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**Women's Experience on Learning That Their
Intimate Partner is Homosexual**

By

Denise Joy Larsen



**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education**

in

**Counselling Psychology
Department of Educational Psychology**

Edmonton., Alberta

Fall, 1995



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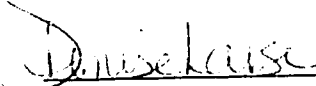
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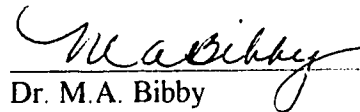

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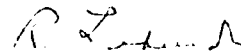
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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Women's Experience on Learning That Their Intimate Partner is Homosexual" submitted by Denise Joy Larsen in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in Counselling Psychology.



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Dr. D. K. Kieren

Date: AUGUST 15, 1995

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family whom I love dearly. To my grandparents, for their friendship, and the meaningful and solid foundation which they have provided for me. To my parents for their profound support and love. To my sister for friendship that only a sister can provide. To my brother for his quiet caring and great sense of humour. To my inlaws for their care and hugs. And of course, to my partner, Michael, for enriching my life, and for learning and growing with me.

ABSTRACT

This study used an existential-phenomenological methodology to investigate the experience of five women who had learned that their intimate male partner was homosexual. The purpose was to provide an in-depth description of the salient and unique aspects of this phenomenon to lay readers as well as professional therapists. This description should provide a clearer understanding of the issues which women may encounter when learning that their intimate partner is gay.

Individual interviews were conducted with each of five participants. Nine themes essential to the experience were revealed through data analysis. For these participants, learning that their intimate partner was homosexual was revealed to be a complex experience which was influenced by family and social attitudes. The experience resulted in a profound identity crisis based on the loss of each woman's foundation in relationship. Implications for counselling are suggested and the results are discussed in relationship to current research on women's self-definition and experience in relationship.

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I would like to express my sincere gratitude to both Dr. Mary Ann Bibby and Dr. Rosemary Liburd for their generous support, encouragement, and feedback as I worked through the research process. I would also like to express my appreciation to Dr. Diane Kieren, the third member of my examining committee for providing new perspectives on my research.

To the women who provided their stories for this research, a very special thank you. I have recognized the risks which you took to share difficult aspects of your lives with me. I have also recognized your trust in my careful interpretation of your experiences.

Finally, I wish to thank my family and my partner for their personal and academic support throughout my education. I expressed my deepest gratitude to both my mother and father for their steadfast belief in my abilities and support of my dreams. I am also very grateful to my partner Michael Gulayets for his support and unwavering willingness to critique and proof my written work through out this project -- without him none of my commas would be in place.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

General Overview

In recent years, North American culture has begun to deal openly with the issue of homosexuality. Homosexual activists have fought for equal human rights protection and public acceptance of their sexual orientation. Over the years, many parents have become aware of the homosexual orientation of their children and have attempted to adjust to this new information (Clark, 1977; Fairchild & Hayward, 1979). Yet, there are others affected by homosexuality who have received little attention or support. Many women and men learn that their spouses are homosexual, having had no prior knowledge of this (Gochros, 1989; Buxton, 1991). I have met many women married to gay men who struggle with this new found knowledge. They often describe their experience as a deep sense of isolation, confusion and fear. Their questions, often profound, can be frightening and confusing. These women often ask, "Why me?" "What does this say about me?" and "What should I do?". While there are no clear answers provided by literature, these questions provide the impetus and rationale for this study. These women often report an isolated existence and are afraid for their own future, unclear about the impact of their male partners' disclosure, and unsure of to whom they can safely turn. Listening to and carefully analyzing the stories of their struggles, fears and triumphs can provide a window of understanding on this often hidden phenomenon. It can also serve to educate those of us who work in the helping professions.

The Research Question

This study proposes to examine an experience. The question that it asks is simply: “What is the experience of a woman who learns that her intimate partner is gay?” While this question is simply stated, the intention of the study is to describe the deepest thoughts and feelings that a woman experiences when learning of her partner's homosexuality. Through in-depth interviews and careful analysis, themes common to all participants' experience may emerge. Careful description and empathic understanding may allow an informed sensitivity to our understanding of the inner experience of these women. A clearer understanding may also aid those in the helping professions to accurately empathize with heterosexual women who find themselves in relationships with homosexual men. Finally, the actions and decisions that these women have made may provide insight into successful ways to cope with a husband's homosexual disclosure.

The goal of this research then is to better understand this phenomenon by examining the descriptions provided by five women who have experienced their partner's homosexual disclosure. Each woman's interview will provide the raw data which will be analyzed and interpreted using phenomenological methods as delineated by Giorgi (1975) and Colaizzi (1978).

To date, a number of studies have examined the experience of homosexual disclosure within married relationships. The majority of these studies have only given cursory attention to the wives' experience as described by their husbands. In addition, a very limited number of studies, just three, exist which examine the wives' experience as described by themselves. While the results of these studies have proved beneficial,

they also contain some basic inconsistencies particularly regarding the impact of disclosure on the marital relationship and the role that stigma plays in the experience. These are discussed in Chapter Two.

