (Weston 2000). Whereas those in long-term partnerships may share many daily life activities ranging from mowing the backyard to dealing with a lost pet, those who are dating tend to share primarily social activities. Jackie noted the distinctions in what she shared at work when she was dating someone casually (nothing) or seriously (cookie baking).

> JACKIE: And so, there have been times [at workplace social events] that 'Karrie' has been included…I think when you have a girlfriend it's so much easier to be out than when you don't. And I know that when I was dating, or not seeing anyone, I was much more quiet about, I was quieter about my life…I think that partnerships are something that straight people can understand on some level. And---
> KS: Is it easier to talk about…
> JACKIE: And other times of your life as a lesbian, it seems like you're talking about being a lesbian all the time….

For Jackie and for others who were dating casually, mentioning dating at work was a form of specifically talking about sexual identity and being a lesbian. Jackie noted that she did not mention casual dates, but when she was attending a conference her new girlfriend

made her cookies for the trip. She mentioned to coworkers, "that the woman I was dating made these macaroons." That was the first time she said anything about anyone she was dating to her supervisor. Mentioning specific non-sexual, but intimate actions taken by a girlfriend seemed less focused on 'lesbian' issues and more on the relationship.

Exploring how another young woman handled dating while she worked in different jobs helps show the range of ways she and others discussed dating in their workplaces. The two youngest interviewees also had fewer work experiences about which to report. For them, work had been primarily a combination of full-time summer jobs and part-time jobs in places such as restaurants, social service agencies, and university research settings. Rachel was a college junior who had worked in several full-time summer and part-time restaurant jobs and had worked part-time on her campus. Rachel had dated women casually since her coming out two years previously, but had never been in a 'serious' relationship. Her ways of adapting her strategies for talking about dating to different workplace situations shows the influence of how workers' read a workplace's culture and whether other out lesbian and gay employees indicate that it is a safe place to reveal lesbian identity (Badgett 2001).

Rachel noted that she had experienced three different workplaces situations where she managed information about her lesbian identity and her dating life. In a restaurant she described as gay-friendly with lots of young gay and lesbian servers, she frequently flirted with coworkers and talked with them about their dating lives. Giuffre and Williams (1994) noted that restaurant settings tend to be sexualized work environments for many servers and that some experience this as pleasurable. For Rachel, this summer job allowed her a chance to enjoy playful talk with her coworkers and talk about restaurant patrons as well. Rachel reported:

> [The restaurant] was known as a place where lots of lesbian and gay folks would come. We'd [the servers] would like flirt with them a little and talk about them with each other. It was just really fun to be so out.

Rachel was also clear that she had felt freer because this was only a summer job. She did not expect it to have a long-term effect on her career plans, so she approached it casually and enjoyed the immediate environment. In another restaurant job, Rachel felt the environment was less gay-friendly. Rachel thought only one other woman might be lesbian, but neither she nor that woman was explicitly out. Rachel said that she had felt less comfortable with coworkers and had not told them about casually dating a woman. In the following comment, Rachel explains how she handled dating situations with her coworkers.

> KS: So you didn't mention it at work?
> RACHEL: No, I didn't think it was any of their business. Plus, it's always tricky when it's just dating. It seems like then there's more focus on the ups and downs and they're more likely to see you as being all about sex.
> KS: But you think it's different when…?
> RACHEL: Yeah, it's different once you're in a relationship.

Rachel also noted that she found a difference in how she managed her disclosures when she was casually dating someone and what she imagined she would do in a serious relationship. In Rachel's stories we can see how Rachel distinguished between the fun of discussing her dating life with lesbian and gay coworkers and her cautious approach to talking about dating a woman with presumably heterosexual coworkers. She reported that talking about her dating life with the heterosexual group felt like she was prioritizing her sex life, and talking inappropriately about it, although many of them talked about their casual heterosexual dates. As Badgett (2001) notes, the different perceptions of lesbian and heterosexual workers' disclosures as 'sexualized' may operate interpersonally or be internalized by people like Rachel and Jackie who limit their own discussions.

In a related example, Melissa, another college student spoke about her work in the college library. She discusses the ways that having a context for her discussions with similar-aged student workers makes it possible for her to share information about her lesbian identity and dating life, while she finds no opening to talk with older coworkers. For

Melissa, it is possible to talk about her work tasks and to chat with others without mentioning any aspect of her lesbian identity. She uses age of her coworkers (and related student status) as a marker of how she manages identity with various people.

Another one of the younger and more newly out interviewees who had never had a long-term dating relationship discussed the importance of friendships in her workplace of several years. Michelle had worked in various jobs in a large office setting over the course of her college career. She noted that the office had employed a few out lesbians and a few implicitly out lesbians. Michelle had noticed over a two year period that others treated them well and that lesbian identity issues were discussed freely in the very friendly and talkative office. During her third year, Michelle came out and began dating. She discussed dating only with her best friend in the office, another lesbian. After several months, the two of them began dating. While they kept the change in their relationship secret at first, the other workers they considered friends were told gradually after they began dating. What was important to Michelle was that the office had provided a safe and welcoming environment for her as she was exploring her own sexuality.

> MICHELLE: When I was questioning whether I might be lesbian, it wasn't scary for me. I knew "Brenda" and "Sharon," so it was like I had good role models. When I came out, I started wearing pride necklaces and they picked up on it. I think maybe they'd already wondered if I was a baby dyke. Anyway, they were really kind to me, so it was no big deal. I didn't make a point of telling everyone, but it wasn't like I was keeping a secret. Even before "Karen" and I started dating, everyone already teased us about how much time we spent together.

What Michelle's story also illustrates is the difference between places where coworkers are friends who talk and become friends and those where coworkers inhabit the same general space, but do not have a context in the discussions to share information. How does it matter whether people define relationships as coworkers-only or friendships?

Identity Management with Colleagues Who Become Friends

About half of the women described all or most of their relationships with coworkers as being more like colleagues than friends.[24] This distinction was important, because when coworker relationships moved from collegial to friendly, many interviewees felt that different sets of norms applied for disclosure with friends 'entitled' to know more about their identities (Charmaz 1991). In her study of people managing information about their lives with chronic illnesses, Charmaz found that those with illnesses constantly evaluated what to tell people based on their perceptions of relationships with them. When a relationship became a friendship or when they thought it had the possibility of becoming a romantic relationship, evaluations of what to tell became weighted by norms about emotional intimacy between friends and by considerations of how much information others needed to understand their daily lives. For instance, an acquaintance who was seen only occasionally might not notice changes in the sick person's appearance or daily energy levels while those with whom they spent more time, often noticed differences and requested explanations. At the same time, social norms encourage people to share information with friends as a way of building emotional intimacy (Swidler 2001).

Jordan disclosed her lesbian identity indirectly to coworkers in a social occasion on a business trip. She wanted to avoid actively passing as heterosexual, so she shared a non-sexual piece of information about her partner with others. Finally, she had developed a good sense of these women's levels of acceptance of her as an individual and had determined that they were not actively homophobic after observing them for several months. Tina's story of coming out to friends reminds us that social norms both encouraged her to share her lesbian identity with friends and protected her against others' disclosing her lesbian identity without her permission. Tina's story also shows how friendship groups share

[24] In Chapter 5, I reported that compartmentalizing workers were likely to disclose information about their lives only to friends. In this section, this discussion extends to workers who hold varied meanings of lesbian identity, not only compartmentalized.

new and potentially interesting information as one way of building group cohesion (Boden 1994; Charmaz 1991). Tina came out to family and friends explicitly shortly after she came out to herself.

> I sent letters to people, and said, "By the way, I'm a lesbian." I called people. I told people in person, like my mom. I told some of my friends at [my undergraduate college]. I would take them out to dinner. It became a big joke. I would take you to dinner so that I could tell you that I was a lesbian. And I did it to several people. And it was sort of funny after a while, it was like people calling each other saying, "Have you gone to dinner with Tina yet?" [Laughter.] So that they knew whether they could talk with the [other person] about it or not.

Tina's strategy of telling people in a private, one-on-one setting was common among those who disclosed directly to others both in their friendship circles and workplaces. Rarely did interviewees report coming out to a group of people, unless they did so as part of a publicly out strategy in the media. Tina's comments also show that people she told were careful about passing along information. As far as Tina knew, people asked each other, "Have you gone to dinner with Tina yet?" as a way of discovering whether others knew of her lesbian identity. Those to whom she had disclosed were careful not to mention her revelation to others, but let her do the telling herself. Tina used this story to illustrate her long-term approach to being out in all aspects of her life, including her workplaces. While she adapted her strategy of mentioning lesbian identity to differing settings such as meeting with potential colleagues in an interview or inviting colleagues to her commitment ceremony, Tina was out explicitly in her workplace.

When working with people who were not friends, as most of the interviewees were doing, moving to a friendship level could be a time for telling others of one's lesbian identity. For those who were not told, but later learned of it, the lack of information could feel like a rejection of friendship. Being one of those outside the circle of those who knew was unpleasant for some people.

As discussed in Chapter 5, Stephanie had a political commitment to being out in her

work life and was publicly identified in organizational files as a mentor for lesbian, gay,

bisexual, and transgendered students. However, one of her more-distant coworkers had not

seen the printed information, and Stephanie had never told her about either her lesbian

identity or some of her other activities. Instead, the coworker heard a discussion at a party

between people who assumed Stephanie's lesbian identity was common knowledge.

Stephanie recounted a complex set of messages from the other woman---suggesting both

that the coworkers wanted to know this information and that she resented Stephanie for

telling anyone.

> STEPHANIE: …She was surprised that I had never chosen to tell her this about myself. On the other hand, she was someone with whom I'd had plenty of conversations and found out that she was Republican and pro-life and against a livable wage and most of the things that I believe in. So I just didn't really care to have that other discussion with her. You know, get to the next level.
> On the other hand, she really likes me and she's someone with whom I've had dinner several times and she was really mad…She said that when she heard it at this party she was shocked and not only that she hated that I had told someone in this division because it was going to be used against me forever. That I should've just kept that private. I was like (then why) I would've ever told you?

Notice that Stephanie refers to 'get to the next level' when talking about increasing the

intimacy and importance of what she shared with her coworker. Stephanie had decided to

limit the amount of information she shared with the other woman. She and the coworker

appear to have had differing definitions of their relationship, since each used various

markers of collegial versus friendship status---eating together, how much they liked each

other, and whether they shared similar values. For Stephanie the lack of shared values

trumped the importance of shared activities.

In addition to shared values, there was an evaluation of whether the colleague would

respond positively if the lesbian worker came out. Even considering a coworker a friend, did

not mitigate an evaluation of her or his ability to respond positively to a disclosure of lesbian

identity. As Caitlin noted in discussing a previous coworker:

I considered the one woman that I liked a lot a good friend but still I felt that she was a little sheltered. I just didn't want to risk it I didn't see any reason to because we were never going to see each other socially outside of work. I doubt I made any excuses but the fact is I didn't so there must be a reason that I didn't tell her.

The level of sharing and intimacy within workplaces varied making friendships easier to form in some organizations than others. Michelle, for instance, felt that she had several friends in her workplace while Stephanie noted that the competitive environment in her organization made such friendships unlikely. Moving from individuals' making decisions about their own methods of handling workplace issues to partners' strategies, we find that women who were in long-term romantic relationships or partnerships with other women found managing identity became even more complicated.

Partnerships and Preparations for Work

Issues of how lesbian workers prepare for their work lives and how partnerships may shape those experiences have been raised in studies specifically of lesbians' workplace experiences and those of partnerships more broadly. In Dunne's study of British lesbians' work and family experiences (1997), she finds several paths women took in preparing for work. She notes the continued influence of societal expectations, especially for working-class women and men, that women would work until marriage in short-term jobs, and then leave the labor force to raise children. Her analysis shows that women's expectations of following this job-until-housewife track led to lower levels of education and less job-specific preparation. Other women in Dunne's study described expectations that they would work throughout their lives that arose both before and after coming out as lesbian. Having such a work-focused set of goals was related to higher education and more preparation (such as internships) aimed at gaining specific skills. Dunne also reports that women with a higher work focus were more likely to enter male-dominated occupations, reporting that they sought the higher pay.

Research on women's entry into non-traditional occupations suggests that their higher pay is a major draw. Traditional women's work of caring such as nursing and teaching has been devalued economically and socially (England 2005b). Dunne's interviews do not allow her to test for causality, but she argues that having more job opportunities both offered women an alternative to marriage and housewifery and enabled those who had rejected marriage to support themselves (Dunne 1997). From Dunne's analysis, the expectation that lesbians might approach career and job choice with a greater willingness to invest in education and training to prepare for longer expected work lives and greater need for income.

Dunne focuses her analysis on how individual women prepared themselves for lives 'beyond heterosexuality' with lives as housewives as a backdrop (Dunne 1997, p. 10). She does not examine how or whether these women expected to support only themselves or envisioned being members of lesbian partnerships. Others find high rates of partnership (often serial relationships rather than a single long-term relationship) among lesbians (Blumstein and Schwartz 1987; Black et al 2000). Graff suggests that not only lesbians, but high proportions of women and men in the United States have rejected the breadwinner/housewife model implicit in Dunne's analysis. As opportunities for women have risen and men's earning power has declined, Graff (2004) argues that a dual earner model has become the norm. Women as well as men increasingly prepare for lifelong participation in the waged labor force (Graff 2004, p. *34*). For Graff, this growing equality of preparation has facilitated greater partner homogamy in education and earnings rather than the specialization into housewife and breadwinner more common prior to the 1970s (Graff 2004; Kurdek and Schmitt 1987).

Graff sees this increasing similarity of men and women in marriages and partnerships as decreasing the importance of gender in marriages (and thus supporting same-sex marriage), because women and men have become more interchangeable as economic

contributors to partnerships (Graff 2004, p. 54). Historians have likewise argued that modern lesbian identity as lived in long-term partnerships that include separate households from other kin has been made possible in part by women's increased opportunities and participation in paid work (D'Emilio and Freedman 1998; Faderman 2001).

Both Graff and Dunne focus on ways that women's preparation for paid work links to their expectations about adult relationships. Dunne saw a shift to a lesbian identity led women to prepare more for work roles and to target their efforts to higher paid careers. Graff, saw less direct influences on coming out on job preparation, but argued that women's increasing labor force participation made supporting themselves or themselves and a woman partner easier than in the past. What neither explored directly was how women's experiences of partnership with women shaped their workplace experiences. How then did partnerships with women shape lesbian workers' workplace experiences and job paths?

Previous work on lesbian partnerships has shown that they have high rates of dual earner patterns (Blumstein and Schwartz 1987; Kurdek and Schmitt 1987). Recent research has suggested that even for those raising small children, dual labor force participation is the norm (Sullivan 1996; Winfeld 2005). Some studies suggest that lack of coverage for domestic partners and their children makes a breadwinner-housewife model more difficult for lesbians who might choose such a pattern (Sullivan 1986; Badgett 2001). Biological mothers, for instance, may remain in the work force to gain insurance benefits for themselves and their children from previous relationships or those born within a lesbian partnership (Sullivan 1996; Badgett 2001). Partners who might prefer have one person work while the other pursued more education or other opportunities may find that the lack of health insurance or other benefits makes such options difficult to finance (Badgett 2001). What are some of the ways, then, that lesbian workers experience economic constraints on their relationships through lack of partner recognition on formal policies?

155

What these studies also find are that lesbian partner households earn less on average than households with heterosexual couples or gay male couples (Blumstein and Schwartz 1987; Badgett 2001). A large portion of this difference may be attributable to gendered wage differences (Blumstein and Schwartz 1987; Badgett 2001). Others suggest exploring the patterns of lesbians' labor force participation to better understand the links between gender and sexual orientation in predicting earnings and other outcomes (Black et al 2001; Blandford 2003).

Beyond economic issues, another aspect of partnership that may affect lesbians' workplace experiences is their desire to discuss those relationships with others (Rasi and Rodriguez-Nogues 1995). Gay and lesbian scholars have argued that being able to talk about and recognize one's partner at work on par with heterosexual couples is emotionally meaningful as well as economically important (HRC 2000). For women, the construction of a work identity linked to a personal relationship has been suggested to be especially important. Tannen's accounts (1994) of gendered linguistic practices at work finds that compared to men, women in workplace settings more often mention their partners (Tannen 1994). Tannen links the mentions of partners that women use more often, such as 'I'll have to check with my husband before planning a work trip,' to people's desire to honor their connections to others and to signal the importance of these relationships (Tannen 1994, p. 85). Such mentions of partners symbolically link these women workers' workplace decisions to their connections to others. Tannen suggests not only that this behavior is more common among women workers, but that it is a form of doing gender appropriately in the workplace. Her analysis uses only heterosexual women's experiences, but implies that this pattern is related to the gender of the speakers and not that of their partners. This leads to questions for further investigation. Do lesbian workers see a pattern of talk about heterosexual partners in their workplaces? How do they participate in such talk themselves? To what

extent do lesbian workers report discussing their (female) partners with others at work? In the next section, some of these questions are explored.

Partnerships: Opportunities and Constraint

The questions raised above suggested that I explore what sorts of relationships interviewees were in and how those relationships affected their employment choices and their daily identity management. Partnership status did influence interviewees' identity management strategies and opportunities for disclosure. Partnered workers were more likely to find opportunities for disclosure as part of their daily work lives and to compare themselves directly to heterosexual coworkers. As Andriote (1991) notes partnered lesbian and gay employees often analogized their relationships to those of heterosexual couples in determining a 'standard' level of disclosure. When that level of disclosure was not available to them, some lesbian employees perceived themselves and their relationships to be experiencing discrimination. Badgett describes such examples as a form of indirect discrimination because it limits the comfort of lesbian employees compared to their colleagues, and it may have larger effects if not being about to talk about their partners. This means that lesbian workers seem less socially skilled than other workers who do feel free to discuss their partners. This pattern also fits with Tannen's (1994) idea about women's sharing of personal information to show connection as well. If part of doing gender in a workplace setting for many women is mentioning connections to partners or spouses, then lesbian workers may feel discrimination or discomfort if their own discussions of partners are not welcome.

Partnerships offered both opportunities for disclosure and possible constraints on such disclosure. Being partnered could raise issues about participation in work-related social events such as dinners, travel, or other events. The availability and expectations for partner participation in workplace social events varied among different job settings (Badgett 2001; Hochschild 1989). For instance, in a discussion of how coworkers' families reacted to their

157

partners, partnered interviewees might notice whether or not they were able and willing to share information about their partners. Partnered lesbians also tended to have more daily experiences with partners compared with those who were dating or single.

An interviewee in a professional job remarked that hiring situations could lead to questions about partners that might lead to the disclosure of lesbian identity. She spoke about the hiring practices of institutions hiring professional workers from distant places.

> I think the other way that [being with a partner is] involved, most places when you look for a job, if you're straight and you're married they're going to find your partner a job. If you're a lesbian and you're looking for a job, you have to decide whether or not that's a piece of information you want to give about you. When they say, 'Is there someone else who would need to find a job?', you have to in thirty seconds, in a nanosecond, you have to make a decision about someone you've known less than ten minutes about whether or not it's appropriate to give them that piece of information about you.

Like others who had been in this situation among the interviewees, this person had prepared her answer in consultation with her partner. Three of the four interviewees who reported receiving questions about relocating partners or finding them jobs, treated the questions as if they were single. They and their partners had determined that they did not want, need, or perhaps trust the institutions to help them find a job for their partner, so chose not to disclose. The third person, Tina, did reveal that she had a partner, but did not request help from the hiring institution for finding her a job. All of these women had weighed their own choices about being identified immediately as lesbian before becoming acquainted with coworkers. While they balanced a variety of competing interests, the first two women were clear that they preferred finding jobs for their partners personally to disclosing their identities in this way. The final partnered interviewee who was relocating for work had mentioned her partner and had asked about employment options for her. She was told the procedure for the partner to apply for a position in a nearby organization, but was told that her employers could not offer any assistance other than that information.

For some workers, social events were expected aspects of their work lives, while for others social events were optional adjuncts or not even conducted as part of the organizational scene. When social events were open to partners and families, the interviewees noted that they considered when and whether to involve their partners. In a few cases, disagreements about how to handle partnership status at social events led to conflict between partners or within the interviewee's own sense of self. For some partners, being expected to attend social events was seen as a burden. For those who were not out in their own workplaces or in the larger community, attending a partner's social events created the possibility of information being shared with others. Conversely, partners sometimes felt slighted if they were not invited by their partner or their partner's organization to attend social events where spouses or dates were acceptable. Therefore, social events where some 'family members' were invited were often moments in which partners had discussed their joint strategies.

Four of those who were partnered reported that they attended all of the social events as an out couple. One woman talked about an example of institutionalized requirements for partnered people. In this instance, one interviewee reported on a preparatory talk offered to partners of all sexualities and marital statuses of new medical students that she attended to support her own partner. Christine reported that the partners were explicitly coached in strategies for supporting their medical school-attending partners' time-intensive work. They were also encouraged to reduce their own expectations for their partners' time, social support, and availability. Given the Christine's own demanding work schedule, her acceptance of this role surprised me. However, it became clear that she saw this as a short-term investment in her partner's career and their overall success as a couple. She also came from a family background in which her own mother had played a similar support role for the interviewee's father. She reported that she saw her parents' roles as a model of a successful relationship, so seemed to be seeing her decisions as a recurrence of theirs.

159

The regular features of employment often called for consideration of partnership status. One interviewee explained that her workplace's social obligations had risen as she received successive promotions. She was increasingly expected to attend formal dinners and evening social occasions. Because her field was predominantly male, she was meeting with male colleagues and their wives and girlfriends. While she was politically opposed to taking male dates as cover for her lesbian identity, female dates were not acceptable to her supervisor, or, she thought, to the larger group of participants. Although she was out to her supervisor, he had made it clear that he did not want to have to talk with her partner or to see her in social situations.

Another feature that both of these examples highlight is the continued expectation in some workplaces, especially those with demanding time schedules that a worker will have someone who provides companionship and smoothes the worker's daily life. In the first case, the workshop Christine attended cued her and other partners of medical students into their expected roles as supporters. For the second interviewee, the necessity of having such a support person was less clear. There was no formal preparation for the social events which her work required that she attend. However, she made comparisons between her own life and that of her male colleagues, all of whom were married or in relationships with women who arranged their personal lives and households. Her own days included a demanding career and arranging all of the details of life for herself. She and I discussed some of these issues, and I suggested that she needed a 'wife,' or someone willing to do the tasks traditionally done by wives. She agreed and noted the many ways that the career pattern in her area presupposed that the worker would have a wife. She also noted that her demanding career was possible, in large part, because she was not a wife to someone else.

> I think it's [being lesbian] impacted my work in the sense that I haven't gotten married and spent time having kids and doing the other things that straight women do to take care of their husbands to enable them to have careers. I've been the one that's been able to have the career. The downside of that is I haven't been in a twenty-year relationships as a result, primarily as a result of my job.

160

Another woman who was partnered spoke about daily experiences of having her partner's support and often her presence in the workplace. Diane noted that these regular shared events made it likely that others would infer that she was lesbian, if they wished to make these connections.