The ultimate goal of this research is accurate, in depth description of women's experience in intimate relationships with gay men. It is my hope that, through careful investigation and essential description, this study will help to provide clinically useful data where little exists. In addition, descriptions from this research may serve to untangle some of the inconsistencies in past research. Finally, this study may add breadth to findings from previous studies which have focussed exclusively on married relationships.

Overview of Thesis

The following section outlines the chapter format for the thesis presentation. This includes an examination of relevant literature, methodological issues and procedures, data analysis and results, and a reflection on the findings.

Chapter Two presents a review of the literature on relationships between homosexual men and heterosexual women. Particular focus is given to critically reviewing and highlighting the findings of studies on the experience of women in these relationships.

Chapter Three addresses methodological issues and focusses on the reasons for selecting a qualitative, phenomenological approach to the present research question. This is followed by a detailed description of the phenomenological method employed in this study. In addition, information on selection of participants, data gathering, and the process of data analysis is discussed. Finally, issues of validity, reliability and

generalizability will be addressed as they relate to qualitative research in general and to this study in particular.

Chapter Four presents the description of the individual experience which is the result of the phenomenological analysis for each protocol examined in this study. It also includes a higher level phenomenological analysis which reveals a description of the phenomenon common to all five participants.

Chapter Five presents a reflection and discussion of the results described in Chapter Four. This chapter contains a summary of the research findings, suggests potential implications for counselling, and addresses areas which may warrant additional research.

Definitions

Differences exist within the literature regarding the exact meaning of several terms used when addressing sexual orientation. For example, the differences or similarities between homosexuality and bisexuality remain blurred, particularly in much of the research on gay/straight relationships. As a result, the definition of several terms is necessary in order to clarify the description of this study.

Homosexuality: While there is no commonly accepted distinction between homosexuality and bisexuality, homosexuality most commonly refers to any sexual activity between members of the same sex (Hyde, 1986). Important for this present study, this usually includes the following four elements: erotic fantasy, sexual activity with others, a perceived sense of identity, and corresponding social role (Friedman, 1988).

Bisexuality: More debate exists around the definition of bisexuality. A simple, but possibly less helpful definition of bisexuality focusses exclusively on behaviour and suggests a bisexual is a person that engages in sexual activity with members of the same and members of the opposite sex (Hyde, 1986).

Kinsey, Pomeroy and Martin (1948) found that a large number of males rated themselves in the middle portions of a continuum anchored on one end by exclusive heterosexuality and at the other end by exclusive homosexuality. This research found that 37% of males in the study had had at least one homosexual experience leading to orgasm in adulthood. This suggested that many males may consider themselves as experiencing varying degrees of bisexuality from nearly exclusive homosexuality or heterosexuality to an equal preference for both sexes.

MacDonald (1981) considered bisexuality to be more situation specific and influenced by life circumstances, life stage and specific partners. MacDonald indicated that bisexuality was revealed simply through a person's desire and enjoyment of sexual activity with both sexes.

While these definitions are informative, for purposes of this study, each woman's identification that her partner is homosexual, as evidenced by some of the four elements outlined above, was the sole criteria for including her experience as the partner of a homosexual man. Throughout the duration of this thesis *homosexual* will refer to each woman's report that her husband disclosed a homosexual orientation to her. The degree of each male partner's homosexual attractions or homosexual activity will be discussed by his partner as relevant to her experience.

Heterogenous: The term *heterogeneous* will be used throughout this study to refer to a relationship between a homosexual man and a heterosexual woman.

Intimate: Participation in this study required women to be involved in an intimate relationship at the time of their partners' disclosure. As the literature review will indicate, this represents a broader definition than has been used previously in research on heterogeneous relationships. Nearly all previous studies have employed the somewhat arbitrary distinction of marriage as implicitly defining an intimate relationship at the time of disclosure. Perlman and Duck (1987) stated that, "One often sees references to marriage . . . as being synonymous with intimacy. In our view, such relationships have the potential for being intimate, but we prefer to define intimacy in terms of the qualities achieved in the relationship" (p. 16).

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (1981) defines intimate as follows:

(1) belonging to or characterizing one's deepest nature, (2) marked by very close association, contact or familiarity, (3) marked by a warm friendship developing through long association, and (4) of a very personal or private nature. (p. 600)

Much research and debate has occurred on the nature and definition of intimacy beyond that provided by dictionary definitions. Rubenstein and Shaver (1982) included the following descriptors in their list of the features of intimacy: openness, honesty, mutual self-disclosure, caring, warmth, protecting, helping, being devoted to one

another, mutually committed, emotionally attached, and feeling distress when separated.

According to Erikson (1963), intimacy includes “the capacity to commit self to . . . partnerships and to develop the ethical strength to abide by such commitments, even though they may call for significant sacrifices and compromises” (p. 263).