> DIANE: My partner often drives me to or picks me up from work. She knows everyone in [our unit] and has spent quite a bit of time here. We've never made a big deal of it, but people who wanted to, could probably see that we're together. I refer to her as my roommate, but how many roommates do all of those things for someone? Still, I know that "Nancy," one of the other full-time workers has never put the pieces together. So, I think it's still up to people to interpret.

Diane is the woman who felt that others could not tell from her appearance or actions that she was lesbian. While others in the workplace confirmed that "Nancy" was not a skilled reader of social cues about lesbian identity, others had interpreted Diane's partner's presence as meaning that they were likely to be a lesbian couple. The partner's appearance was also more stereotypically butch than Diane's, so people looking at her might have interpreted the situation more carefully than when seeing Diane without the partner.

Being partnered raised disclosure issues and opportunities not present for single women. Being partnered allowed women to disclose their lesbian identity as a part of their relationship status and not as an abstract identity marker that could be interpreted more broadly. After describing herself as someone who shared lots of discussions about her daily life with coworkers, Erica noted that she could not refrain from talking about her partner without cutting out large aspects of her daily life. She perhaps best phrased how being partnered changed disclosure issues. As Erica noted:

> I think being part of a couple sort of puts you out there in different ways. I don't try to actively closet myself when referencing myself. I usually don't mention her name per se but my partner, so [they] could figure it out if they needed to.

Discussing one's partner was less often seen as 'talking about sex' that was declaring oneself lesbian or mentioning dating women, according to interviewees. The difference between claiming a relationship with a specific woman and claiming an identity based on

desired or enacted sexual activity seemed to shift identity management strategies significantly for many women. Within a broader culture that penalizes middle class women for frankly discussing their sexual lives without being labeled negatively, these women reframed their identities into relationships (Ward and Winstanley 2003). Talking about relationships desexualized their disclosures and fit better into workplace norms which encouraged women especially to downplay their sexuality in order to be seen as competent employees.

Review of the Ways Personal Contexts Affected Identity Management

Personal contexts such as current age, time since coming out, and partnership status were important factors shaping lesbians' identity management at work. Those who were older were also more likely to be in jobs they were committed to keeping and to be partnered. Both factors influenced their identity management strategies. Younger workers and those who were newly out were more likely to be testing different ways of managing their identities at work. For some, this meant enjoying flirtations with coworkers while for others it meant remaining closeted until they learned how others responded to lesbians. Workers who became friends with coworkers also changed disclosure strategies to fit the growing emotional intimacy of their friendships. Whatever their own age or stage of life, becoming friends with a coworker signaled increased sharing of non-work information, usually including lesbian identity.

Previous research had suggested links between job choice and claiming a lesbian identity (Dunne 1997); however the interviewees in this study were less affected by their economic independence than were Dunne's informants. Instead, these women reported that they had expected and prepared themselves to work for pay for most of their lives even if they married. Coming out as lesbian was not a major shift in that expectation. While some of the interviewees reported shifting their career plans slightly to avoid contexts of

great homophobic because they came out, most did not have a carefully strategized plan for how their coming out affected their overall job and career choices.

Finally, partnered interviewees noted that sharing their everyday activities with someone meant that they faced more pressure to be out, because not disclosing lesbian identity required them to edit large portions of their non-work experiences from workplace conversations (Graff 2004). Many used the implicit strategies mentioned in Chapter 4, by talking about their partners and their shared activities without direct explanations, they left it to listeners to interpret their information as disclosing lesbian identity. Managing social events related to work created some opportunities for different strategies. Their methods of handling such events often relied on considerations of their own and their partners' comfort with being out and with the potential for information about them as a couple to harm one or both women. In the next chapter, we explore how the individual strategies these women preferred intersected with their workplace environments.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXTS OF IDENTITY MANAGEMENT

Managing lesbian identity at work may mean feeling completely equal to heterosexual coworkers within the organization. Gay-friendly organizations may mean navigating the contrasts between formal, official recognition of same-sex partnerships and the day-to-day lived marginality of lesbian and gay employees at an institution. Far more often, lesbian employees are not in gay-friendly organizations and find neither formal protection in their organizations, nor supportive and informed coworkers.

When this study was conducted, gay employment issues had been widely debated at the national level for several years. Most lesbian workers were conscious of their vulnerability to losing their jobs, being denied promotions, or losing social support in their workplaces if coworkers or supervisors wished. Stories of firings and informal heterosexism were available in print and from friends (Rasi and Rodriguez-Nogues 1995). As a 'right-to-work state', North Carolina further allowed employers to fire employees for any cause. The general consciousness of these risks was mostly invisible to heterosexual workers, as Stephanie said, "I think what surprises most straight people is that you can be fired for being gay or lesbian." Gay rights organizations efforts to prevent such outcomes created some policy changes through organizational and legislative activism. Safe organizational climates through policy statements have been the focus of most workplace-oriented political activism by gay rights advocates (Blandford 2003; Bernstein 1997).

The interviewees reported searching for jobs that would fit their skills and provide a workplace culture that was comfortable for lesbian employees. They gathered information

informally as well from friends and contacts at possible employment sites. For some jobs,

workers reported agonizing over appropriate information to include (or omit) on resumes.

Others sent in their applications and assumed that hiring officials would fairly assess their

skills. Depending on the workers' strategies, they might come out in a hiring interview or

wait until securing a job or never disclose their lesbian identities. All of these efforts were

ways of assessing both formal and informal organizational support for lesbian workers.

Even after finding welcoming organizations and getting hired, most organizational contexts

had at least some institutional rules and daily practices sometimes reinforced heterosexist

norms.

In this chapter, I explore how organizational contexts influence lesbians' identity

management strategies at work. The interviewees worked in organizational settings that

ranged from settings that were officially welcoming of gay and lesbian employees

(supportive) to those that were officially unwelcoming (homophobic) or unofficially

unwelcoming (heteronormative). Most were in organizations without specific statements

about sexual orientation. The interviewees' experiences navigating these organizational

contexts illustrate that formal policies are helpful to lesbian employees, but that informal

cultural aspects of organizations also shape workers' identity management strategies.

Job Choices That Reflect Identity Management

Studies of coming out at work have primarily focused on workers' identity management

strategies once they are in particular workplaces. Several studies focus on the ways that

organizational norms against discussing sexuality create pressure to avoid talk about

sexuality in the workplace especially lesbian and gay sexuality or other martingalized

sexualities (Hearn and Parkin 1995; Ingraham 1996; Ward and Winstanley 2005; Williams,

Giuffre, and Dellinger 1999). These authors suggest that these mainstream organizational

norms create organizational cultures where a form of restrained male heterosexuality is the

norm and where gay and lesbian people must pass as heterosexual to maintain their jobs

and coworkers' support (Friskopp and Silverstein 1995; Rasi and Rodriguez-Nogues 1995; Woods 1993). Studies of lesbian workers have suggested that workers manage the risks of being lesbian at work by carefully choosing their workplace and by creating strategies to manage information about their identities (Dunne 1997; Griffin 1996). Using models of lesbian identities as stigmatized identities to be managed (Goffman 1963), researchers have shown many ways that workers manage lesbian identity at work (Dalton and Bielby 2000; Dunne 1997; Lindsay et al 2006). In this chapter, I will focus more on the insights provided by Lyons, Brenner and Fassinger (2005). Their study suggests that organizational fit between the employee and organization is an important factor in predicting the employees' job satisfaction. While their model is abstract and quantitative, their insights into the importance to employees of finding an organizational culture that matches their preferences offers a useful basis for elaboration. I also draw from quantitative studies of lesbian and gay workplace issues (Badgett 1997, 2001; Black 2003; Blandford et al 2003; Gluckman and Reed 1997) to develop a focus on the formal organizational policies as important benefits to lesbian employees and indicators of harder-to-measure features of organizational culture. General studies of lesbian and gay workplace issues suggest that workers' disclosures are shaped by formal organizational protections (Human Rights Campaign 2006), desire to gain domestic partner benefits, and efforts to be integrated people at work (Dunne 1997; Griffin 1998; McDermott 2006; Raeburn 2000; Rasi and Rodriguez-Nogues 1995; Ward and Winstanley 2005); however, more work is needed to show how lesbian workers' actually manage information about their identities in order to avoid discrimination and share information about their personal lives with coworkers on equal terms with heterosexual coworkers.

   Exploring how interviewees chose workplaces helps to explain both the identity management strategies of those who were explicitly out and those who followed other strategies. An ability to be out at work or at least comfortable with being lesbian was

important for most of the interviewees, but women who felt their bodies revealed their

identities prioritized being out more highly than others.[25] These women looked for

supportive workplaces to manage lesbian identities that they believed were visible to others.

Dana prioritized finding an accepting workplace over other considerations. She was one

of the interviewees who felt that she was visually recognizable as a lesbian and could not

pass. Dana believed that everyone who saw her could identify her as lesbian. Finding a

place where she could be out comfortably constituted an important priority.

As a native North Carolinian, Dana's search had been primarily within the Research

Triangle region. She described her job history as including what she called the Durham

'lesbian circuit,' of lesbian-owned or non-discriminatory organizations which hired workers

for production and retail service jobs. For Dana, asking friends in the gay and lesbian

community about a workplace's reputation was the key method of learning about their

culture before applying. Dana had also been trained by a former employer in hiring

practices and deployed that knowledge in describing what could legally be asked in a job

interview. Because the organizations on this 'circuit' were mostly smaller companies in the

service sector, their pay scales were relatively low, but they offered the freedom to be out as

a lesbian. Dana reported that at one point in her life, that sort of comfort had been very

important psychologically and physically.

> DANA: I'm not in the same place I was then. The same things are not that important,
> really. When I went to [the largest organization she mentioned on this circuit], it was
> very important to me that I not have to shave my legs and that I not have to wear a
> bra to work. I didn't really care so much about what they paid me. I did not want to
> wear a bra and I really did not want to shave my legs. When I went to [my current
> organization], I have to wear a bra--nobody has said you have to wear a bra but I
> have to wear a bra to work. You know what, that's okay. In the summertime, I shave
> my legs.

For Dana, jobs that did not require her to wear a bra or shave her legs had been really

important in her twenties. As she grew older, getting paid a higher wage, even if it meant

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[25] The interviewees tended to identify strongly with their work identities and roles, unless they were in
temporary jobs. Therefore, this study may under-represent the experiences of people like Terry for
whom work is primarily instrumental.

less physical comfort became important. However, she believed that others knew of her

lesbian identity based on her visual presentation (even with shaved legs). She and on her

willingness to talk directly about her partnership with another woman. Dana compared how

it felt to her to be explicitly out at work to her partner's workplace strategy of avoiding

disclosure.

> DANA: Everybody on my crew knows that I live with a woman named "Mary" and we
> have a hot tub and what we did on the weekend and what we ate for supper. I'm just
> like…right out there….
> But, it's what we [my partner and I] get out of it [work] is very different. She doesn't
> really care. I don't think they know if she even lives with somebody or not or what
> her name is… I don't know who the people on her crew are and I don't know what
> they know or what they don't know. I can't imagine really working with people and
> not telling them.

Dana believes that her visible lesbian identity was readable by her coworkers, so she

included discussions of her partner in on-going work discussions of partners. Once having

accepted a job, Dana talked about her girlfriend with coworkers from the first work day. She

had a generally direct style. While part of this may have been because of her own

perception that chatting with coworkers helped the work proceed more quickly, it was also

clear that she did not feel the need to censor her lesbian partnership from others. She

applied a similar ethic of boundaries in discussing her girlfriend as she would have with a

male spouse, but included her experiences without specifically censoring her experiences

because she was lesbian. For Dana, sharing parts of her daily life with coworkers seemed

totally appropriate. She had chosen a job where she judged that such sharing would be

safe.

For those interviewees who believed they could pass as heterosexual, the importance of

being out varied. They did not feel the need to choose a job simply to manage their lesbian

identity as an already revealed status. Being out was sometimes a top priority, but it was

more often balanced against other issues such as pay or fit with their skills or interesting

work. Finding a job and organization that met their criteria often involved careful selection of

jobs that supported their ways of managing identity. One way of gaining more control over

working conditions was getting more education for this highly educated group of women with

significant cultural capital. For instance, Caitlin believed that her high level of skills

supported her ability to choose a desirable environment.

> CAITLIN: Now that I can be more choosy, I will seek that out. In college if you get a job, you just need a job. Hopefully, the higher, the more educated you are, you get a little bit more of an opportunity to choose your workplace. You have that luxury that most women don't have. I have that choice. I also have chosen an almost all female field for the most part [for my future graduate education].

As mentioned in the introduction, the interviews were conducted during a time of low

unemployment in the study region, especially for educated white women. None of the

interviewees discussed being completely jobless, but they felt that finding a suitable job was

far from certain. Caitlin's desire to be 'more choosy' may have limited her opportunities for

better-paid or otherwise more desirable work. As noted in a previous chapter, she had left a

previous job to avoid pressure to date men or become involved in a heterosexual social

world. These choices influenced her range of possible options.

Several interviewees spoke about ways that they managed identity in job choice

situations where they did not know people in their intended workplace. These women were

not coming out in their hiring process. For Dana, Caitlin, Robin, and Michelle knowing

whether a new organization was homophobic was very important. Each mentioned that she

tried to avoid working in places that did not support lesbian rights. They also spoke about

the difficulty of gathering this information while also trying to impress those hiring them.

Caitlin's search was more difficult, in part because she was new to the area and had no

one who could direct her to lesbian-friendly organizations. Caitlin spoke about her efforts to

find a woman-friendly and lesbian-friendly workplace when she moved to the region. Unlike

Dana, Caitlin knew that she could pass as heterosexual if she chose to, but she was very

committed to having a supportive environment where she could be out to coworkers that

also furthered her long-term career goals. For her, long-term career goals of further

education and a service-oriented career were important, but had to be matched by a

supportive atmosphere. In this section, Caitlin explains why it was so important to her to

have an all-woman staff. In the next section, she discusses the importance of others'

appearances in signaling a supportive workplace.

> KS: One of the things you said a little bit ago was it was important to you to work in an all woman staff. How so? Tell me what made that important.
> CAITLIN: I've worked with men in college and high school. And I didn't like it. I know that's a blanket statement, and I don't want to even get into that.
> KS: No judgment. I'm just sort of curious because this is big stuff that you look for in a job and that's important.
> CAITLIN: I think, my whole life I was surrounded by men. On the radio singing the books that we were made to read in high school. Even in college, we were in a totally male environment for the most part. One day, I got so frustrated flipping through the radio that I just I got really frustrated. I reached my limit. And that was when I was still dating them. It's not that I hate men. I just don't want to have anything to do them. I've had too much. I'm saturated.
> So what I chose to do is to surround myself with a female environment as much as I can. I read female authors; I befriend women. That's not to say that I won't occasionally meet a male that I like. Maybe might come to build a friendship eventually. Few and far between. I work in an all female environment, just as a carryover effect. A lot of people don't imagine that, that answer or that belief.
> KS: But it seems like it's very consistent with what you, how you want to spend your time. It makes a lot of sense. Do you think that being a lesbian specifically ever sort of, has that influenced the kind of jobs you've taken or is it more sort of a focus on women holistically?
> CAITLIN: The latter I believe. I just want to walk down the street and not get hit on by any man or looked at. They just do; they always look at women. I'm sorry, now I'm making a blanket statement. That offended me even when I was dating them.
> I probed Caitlin's answer further to ask how her career was shaped by such values, and whether she consciously chose to link them.
> CAITLIN: I think now, it's imperative that I work in a mostly if at all possible a female environment. When I was in high school, I had at least one course with all women every semester. It was such a huge difference. I definitely like that environment much better.

While it was critically important to her to work in an all woman environment (and by all

woman she implied that the place should support feminist principles), Caitlin did not

immediately come out to those in her workplace, not even to the woman she identified as

lesbian. Despite seeing someone she believed to be lesbian who was openly accepted in

the workplace, Caitlin waited until she knew the women and verified her interpretations of

the climate as supportive. Because of her feminine appearance, Caitlin assumed that no

one else knew she was lesbian until she told them, and others' responses to her news

verified this as "Everyone was accepting, but surprised."

Like Caitlin, Robin moved into the job market with few contacts who could offer her a

sense of organizational climates. Therefore, she scouted the organizations through

exploring printed and online material about organizations and through asking potential

coworkers questions. She found lesbian or gay people who were employed at each

organization and asked for their experiences during her interview process. She reported on

one her experiences and noted that simply connecting with one gay or lesbian person to

check their experiences could be reassuring to her.

> [There was someone there I identified as a dyke based on her work interests.] I came out to her. [The hiring official] either heard directly from her or figured it out. I ended up being out, wherever I interviewed but it was sort of an indirect kind of [process]. I haven't very often felt that nobody knows, so I better make a public pronouncement. It seems either people kind of pick it up or there are enough gay people around to kind of come out to more quietly who then let it circulate. I'm fine with that.

Other lesbian workers also found that their appearance could signal their identity in

hiring situations. Those who were moving into more powerful positions from student to full-

time worker or into supervisory roles seem most aware of the extent to which their new work

identity was a construction. For them, clothing choices were more consciously made than

for those who had been in the same job for a year or more. Several interviewees mentioned

strategies for either trying to specifically not signal that they were lesbians or to signal that

they were conventionally feminine (with the assumption that conventional femininity was

often read as heterosexual). For Michelle, who defined her everyday work look as boyish,

dressing for an interview was a consciously constructed performance. She chose more

feminine clothing than she would normally wear for the interview. Like a few other women,

she expressly noted the literal material of body and fashion she was working with in

selecting clothing---men's clothes tended to fit her body better, but women's clothing

seemed more appropriate for an interview situation. As she later explained, she had a

friend who tended to wear more feminine clothing regularly shop with her for this suit. When

I asked her how she had selected an outfit for a recent interview, she explained.

> MICHELLE: Yeah, I wasn't quite sure exactly how to go about that. I think that was my first time I really had to, where it really mattered. You know, I had to buy my first suit and everything, for the interview. Yeah, it was exactly how dykie should I look here.
> This [an imaginary outfit] is what I really would like to wear. Yeah, I felt like I had to kind of tone down a little bit. It was kind of a big dilemma. I was wondering. I felt like I was kind of compromising myself.
> …The suit really doesn't reflect it, but, you know, I was getting my hair cut right before I left, and I was thinking, "No, don't cut it that short." Things like that. But, yeah, it definitely influenced how I dressed and everything for that one interview.
> KS: Well, tell me a little more about like, here's what I wanted to wear and here's what I actually wore. Can you, did you have sort of an outfit maybe that you tried on and it was like, "Yeah, but no."
> MICHELLE: I, not really. I have kind of, I guess a jacket or so at home, you know, I think would have been dressy enough, but I decided that it, I think it was, it's actually like a man's jacket and it just, yeah. I decided that was just a bit too much. So, but as far as the suits, I went and, I don't know.
> Men's pants and things just tend to fit me better, but I didn't, normally I guess I would have tried on some of both, but I tried on strictly the women's suits and stuff. But I found one that I liked and was pretty comfortable in.
> KS: What does it look like? Is it like a pants suit?
> MICHELLE: It's a pants suit, yeah.
> KS: With a jacket and—?
> MICHELLE: Yeah. Kind of double-breasted so it's higher up. But, yeah. You know, it's kind of, it's a woman's suit, but it's close. It's close to being a bit androgynous, I guess.
> KS: Um-hum.
> MICHELLE: Just it's clear that I feel more comfortable.

Notice that for Michelle, wearing more feminine clothing is linked to appearing more

professional or more appropriate for meeting those with more power in her workplace

(Dellinger and Williams 1995). She describes considering wearing her previous jacket,

which was "actually like a men's jacket" and "It was a bit too much." Therefore, she

consciously chose a "woman's suit, but it's close." Close to what is not stated, but she

implied close to androgynous or masculine enough for her taste.

Like Michelle, Dana tended to favor clothing that was often coded as masculine.

Although Dana described her body as signaling her lesbian identity clearly, she also

mentioned choosing clothes to counter-balance her very short hair and body shape with more feminine signals.

> DANA: Like with my job now, last summer, I buzzed it right up there pretty short. It was a little shocking for people. I could tell. But when I interviewed for them, I had just gotten my head shaved pretty close.
> KS: Really...
> DANA: But I wore a very feminine outfit. I went to a dress store in the mall and bought a women's top that looks like it's got a shirt on underneath it but it's actually just a little piece of cloth.
> KS: I know what you mean.
> DANA: I really like (it). It was comfortable and it was very nice.
> KS: Did you wear a skirt or just pants?
> DANA: Pants. I wore black linen pants with this kind of fake jacket shirt in one kind of deal. I even went and bought some black dress shoes and I bought some black trouser socks. Hadn't worn any of them since. I went to this interview and got the job and never dressed like that again. But my hair was really short.
> And, actually, I wore the other diamond earring. In fact, when we've got people in like the President of the company or the Vice, you know what I mean, bigwigs, I will wear the other earring. Terry lets me wear the other earring. But I will wear a gold chain, although I don't normally. But if there's people coming from out of town, then I'll do what I should do. I do that.

For Dana, as for others, dressing up in more formal and more feminine clothing was a key way to signal professionalism. Her discussion segued directly from the hiring process to dealing with variations in dress codes for daily work and for meetings with senior executives in her company. As Dellinger and Williamson (1995) noted in their interview of women's use of makeup at work, Dana conformed more closely to gender norms during professionally significant occasions when she interacted with those who had more workplace power than she did.

Tina felt that she passed as heterosexual in many contexts and was conscious of choosing clothing that looked professional and feminine such as dresses. However, Tina was committed to being out in her professional life as a college teacher in a profession committed to equal rights for all people. She described her efforts to test the openness of two jobs for which she was interviewing. In the first job, she described an interview at the organization.

173

TINA: Yeah. And I would be the only [lesbian], as far as I know. Basically everybody there told me their family situation. So it was pretty clear that it was not—and I asked them. I was really out with them, when the faculty took me to lunch. The director wasn't there. And I sort of talked about being a lesbian and being there, would that be a problem? And they were like, no. [There is] a really good gay community and they actually knew something about the gay community, which I felt was good. Some people had done some AIDS research, and so that made me feel good. And so, so I felt like, generally, that would be okay. But I think the director, I think I made the director uncomfortable. I got that feeling. And I have a pretty good read on people. Not always, but often.

In this situation, Tina explored both what people said and what they knew. The fact that these potential coworkers were knowledgeable about the gay community supported their verbal claims about the non-discriminatory atmosphere. By discussing this with future coworkers without a supervisor's presence, she also highlights the ways that lesbian workers gathered information that tended to be sensitive to power relationships. Other interviewees reported asking friends who worked in organizations or friends-of-friends to report on the organizational culture. Like Tina, they tried to avoid directly asking those in power to report on their organization believing that the question would either out them or would lead the director to report an overly positive view.

Tina also reported instances of struggles with living her principles of being out and trying to learn about organizations' policies while trying to find a job. At a hiring fair, she found an opening at a religious institution whose formal policies were notoriously heterosexist. The position offered excellent pay and other attractive features, but she wanted to be sure that they could accept openly lesbian employees. She received an offer to interview with them and decided to be out from the beginning.

TINA: I thought I can't interview with them. And then I thought, well, yes, I can and I'll just walk right up and say, "I'm a lesbian and if you have a problem with that, then I'm not interviewing with you." And I planned it. I almost rehearsed it in my head, like this is what I'm going to do. The interviewer arrives, confusing Tina because she looks like she might be lesbian.]
So I'm sitting there panicking, thinking I can't say what I was going to say [about being a lesbian] because I don't really even know what to do with this person, because who is this person? And I'm like, well, maybe she's a lesbian. Then I'm like, well, maybe she's a nun. You know, it's such a fine line in terms of

representation. [They conducted a successful interview finding a good match between Tina's qualifications and the organization's needs.]…

So we got through the whole interview, and I still had not brought up this gay thing, which still was sort of gnawing there but I wasn't sure how to do it.

And then the woman who looks like a lesbian, looks at me and says, "So are there any other concerns that might keep you from [taking this job]?"

And I said, "Well, I guess that would be the gay thing." And they just started to laugh. And I said, "What I need to know is that I'm out in my regular life, and I'm out [in my current job], and I would want to be out [there]. Would that be a problem?" And they both start to laugh. And this other [interviewer] starts to laugh really hard. She sort of gestures over to the other woman and she says, "Well, look who you're talking to." I mean, like, look who's interviewing you. And I was like, "Oh, well, I sort of thought so, but I wasn't sure."

Tina later was selected for the job and supported by her professional colleagues, but a senior administrator stopped her hiring. He believed that her open advocacy for gay rights would conflict with the organization's policies.

TINA: I walked around for a week going, "Wow, I have been blatantly discriminated against." And it's a private institution and there's noting I can do about it. And it was just amazing to me.

As other researchers have found, finding direct evidence of discrimination against lesbian and gay employees is difficult (Badgett 2001; Dunne 1997). In this example, the lesbian member of the hiring committee advocated for her and informed her of the decision-making process. While she was somewhat unsurprised at the administrator's decision to uphold religious policy, her shock at being 'blatantly discriminated against' resonated for months. The decision prevented her from taking a job for which she was well-qualified and which paid better than the job she later took.

As these examples have suggested, lesbian workers often explored the potential workplace culture when deciding whether a job would either be openly accepting of lesbian workers or could be managed using identity management strategies they knew. Finding a good fit made adjustment to the new situation easier than having to develop new identity management skills (Swidler 2001). While Swidler was exploring how people learned to negotiate personal relationships, research on the importance of organizational fit by Lyons,

175

Brenner, and Fassinger (2005) suggests that workers may also seek organizations that allow them to feel comfortable and apply known strategies rather than innovate.

<u>Intersections of Workplace Cultures and Individual Strategies</u>

As noted in the literature review, Lindsay and her co-authors created two interacting continua to explore how parents' strategies for identity management intersected with schools' environments for the members of lesbian-parented families. Family strategies included proud, selective, and private (Lindsay et al 2006, p. 1064). Families' strategies of disclosure included proud, private, and secretive. School cultures included homophobic, heteronormative, and supportive. In their discussion of school cultures, Lindsey and her co-authors used formal policies regarding families (such as permission forms) and informal statements by teachers and administrators to create their classification. In the analysis below, formal organizational policies and informal workplace interactions represent workplace-centered indicators of the organizations' culture toward lesbians as workers.

Formal polices were more common in large organizations (Raeburn 2000). The policies were generally of two types: non-discrimination and provision of benefits. Non-discrimination policies stated that sexuality, usually defined as sexual orientation, could not be a basis for employment decisions such as hiring, firing, or promotion. Organizations, especially those in the Fortune 500 and those employing large numbers of lesbian and gay employees took the first steps to offer such policies. Raeburn found that in the 1990s, most organizations adopted such policies because of the efforts of gay and lesbian worker advocacy groups, but that by the end of the 1990s Fortune 1000 companies were adopting these policies to stay competitive with their competitors for top talent (Raeburn 2000).

A non-discrimination policy provided a basic sense of safety from discrimination for the two interviewees with similar protections. Coming out or being identified as lesbian, would probably not cost their jobs. This safety could not be taken for granted. Among the

women I interviewed, most worked in organizations that did not provide such protections. Fewer yet had partner benefits which was consistent with national patterns (Raeburn 2000).

Formal policies were welcome, but not critical to these workers. As Caitlin noted, she is knowledgeable about policies, both for her organization and the national Employment Non-Discrimination Act then before Congress. Before accepting her current job, she reviewed the organization's policy.

> CAITLIN: I always check to see. I just read that the [organization's] policy was, what did it say. The policy is not to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation, but then there was this sentence after it that said that…[they don't control other related organizations].

Where policies existed, they might be seen more as symbolic gestures, than as actual protection. Jordan, for instance, noted that she still balanced that formal policy against her perception of coworkers' acceptance of lesbians in their workplace, but felt that it lessened the overall risk if the coworkers did respond negatively.

> JORDAN: The policy is nice to have there. I don't think I'll have to use it, but I did notice it, and I guess when I came out to my coworkers there was the knowledge in the back of my mind that I couldn't be fired for doing that.

None of the women had used non-discrimination policies, and where they had experienced discrimination, their preference was to tolerate the situation or leave the organization rather than pursuing the claim.

Federal laws were also proposed to offer more general coverage (Bawer 1995). At the time of the interviews, the United State Congress was debating a bill called the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) which would prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, with exceptions for religious institutions. This federal bill was introduced in 1996 and passed the House of Representatives. It failed in the Senate by a 50-49 vote in 1996. Similar bills have been introduced periodically since then, including a 2007 currently pending bill in the United States House of Representatives (Frank 2007). This new bill includes gender identity protections as well as sexual orientation protections. This new bill is aimed

177

both at protecting transgender employees and at avoiding previous loopholes between

sexual orientation, sex, and gender identity that employers sometimes tried to use to avoid

lawsuits (Blandford 2003).

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enefits polices outlined what, if any, benefits were available to family members (partners,

children, or housemates) of lesbian or gay employees. Formal benefits packages rarely

covered partners, but did cover biological and adopted children of most employees (Badgett

2001; Human Rights Campaign 2000). Most interviewees did not know whether their

organizations had benefits because these issues had not been discussed in their

employment hiring situations and they had not sought out this information themselves.

Workers were better able to report on informal organizational cultures that surrounded them

daily than on formal organizational polices.

Two of the interviewees had formal benefits for partners available, but neither needed

them as their partners received cheaper benefits from their own employment. Two other

women who were not covered by domestic partner benefits knew about their employer's

benefits policies from their own investigation. Tina had explored the policy when teaching

about same-sex couples and their legal treatment. Sherri trained employees in human

resources practices, so was very familiar with her company's policy. Both women had also

wondered whether the policies would be beneficial for their part-time employed partners, but

found the policies too expensive. Domestic partners, unlike married spouses, pay taxes on

their insurance as an employment benefit. Such disincentives make individual insurance

more attractive for many people. According to national surveys, when benefits were

available, usage tended to be light usually in the range of two percent of all employees

(Badgett 2001). This finding seems to be about economic calculations in double-earner

households and not about heterosexism only. The women who were eligible for these

benefits were partnered with women whose own employment earned them health care benefits that were as good as or better than the partner benefits.

Because the workers in this study were all self-supporting, but had no children and few major medical problems, workplace policies for partners and families were usually not necessary for them. In the years since this data was collected, some of the participants have sought employment in settings with partner benefits to allow their partners to be primary parents or choose work or volunteer activities that do not offer health care benefits. Other lesbian workers choose to accept otherwise unattractive jobs that carry domestic partner benefits when they have partners in need.

Other employment benefits such as sick leave for caretaking responsibilities were not covered by any of the organizations employing interviewees. The Family Medical Leave Act restricts coverage to family members in ways that exclude gay and lesbian partners (Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993). Similarly, leave policies may use language that may exclude lesbian and gay partners.

One worker reported an instance where her organizations' informal acceptance of her partner led her to expect similar support in interpreting a formal policy She reported several instances in which her coworkers treated her like she was part of "an old married couple" sharing information about daily activities, house projects, and other aspects of her partnership. Therefore, when her partner's mother died, she expected to be able to take funeral leave. To Sherri's surprise and outrage, she learned of exclusions of same-sex partners' families when her partner's parent died. Her supervisor had allowed her to take her own sick leave time to care for the parent and knew of her commitment to the older woman. However, when she requested bereavement leave at the woman's death, she was told that she did not qualify. Instead, she was told to take vacation time. She was livid. Sherri reported:

[In] the yellow personnel policy and procedure book, you can have up to three days of paid funeral leave for a mother-in-law. So you have to fill out the form. So I took the form in… I said, 'I don't know--how did I phrase it--it's difficult to set precedents' or something like that. Can I take these times off for Erica's mother. She got kind of embarrassed and sort of hemmed and hawed.
Then she said, 'Sherri, what I can tell you is that it's not in the policy. It's not in the policy.'
'So what you're saying is I have to take eight hours of vacation time.'
She said, 'Yes. You have to take vacation.' And yet eight hours of vacation.

Sherri's voice reflected her sadness at losing vacation time and at feeling disappointed in her supervisor's lack of support. This incident challenged Sherri 's general perception of her workplace as caring and equal-minded. This policy seemed unfair to her, since she could cite many people able to take time off to be pallbearers for people to whom they were less connected emotionally. Sherri noted that this policy was both heterosexist and sexist, since serving as pallbearer was generally restricted to men. What was even worse for her, she reported, was the sense of betrayal she felt from her coworkers. She responded by taking the vacation leave and not protesting the policy directly at that time. Later in our interview, Sherri noted that this and another incident were prompted her to meet with other lesbian and gay employees in her workplace to create a proposal for amendments to the policy. As a valued and high-status employee, she felt able to make such requests in a group setting; however, in the moment of needing leave time, she was not able to negotiate that individually.

Sherri's experience of feeling inadequately compensated and served by benefits packages shows the problems that resulted both from formal and informal interactions. Interactions with supervisors, coworkers, and others mediated how the formal policies were enacted. Sometimes these informal factors led to negative outcomes, though mostly they led to a chilly climate of low-level discomfort (Badgett 2001; Blandford 2003; Sandler, Resnick, and Hall 1996). As noted by other researchers, even when protected by organizational policies, few lesbian employees were willing to pursue discrimination suits or

other formal methods of dealing with discrimination (Badgett 2001; Badgett, Donnelly and

Kibbe 1992; Levine and Leonard 1984). Instead, dissatisfied workers left discriminatory jobs

or used informal means to deal with discrimination (see Hochschild 1989 for broader uses of

such patterns).

Having Other Employment Options

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articipants in this study who thought of themselves as having other employment options

were more likely to see lesbian identity factors as important in their workplaces. Those who

felt that they could find another job that was desirable were more likely to disclose their

identities at work, directly or through allowing others to make assumptions about them. For

instance, Tina who lost the job because of religious strictures against lesbians continued to

be vocally out, since she was a well-qualified applicant in an area where there were more

jobs than applicants. Similarly, Dana felt more likely to resist workplace rules and openly

perform a butch lesbian identity when jobs seemed plentiful.

> I told [my partner], 'When there's a lot of jobs in the Sunday paper, I do a lot of things
> on that week that I wouldn't do. When I look through the Sunday paper and there's
> not a lot of jobs, I always tuck my shirt in; I wear my belt; I wear my dress pants.
> When there's a lot of job in the Sunday papers, I might untuck my shirt. You know
> what I mean? I kind of--I don't know what the hell that's about. It's psychological
> warfare in my head. It works.

For women in occupations where their disclosure might 'follow' them to the next job,

identity management was a more fraught situation. Interestingly, academics were the most

likely to have had experiences where identity disclosures followed them from one job to

another. Workers in other fields were sometimes surprised to find that despite being

explicitly out at a previous job, no one in their next job had heard that they were lesbian,

even those talking with their references. As mentioned in chapter four, the tacit norms about

not outing others seemed to apply in these situations.

Workers who were doing temporary jobs followed a rather bifurcated pattern. Either they were very out or totally closeted. They were out, when others in the workplace were lesbian or gay, but tended to be closeted in other settings. Choosing a workplace with other queer people was often a choice for those who felt that they could not pass and for those who were newly out and used such settings as ways to be around other queer people.

As discussed in the section on the embodiment of identity, Dana thought that she could not pass. In past jobs, she had resisted following conventional feminine dress norms and liked the greater freedom offered in setting with other lesbians.

Melissa who was newly out to herself and others chose a summer job in a restaurant with several other gay and lesbian employees. This allowed her to be out at work and to create a community for herself.

> It was kind of like, it was like being part of a club kind of thing. Like you felt like you belonged, you know, and you were cool because you were a lesbian and they are lesbian. It was kind of like, you know, a little club kind of thing.
> KS: And did you kind of just chat between table and stuff?
> MELISSA: Yeah, and I mean, I was friends with the straight people there, too. But it was kind of good to have, like you didn't feel alone at all. Like you felt like you could just—and I still think that I over did it though. I still think that I like made a little, I made more comments than I would have. Like people that came in, like for some reason a lot of, like 'Frosty's' was know for like gay people working there. Gay people coming to eat there. So I'm like, "What do you think about table seven," and they were like, "They're queer." You know like, it was kind of fun.

Among the closeted group, workers mentioned that being out took energy to manage and carried emotional risks. It felt less complicated for them to avoid disclosure in such settings. Workers' experiences suggest that workers do adapt to their perception of organizational culture. They also evaluate how important being out is in a particular setting and with particular coworkers.

Review of Organizational Contexts

As this section has argued, personal relationships and informal judgments of support outweighed formal organizational policies in influencing lesbian workers' identity management strategies. These organizational contexts helped shape the level of risk that

workers felt when they disclosed and shaped how they managed lesbian identity issues daily. To conclude my personal example, we could say that the information encoded on sticky notes and individuals' uses of such notes in friendly conversation often outweighed the specifics of formal policies for workers' daily needs.

In temporary jobs or jobs that could easily be replaced, workers felt more able to disclose if they chose to do so. Sometimes they would perceive few risks to doing so, but find the possible short-term benefits outweighed by the inconvenience of coming out. For those in more permanent jobs, a balance of overall organizational environment and specific personal relationships in the workplace were important. Formal policies offered protection, benefits, and cues to the official environment. Workers' relationships with people in their working environments and their perceptions of those people's probable responses to lesbian identity disclosure shaped disclosure even more strongly. We will now move from questions about how workplace contexts shaped lesbian workers' disclosure strategies and identity management practices to the study's overall conclusions.

CHAPTER EIGHT

IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER WORK

Lesbian workers manage their identities amid a shifting context of legal and social recognition. Such current political and economic climates are important for understanding lesbian workers' sense of job security and job possibilities (Lyons, Brenner, and Fassinger 2005). Knowing that one has legal protection or that one could find another job easily may reduce fear lesbian workers have that their identity will stigmatize and penalize them in the job market. As of mid-2007, at the federal level, legal protections are proposed in a new version of ENDA (Frank 2007). States and localities vary widely in the range of protections they offer. Organizations, especially those that are large or seek employees in tight labor markets, have outpaced legislative changes by offering gay workers protections and even domestic partner benefits that exceed those mandated by law (Human Rights Campaign 2006). However, a majority of American workers are employed by smaller organizations who have adopted gay-friendly policies more slowly (Winfeld 2006). Even where workers do have formal protections, workers must balance the benefits of being out and receiving protection with the risk that others will react negatively. How then do lesbian workers manage their identities in their workplaces? What differences do the meanings of these identities to these women make to such management? How do personal characteristics and organizational cultures shape the constraints for their identity management?

The study examined how lesbian workers managed information about their identities with coworkers and others at work. The data collection occurred in a transitional moment when political debates about Don't Ask, Don't Tell and the first version of ENDA were roiling

and when media awareness of lesbians was just puncturing the veil of lesbian invisibility. In the late 1990s, Ellen DeGeneres was then still a newly-out lesbian actor and character on a comedy television show, not the host of a regular morning talk show. Her coming out had been momentous enough that she appeared on the cover of *Time* and the national media speculated widely on whether she had ended her career by coming out (Handy 1997). Rosie O'Donnell, who was a talk show host, was not out and regularly discussed her crush on Tom Cruise. The long-running, top-rated Will and Grace and numerous reality shows were also just beginning to inform or misinform the American public about the daily lives of gay men and lesbians as workers, friends, and possible role models.

At least in mainstream media, the climate for lesbians has improved. In a 2007 issue of *Time*, media commentator James Poniewozik speculated that Ellen DeGeneres had actually made low-key lesbian identity mainstream enough that she was chosen to host the Oscars (Poniewozik 2007). He also argued that even the more openly political Rosie O'Donnell had used coming out to her advantage and that it is "hard to imagine being gay harming her career," (Poniewozik 2007). Instead of causing problems, the commentator suggests that it has garnered O'Donnell additional publicity.

> But was coming out show-biz suicide for O'Donnell? Every celebrity should destroy her career so well. She has shown Middle America that lesbians can love women without hating men. And she has used her sexuality--the lesbian is Switzerland in the battle of the sexes--as entrée to discuss such concepts as the idea that sexual preference is a continuum, not an either/or.

Despite this increased media coverage and the growing public presence of media lesbians, we still know little about how ordinary people's careers are affected by being lesbian today or in the past. The people I interviewed were neither media icons nor political elites. The twenty interviewees in this study were middle-class lesbians who were working part-time and full-time in mainstream organizations while also dating, building partnerships, and sometimes getting involved in lesbian community projects. Exploring the interactions of workplace and individual contexts, the analysis examined how interviewees thought about

185

lesbian identity and what it meant in their lives. How did being partnered affect identity

management opportunities and constraints? How did working in a heteronormative, but not

homophobic organizational culture influence identity management? On a theoretical level,

this study focused on understanding processes of identity management with attention to the

influences of personal and organizational contexts beyond those of the particular individual

coworkers who were interacting.

My results also showed that personal characteristics such as time since coming out

and being partnered influenced how lesbian workers managed their identities at work.

Being out for longer periods of time offered women more opportunities to learn how to

balance work and personal concerns in ways that reinforced the meanings those identities

had in their lives. The meaning of identity, whether embodied, normalizing,

compartmentalizing, or political also shaped how lesbian workers manage what they do and

share about lesbian identity in their workplaces. For political women, this meant that they

had gained skills to educate others about lesbian identity. For embodied workers, this

meant they had learned to find jobs that enabled them to be out and be accepted.

Partnership also strongly shaped what lesbian workers wanted and needed to share

with coworkers to participate in workplace conversations. As Rasi and Rodriguez-Nogues

(1997) argued, being able to share information about one's partner often meant sharing

information about one's most important emotional relationship as well as one's daily life.

Having a partner also allowed workers' to disclose lesbian identity in ways that de-

emphasized their sexuality and fore-grounded their relationships. Because most workplace

environments officially forbade or frowned on discussions of sex at work, talking about

relationships was closer to the range of ways heterosexual workers discussed their sexuality

at work through discussions of dating, weddings, honeymoons, baby showers, and so on

(Badgett 2001).

Lesbian workers' perceptions of their workplace conditions were centrally important for understanding how they managed their identities at work. As a stigmatized and less powerful group in workplace encounters, lesbian workers adapted their identity management strategies to the conditions of the mainstream organizational members with whom they interacted. Like the lesbian-parented families discussed by Lindsay and her co-authors (Lindsay et al 2006), lesbian workers had clearly preferred strategies of action, but adapted these to organizational culture and to the specific persons with whom they interacted.

One of the key ways that lesbian workers attempted to control their identity management at work was through choosing workplaces and jobs carefully. Through personal referrals, reviews of company diversity policies, careful questioning during interviews, and other forms of informal research, many workers sought workplaces that would allow them to adopt their preferred identity management strategies. The meaning of their identities played into this search. As Badgett (2001) suggests, lesbian workers may consider a range of factors when choosing jobs and accept some forms of formal or informal discrimination as lesbians in order to gain better pay, a certain kind of work schedule or other benefits.

It is important to note that workers who felt that they could not pass sought workplaces where their lesbian presence was accepted from the first day on the job, while those who thought that they could pass usually reported weighing comfortable interactions as lesbian workers with other factors. As quantitative analyses have suggested (Lyons, Brenner, Fassinger 2005), fitting with the organizational culture is very important for predicting lesbian and gay workers' job satisfaction. This study elaborates on those findings to suggest that organizational fit factors may be especially important for workers who do not think they can pass. Finding organizations that were good fits could be difficult. While many workers sought the presence of other gay workers as signs of good treatment and possible allies (Badgett 2001), those who wanted to be out at work sometimes found that having

187

closeted gay coworkers or supervisors made their own identity management more difficult. In general, however, having gay coworkers, out or not out, did support workers in their efforts to manage lesbian identity without penalties.

Because this study focused only on workers who were currently employed, I learned most about how those who found workplaces that offered some or all of the benefits they sought managed their identities within such contexts. Lyons, Brenner and Fassinger (2005) suggest too that workers may tolerate formal and informal heterosexism in their workplaces if other aspects of the workplace's organizational culture are a good fit for them. They do not specify what aspects of organizational culture are most important. While their research does not specify what these other factors are, my results suggest that workers might weigh the benefits of job that match their training, that offer attractive pay or working hours, and include at least a few congenial coworkers as important aspects of fit. These aspects varied. For people like Dana who believed that they could not pass, but who had skills that readied her for several kinds of jobs, finding a place where she could be comfortably out was very important. For Robin and others who faced tighter labor markets, and who could pass as heterosexual if needed, working in their chosen field was sometimes more important than organizational culture relating to lesbian workers.

Issues for Managing Stigmatized Identities in Mainstream Organizations

This study has helped to describe some of the ways lesbians negotiated how, what, and when to tell coworkers about their lesbian identity. Lesbian identity management in mainstream organizations happens at the level of individual interactions such as workers' daily interactions with coworkers. Workplace cultures are created from patterns shaped by varied kinds of interactions both verbal and visual, including conversations about dinners shared with partners, what kind of clothing workers wear, and whose photos are displayed prominently or hidden in a desk.

As the following story describes, lesbians interacting with those they suspect may be hostile or unwelcoming may ignore opportunities for disclosure or may use the times to educate others about lesbians. The story below shows that lesbians selectively share information about their lesbian identity depending on the context. Kathleen McAuley told this story in a radio interview focusing her as part of a lesbian couple who were having a baby (Gordon 2007). Catherine McAuley is nine months pregnant with the child they plan to name "Case." They have legally taken the same last name to simplify their interactions with authorities once their son is born. Catherine's partner Kathleen McAuley discussed a story about her difficulties coming out even when she intended to do so. She also highlights the difficulty of predicting how others will react to disclosing lesbian identity that many interviewees reported in less dramatic ways.

> KATHLEEN: The other day, I was going [alone] to the fire dept to have the baby seat put in the car….I was driving over there, I was thinking. They're gonna look at me. And while I might look four months pregnant, four months is kind of early to be putting the car seat in the car. These guys are probably gonna ask some questions, and I found myself making...
> DICK: Preparing the answers, rehearsing the answers.
> KATHLEEN: Right, right. And, this is for Case [our son]. I'm gonna be strong, and if they ask me, I'm just gonna be open about it.
> So I pull up and this kind of country boy character came out.
> [They talk for a while as he installs the car seat.]
> So, I'm getting ready to shock the hell out of this guy when I say, I'm a lesbian and I'm having a baby and it's not me it's my partner
> And, anyway, so the first question he asked was like, 'So, you've got quite a bit of time yet here don't you...
> I was like, "Well, so…" And, I kind of let that one go. So, how do you work that one in. I just changed the subject and kind of got over that question.
> And a few minute later, he said, 'So, well, I guess if you and your husband are driving around and it starts to shake out in the next chunk of time, now you'll know how to tighten it.'
> And, again, I let that one go. And then a few minutes after that.
> He was like, 'So, is this your baby?'
> And, I said, 'No...no, it's not mine.' Which I was beating myself up for, and thinking, I should have just said, 'Yes, yes it's my baby.' and explained it then, but I didn't.
> So this guy's just really wondering what the heck's going on, I know.
> So a few minutes later he said, 'I'm sorry, I am really nosy, but…are you adopting a baby?'
> And, so then I just said, 'OK, no, my partner's pregnant. She's due in three weeks, and uh, you know, we're having a baby.' [Her voice hesitates and shows she was nervous saying this.]

189

And he goes, 'Oh! So it is your baby.'
And, that was so touching. And that, it just made me think you know we've have to just
stop coming from this place of fear and assuming that people are going to have a
problem with it.
DICK: Always having your guard up.
KATHLEEN: Yeah, let's not.

This story encapsulated many of the dynamics of managing lesbian identity in mainstream settings. Even in this relatively low-risk setting where she may never see the man again, Kathleen's experiences with homophobia encourage her to carefully manage information about her lesbian identity.

Other research has shown the difficulties lesbian parents, especially non-biological parents, face in sharing information about their families (Lindsay et al 2006), and more generally, about the difficulties of revealing lesbian identity when one is passing as heterosexual. Kathleen McAuley was comfortable enough being an out lesbian that she volunteered to share the couple's experiences in an hour-long radio show; however, in a face-to-face conversation with a man at the fire station she repeatedly avoided questions that might out her.

It was only when the firefighter asked a question that he acknowledged as 'really nosy,' that Kathleen explained that her partner was having a baby. He clearly assumed that he was violating a norm by asking about whether the child was hers, which suggests that such direct questions are not within the norm, The man's positive response both touched her emotionally and helped her resolve to assume others' will accept her statements. Later Kathleen reflects on how this encouraged her to be more open.

> KATHLEEN: So, I've always been trying to operate from that lens, help people get it,
> whatever it is. Whether it's a gay thing or it's special needs. Whatever it is.
> Let's not hide ourselves just because someone might feel uncomfortable. But, after
> that experience it was just clear, like who are we to assume that everybody we meet
> is going to have a problem with it. Who are we to assume that they don't know or
> love somebody who is gay.

Like the women in my study who used a political framing of lesbian identity to interpret the meanings of lesbian identity in various contexts, Kathleen's statement clearly shows her perception of the ways that expectations of homophobia and heterosexism can inhibit people's abilities to act spontaneously in an 'open and flowing' manner. Kathleen and her partner indicated that they saw lesbian identity in the way I described as the political viewpoint and used its strategy of coming out to educate others, because they believed that disclosures promoted greater acceptance by those who were heterosexual. In explaining the man's reaction, she links the firefighter's positive response to her to her belief that he must 'know or love somebody who is gay.' This latter statement is consistent with the ideology of the gay rights movement, which has encouraged lesbians and gay men to come out as a method of challenging stereotypes of homosexuality and gaining greater acceptance from heterosexual audiences (Powers and Ellis 1996).

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his story reiterates several of this study's key themes and suggests some areas for further research. First, the story reminds us that some lesbians do pass as heterosexual. It was not until Kathleen revealed that she was a lesbian co-parent that the firefighter was able to understand how she could be an expectant mother who was neither adopting a child nor appearing pregnant. More importantly, their story reminds us that identity management occurs with a mixture of intention and improvisation. Kathleen intended to present herself as a lesbian mother. She even rehearsed some strategies and reminded herself that these actions were symbolically important for her son. However, in the moment of interacting with someone she saw as judgmental, she hesitated to disclose her identity. She managed her lesbian identity for much of their conversation using a strategy of passing as heterosexual by indirect comments. It was not until the man broke conversational norms by asking if she were pregnant or adopting the child that she came out. Her final disclosure that her partner is pregnant with their child finally answers his questions. These final comments allow her

actions to match her intentions of being out. The firefighter's positive response, 'Oh, then it is your baby,' affirmed her connections to her family and offered her unexpected support.

What is significant about this story for my purposes is the way that this woman side-stepped several questions about her status as a mother before finally explaining that her partner was pregnant. This example also seems to highlight the ways that people may be asked if they are lesbians (or otherwise 'unusual' types of parents) indirectly before they are asked directly. The direct question the firefighter finally asks is one he considers rude, yet Kathleen has ignored his less-direct questions.

This discussion is not meant to be critical of Kathleen's actions, but rather to highlight the ways these actions reflect typical strategies for managing identity. Because this conversation took place in one isolated incident, Kathleen was able to narrate its evolution. Interviewees in my study occasionally reported an opening or probing question from a coworker, but these tended to happen in fluid ways integrated such discussions into their on-going workplace interactions. Unlike Kathleen, the interviewees were rarely able to retrace the paths from coworkers' questions to later identity management. Because interviewees experienced such moments as part of their overall workplace interactions, they rarely were able to point out exactly what led to a feeling that particular coworkers were gay-friendly or probably knew of their lesbian identity although the interviewees were implicitly, not explicitly out, to them. In a similar way, Kathleen notes earlier in the interview that she will take time off her work to spend with the baby, but makes no mention of the conversations or reactions she got to that news from coworkers.

Finally, Kathleen's encounter triggered a feedback loop toward more disclosure similar to those Badgett (2001) found in workplaces where positive policies or treatment of out gay people promotes more people coming out. After this encounter, Kathleen notes that she will stop expecting people to be anti-gay and instead come out with the expectation of positive feedback. Continuing research, including direct observations in varied workplaces and other

interaction sites of lesbians with mainstream organizations, is needed to describe how people manage their identities and to see what meanings lesbians and those with whom they interact bring to such encounters.

<u>Suggestions for Further Research</u>

This study's findings are limited in their generalizability in significant ways. First, at best, these results apply to white lesbians with at least some college education who work in locations separate from their families-of-origin. They were not parenting children, so their family involvements were primarily families of origin and partners. As I argue elsewhere, the data were gathered during a period and location of relative political openness and economic growth.

Research on lesbians, especially those in workplace settings, may be rightfully criticized for under-representing the experiences of women of color. In fact, it is significant that images of lesbians of color were never mentioned by study participants and remain largely invisible in media as well. While I am concerned about repeating this pattern of white-only research, I can only acknowledge that lesbian workers of all races experience some forms of heterosexism similarly and some differently. Many white lesbians have been able to ignore the ways that white racial identity shaped their own experiences (Besant 1999). As other researchers note, "the effects of the interaction between racial category and sexual orientation as well as the susceptibility to double stigmatization may create a unique vocational situation for [People of Color]," (Lyons, Brenner and Fassinger 2005, p. 546). More research on these experiences is needed.

The study also demonstrates the need for further work to explore the differences among lesbian workers in terms of their personal characteristics and the ways that they understand lesbian identity. Others have argued for the need to study "individuals in the context of their fuller set of identities related to race, class, and gender, in particular," (Badgett 2001, p. 229). To the identities Badgett lists, I would add partnered or single status.

193

As this study shows, partnered lesbians saw their identity as meaningful in and through relationships with their partners. They were more likely to disclose their lesbian identity because of their partners' presence in their lives and through discussions of her presence than in any other way. Others' research points to the ways that seeking domestic partner benefits or benefits for a partners' biological children may inspire workplace activism, how their presence in lesbian workers' lives shapes daily negotiations of what is said to coworkers whether about their dinner menus or need for childcare is still mostly a matter of conjecture. Badgett's (2001) work, for instance, points out the ways that working for partner coverage has motivated much workplace activism, but relies on inferences of motivations and particular companies' reports rather than a fuller range of data. Further research should also continue exploring how partnership shapes career and job choices.

The women interviewed were relatively privileged in terms of their education, job skills, racial identity, and cultural capital. Their very real concerns about job loss and choosing jobs that were supportive were real, but they faced these searches with some resources. Generalizing these findings to groups with different characteristics or even to experiences of the same lesbian workers nearly ten years later could be difficult. Historical change and changes in their workplaces, partnership statuses, and other identities have led several of them to adopt new identity management strategies. Understanding their decision-making processes and strategies for identity management may, however, inform other efforts to understand sexual identity management in workplace contexts.

The study suggests that more information is needed about how lesbians choose career paths and jobs. Counseling psychologists have been urged to consider the fit between workers and their work environments when they guide workers in choosing or adjusting to careers and jobs (Dawis and Lofquist 1984 cited in Lyons, Brenner, and Fassinger 2005). While suggesting that people should choose jobs that match their skills and interests seems obvious, they suggest that those offering advice must also suggest ways workers can find

194

organizational cultures that fit their larger sets of interests (Lyons, Brenner, and Fassinger

2005). This research on gay and lesbian employees has largely explored only matches

between values and organizational culture without attention to power differentials, risks of

coming out, or the changing political climates lesbian and gay employees face (Lyons,

Brenner, and Fassinger 2005). Extending research on these issues has the potential to

both flesh out the processes underlying lesbians' career paths and to offer guidance to

workers. College students and other job entrants often receive little advice about how to

manage their identities in workplaces or even how to choose workplace settings that support

their success.

Implications of This Research

    This study's implications are useful for those in academic research, business, public

policy, and employment counseling. First, the study suggests that understanding

quantitative studies of workplace discrimination, income differentials, and job satisfaction

can be enhanced by exploring the processes through which lesbian workers choose jobs

and manage their identities at work.

    Businesses who wish to compete for talented employees may find these results useful in

arguing for formal non-discrimination and partner benefits policies and for increased

education for workers to change organizational climates to ones of greater acceptance of all

workers. As noted in the Human Rights Campaign's 2006 Annual Report, many large

organizations have found providing such benefits helps them attract and retain highly

qualified employees of all sexual orientations. In some industries, provision of such benefits

is becoming a standard expectation as industry leaders adopt model policies (Human Rights

Campaign 2006).

    Creating not only formal non-discriminatory policies, but also shifting organizational

climates to greater respect for all workers is another implication of this research. The costs

of hiding lesbian and gay identity in situations where mismanagement could lead to job loss

or other forms of discrimination reduces workers' efficiency (Badgett 2001). Having to manage a potentially stigmatizing identity keeps some lesbian workers from forming closer personal relationships with colleagues. Such personal ties offer non-monetary benefits for employers in terms of greater efficiency and workplace commitment by workers (Hochschild 1997). Focusing educational efforts on providing information about sexual orientation and family diversity is another important step. Educational efforts that also present discussions of sexuality in the workplace in terms of gender-neutral practices and that challenge heteronormative assumptions are also helpful. Trainers who extend their discussions beyond respectful treatment of people of all sexual orientations to model ways that discussions of gay or lesbian identity are not focused on sexual acts, can also increase all employees' skills for interacting with each other (Fassinger, Brenner, and Lyons 2005).

While organizations have led the way in providing fair workplace policies, public policies that prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation are urgently needed. Currently, workers must navigate identity management among organizations that vary widely in their treatment of lesbian workers. If differences persist over time, workers may gravitate to employers who offer better benefits or workplace climates in ways that drain their energy from other sorts of work. Workers' choices of jobs that seem to be supportive of lesbian identity may lead some to underachieve or simply fail to contribute to society because of the risks they face. Having non-discrimination policies, including those that provide equal treatment for lesbian and gay employees' partners offers basic equality of access and outcomes for lesbian and gay employees.

As mentioned above, learning more about these issues will enable counselors, academic advisers, and family members to offer better advice to job seekers. Having a research base on the importance of policy protections, on finding markers of supportive work environments, and other workers' strategies for negotiating lesbian identity in heteronormative contexts would enable lesbian workers to avoid having to pay for

196

supportive workplaces with pay cuts (Badgett 2001) and to contribute the full measure of their abilities to their work (Winfeld 2005).

<u>Contributions of the Study</u>

This study has focused attention on lesbians' identity practices in their workplaces. Understanding how lesbians negotiated if, what, how, and when to tell coworkers about their lesbian identity contributes to an understanding of a central focus of their lives in terms of meaning, possible emotional connections, and financial security.

The extent to which identity management is a relevant question varies depending on whether workers have the power to control partially or fully what others in their workplace know about their lives outside of the work context. This study shows that workers who live in an urban setting where in-migration had been high found that others in their workplace rarely knew them or knew of of them before they entered a work setting. This disconnection from their pasts and their personal lives allowed for a level of urban anonymity not present in other urban regions of similar size. This offered opportunities to manage lesbian identity issues without worries about overlapping relationships between those known in their personal and work lives.

This project deepens our understanding of the ways sexuality and sexual identities are always present in workplaces, if often unacknowledged or noted only in cases of violence and harassment (Hearn and Parkin 1995). What meanings sexual identities have for workers has been under-explored in the past. This study showed that lesbian workers' identity management strategies varied depending on whether they believed they were managing already revealed identities or were managing a hidden identity whose meaning was personal, not relevant at work, or politically important. While others have noted variations in how lesbians manage identity in mainstream settings, they have not asked what 'it' is that is being managed. By showing that how an individual's understandings of what lesbian identity is influences her handling of workplace disclosure issues. This work

197

has possibilities for extension to other groups, beyond lesbians and gay men, since examining how workers manage stigmatized identities and marginalized sexualities helps understand these processes and those of privileged actors in such settings.

This study also shows that processes of identity management relate both to characteristics of actors and the organizations in which they work. Their workplace settings allow for a view of different kinds of workplaces where these middle-class, college-educated women worked.

In a country where millions of viewers wake up to Ellen DeGeneres' talk-variety show Ellen, we might say that lesbian workers' problems are over. Because DeGeneres rarely talks about her relationship with her partner or otherwise mentions being lesbian, I suggest instead that certain kinds of lesbian identity management have become more acceptable, but that balancing openness with clients' or coworkers' comfort levels remains crucial. Just as the Cosby Show did not signal the end of racism, Ellen does not signal the end of heterosexism. Understanding when and for which workers being fully present as workers and as people with personal lives is possible remains important.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

List of Topics for Interviews

(This list was given to interviewees as we began the interview.)

Topics of the interview and general format.
      I'd like to talk with you about eight broad topics. We will move among the different topics depending on how they relate in your life and which ones are most important to you.

General questions about where you work

People you work with (how often you see them, how well you know them)

What role work plays in your life

Lesbian identity in your personal life

Coming out in other situations

Relationship status

What role lesbian identity plays in your work

Strategies you use to express, share, and conceal your identity

Workplace attitudes towards lesbians and gay men

Future plans for work

List of Topics/Questions for Interviews

The list of questions is a guide. The order and probes will vary depending on how comfortable the interview subject and I are with each other and depending on what she finds most relevant about her experience.

Lesbian Identity (and Individual Framing of it)
Issue of naming and identity
*What term are you most comfortable using to describe your sexual identity (used to *choose language with which she's comfortable*)?
*What does being a lesbian (*or other term*) mean to you?

Coming Out Questions
What age were you when you first came out to yourself?
What age were you when you first came out to anyone besides yourself?

*In what ways do you express or conceal your identity in your personal life including with family, friends, and acquaintances?
      Have you discussed your sexual orientation explicitly with them?
      Do you think they 'know anyway?
Do you think people on the street know you are a ___?
Do you think that you pass for straight unless you tell people otherwise?

Context in life (framing as ideological, political, integrative, etc.)
*What roles does it (*this identity*) play in your life?
* What motivates you to share or conceal your sexual identity in the ways you do? Are there ideas other people have about this that you share or disagree with (example of coming out to make gay people more visible and normal)?

Relationship Status Questions
Are you dating someone currently?
Are you in a long-term romantic relationship or relationships?

How long have you been with this person?

Is this person male or female?
Do you consider yourselves domestic partners?

Have you applied for this status legally?

What might make you decide to do so?
Have you ever been married to a man?
Are you a parent? Yes   No Loss of custody   Death of child

If so, what role do you play in your children's lives?
Are you a co-parent of a partners' child/ren?
What role do you play in those children's lives?
Has your relationship status (being partnered or not) ever affected whether you come out at work or elsewhere? If so, how?

Workplace Specific Topics

General description of work attitudes and workplace
*What ideas did you receive about working when you were growing up and leaving high school? How have those changed or not changed in the years since then?
*What roles does your work play in your life? For instance, is it important in terms of how you think about yourself and your identity or is it something you just do for money?
*What do you like most about your work?
*Relative to other activities in your life, how important is your work to you?
*Where do you work? Can you tell me about what it's like to work there? Are there special issues you feel you face as a lesbian? (and then probe for answers to the following)
What type of work do you do? (occupation and job)
Where are you employed? (Elicit the name of the employing organization and site of work.)
How long have you held this job?
Did your sexual orientation have any effect on your decision to apply for or to take your current job? In what ways did it affect your decision?
How has your sexual orientation affected other decisions about career choie or job choices?
What is the ideology of your workplace about gay issues?
What is the culture or "feel" to your organization? What is it like to work there, if you were telling someone new?

People you work with (how often you see them, how well you know them)
Is most of your work in one setting? Describe the settings.
Do you move around physically or to other places for your work?
Do you interact with one group of people?
Do you interact with several groups of people regularly, for instance, clients, coworkers, etc.?
Is it a place where people time together outside of work situations?

D
o you eat lunch with people from work?

Y
es   no sometimes

H
ow much non-work time do you spend with them?

H
ow many of them, if any, do you consider friends?
Is it a place where people share information about themselves? Yes no depends (on what?)
How comfortable do you feel about sharing personal information with your coworkers?
How comfortable do you feel about sharing personal information with your HR manager?
Is talking with people part of your job? Yes no depends

F
or example, do you interact with clients or customers?
Is talking with people about personal issues (your own or others) part of your job?

F
or example, do you provide counseling either formally or informally? To whom?
        Tell me more about how (if at all) your job involves talking about personal issues.

Job-Related Benefits
What types of benefits do you receive through your job?
Does your employer allow time off for personal time or for family-related issues (fo instance, through the Family and Medical Leave Act)?
How important are benefits as a reason for choosing or staying with this particular job?

Does your employer offer domestic partner benefits? Yes No Don't know
Does your employer provide benefits for your children, if you have any? Yes No Don't know
What kinds of benefits do you receive for your children?
Does your employer provide daycare or day care assistance to employees with children?
Does your employer pay for children's medical insurance as part of benefits for their parents?

ENDA
*Are you familiar with ENDA (Employment Non-Discrimination Act prohibiting discrimination in employment on the basis of sexual orientation)?

Currently unemployed: (*Did not interview anyone without a current job.)*
If you are not employed now, what work did you last do? When was that?
*Why did you leave?

Dress Codes
Is there a dress code for your work? It is formally or informally stated/
What sorts of outfits do you and your coworkers wear?
Do you make any effort to signal or hide your sexual orientation through what you wear?

Past and Future Expectations for Work-Related Issues
Do you plan to stay in your current job for the next year or more?
How would you handle being gay in your next job? What factors might influence your choices?

Advice to Others
If someone asked you for advice on coming out at work, what would you tell her? What should she consider?

WRITTEN INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Pseudonym of your choice _____

What is your age? _____   How old were you when you came out (first time)? _____

What is your race/racial identification? _____

How would you describe your sexual orientation (choose all that apply)? For instance, do you think of yourself as

le

sbian

g

ay

bi

sexual

h

eterosexual
Queer

Q

ueer woman

w

oman involved with another woman
or something else (specify)? _____

Do you feel that this orientation is:

g

enetic
chosen   environmental   all of the above

What is the highest level of education you and your parents (or other caregivers) have completed? What sorts of jobs did they hold? Fill in the blanks below, please.

a. less than high school   **b.**
high school   **c.**
trade school   **d.**
some college
e. associate's degree   **f.**
bachelor's degree (BA/BS)   **g.**
master's degree
h. PhD i. MD J JD

Your education_____

Mother's education _____

M

ain job(s) _____

Father's education _____

Main job(s) _____
Stepmother's education _____

Main job(s) _____
Stepfather's education _____

Main job(s) _____
Guardians' education _____
Main job(s) _____

When you were growing up, would you say that your family's class status was:
poverty

working

middle

upper middle

upper

How many hours per week do you work (for each job)? #1 _____ #2 _____ #3 _____
Are there more than 50 people employed by your organization? Yes   no   not sure

Overall, how well do you like your job? (Note, if you hold multiple jobs)
Strongly like
Moderately like   Neutral   Moderately Dislike

Strongly Dislike

Are there other people in your current household who work for pay?
        Live alone Yes

No
If you live with others, how many people in your household work for pay? _____

What is your current individual average income from your job(s)? Circle one.
Under $10,000   11-20,000   21-35,000   36-50,000   51-75,000   76-90,000 over 91,000

What is your household's total income from jobs?
Under $10,000   11-20,000   21-35,000   36-50,000   51-75,000   76-90,000   over 91,000

Does your household have other sources of income (stocks, investments, alimony, etc.)?
Yes No
How important are other sources relative to your job income?

APPENDIX C:

CONSENT FORM

I, _____ (please print your name), agree to participate in an interview about my work experiences and the types of personal information I share with people at work with Kathryn Schmidt of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Kathryn is exploring the types of personal information lesbian and bisexual women share with their co-workers and employers. She plans to write a dissertation that studies workers' personal and professional relationships with people at work, reasons that workers share information, discrimination based on shared information, and differences in workplace cultures.

The interview will cover eight broad topics: general questions about where I work, people I work with (how well I know them and how often I see them), lesbian identity in my personal life, coming out in general, relationship status, what roles lesbian identity plays in my work and life, strategies I use to express, share, and conceal my identity, workplace attitudes towards lesbians and gay men, and what role work plays in my lie. The discussion will move among these different topics depending on how they relate in my life and on which ones are most important to me.

I agree to the following interview format:
_____ Tape-recording and note-taking in person
_____ Tape-recording and note-taking by phone
_____ Note-taking only in person
_____ Note-taking only by phone

If the interview is tape-recorded, it will be transcribed within 7 days, and then the tape will be destroyed. Any notes that might identify me will be destroyed after they are transcribed.

I understand that my identity will be kept confidential in all information gathered in this interview. Kathryn will accomplish this by changing my name and any information obtained from this discussion that might uniquely identify me. Under these conditions, I agree that any information obtained from this interview or follow-up my be used in any way thought best for publication.

Participation in the study is voluntary and there is no penalty for not participating. I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in this interview at any time. I may also refuse to answer any individual question. If I decline to participate, Kathryn will not include information about me in her records or completed study except for a count of the people who were contacted and chose not to participate. None of them will be individually identified or identifiable.

If I have any questions or concerns that arise in connection with this interview or any other aspect of this study, I should contact Kathryn or her faculty adviser, Professor Rachel Rosenfeld at 919/962-1007. I may also contact the UNC Academic Affairs Institutional Review Board if I have questions about my rights as a research subject (contact David A. Eckerman, Chair, AA-IRB Office, CB #4100, Bynum Hall, UNC-CH, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-4100, 962-7761.)

_____

_____
Date
                                                                                      Si
gned

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221

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