Perlman and Duck (1987) found three main themes across definitions of intimacy. They included: “ closeness and interdependence of the partners, the extent of self-disclosure, and the warmth or affection experienced” (p. 16). These aspects of intimacy can be found in the relationships that each of the participants in this study describe.

Each of the participants in this study described an affectionate relationship based on mutual commitment and an interdependence between partners as being characteristic of their intimate relationship. This provides the justification for participation in this study. Their feelings that the relationship had been intimate at the time of the study allowed them to participate in the research.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Context

It is likely that any study which proposes to investigate issues surrounding homosexuality contends with the moral and social values of the culture in which it is conducted. Past research focussing on sexual orientation has often taken a negative view of anything but a heterosexual orientation. These past scientific investigations have often been disparaging, with a tendency to pathologize homosexuals and their relationships (eg., American Psychiatric Association [APA], 1968; Hatterer, 1974). The etiology of homosexuality has often been considered a source of pathology. Yet, while the etiology of homosexuality and how homosexual males become intimately involved with heterosexual women may be important, it is not the focus of this study or literature review. The purpose of this review is confined to material related to this current study. As a result, only research which begins to illuminate our knowledge of women's experience in heterogeneous relationships is reviewed.

It is challenging to conduct a literature review on the topic of women in relationships with gay men. Little information specifically focussing on the woman's experience exists. The gay husband's perspective has been examined only slightly more extensively than that of his straight spouse. These studies tend to be descriptive in nature, often employing correlational design and natural science methodology. In addition, there are a very limited number of researchers who have directly addressed straight women's relationships with gay men. Their research tends to employ both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Finally, though unusual in a literature

review, a short section is included in this review which addresses the response of the popular media to the phenomenon. This appeared necessary and illuminating because, in recent years, wives of gays have been spotlighted in both print media and on television talkshows. The manner with which the media has approached these topics and the information it has yielded provide yet another view from which to examine the phenomenon.

Prevalence

There are several difficulties in obtaining accurate estimates of the prevalence of heterogeneous marriages, i.e., heterosexual woman and homosexual man. Estimates are usually based on the famous study by Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin (1948) who indicated that "data make it appear probable that the true incidence of the homosexual in married groups is much higher than we are able to record" (p. 289). Kinsey et al. estimated that 10% of the male population is homosexual. Critics have challenged this estimate based primarily on the sample selection which did not employ any systematic design to ensure the inclusion of all major types of American males (Hyman & Sheatsley, 1954). Nevertheless, this estimate, at 10%, is commonly used to approximate the incidence of exclusive homosexual orientation in the American male population. Bell and Weinberg (1978), in a large study of male homosexuality in several California counties, obtained results that indicated that approximately 20% of male homosexual subjects had been or were married. While there were limitations with this study, the authors attempted to control for possible subgroup differences and efforts were primarily successful in obtaining a stratified sample on a number of variables. In Canada, rough calculations using the findings of both Kinsey et. al., and

Bell and Weinberg would suggest that approximately 280,000 gay males are or have been married, leaving a corresponding number of women to face this phenomenon. In comparison, Gochros (1989) suggested that conservative estimates of the number of married gay or bisexual men in the United States numbered around 2.6 million. These estimates must be considered rough at best since the studies which form their basis contain some design flaws which weaken generalizability.

It is, nevertheless, quite likely that estimates of the incidence of this phenomenon are likely an underrepresentation for a number of reasons. First, this research does not include the number of bisexual males who marry and this would likely increase the prevalence of women who experience the homosexuality of their husbands. Second, Bozett (1982) further pointed out that some gay men remarry thus increasing the number of women affected by this phenomenon. Third, many women in intimate unmarried partnerships with gay men must address this issue, thereby further increasing the prevalence of heterogeneous intimate partnerships. Finally, compounding the difficulties delineated above, Ross (1983) suggested that many men do not disclose their homosexual orientation to their wives and many wives who are aware of the husband's homosexual orientation are unlikely to report such a relationship. A participant in Gochros' (1985) study put it succinctly when she said that this phenomenon was "the best kept secret in America" (p. 5).

Characteristics of the Heterogeneous Couple

While these numbers indicate that intimate heterogeneous relationships may be more common than many would assume, they do not speak to the experience of the women who must negotiate this situation. Studies have been conducted to examine the phenomenon from the homosexual husband's perspective (Bozett, 1982; Brownfain, 1985; Coleman, 1985; Ross, 1983), yet generalizability tends to be problematic. For example, all four of the studies cited above employed a non-experimental design useful in obtaining descriptive data from the married homosexual man's perspective. Sampling was restricted to accessible samples in all cases. Of these four cases, Ross (1983) used the most rigorous sampling techniques. He studied a larger number of subjects to compare correlational relationships on a variety of data obtained from three matched samples. Nevertheless, generalizability, from a natural science perspective, was compromised by the use of the small sized accessible samples in all four studies. Wolf (1985) characterized the nature of research in this area as only superficially addressing the psychological concerns of those impacted by this phenomenon. He remarked, "what has been written lended itself poorly to generalization because of its anecdotal nature, a small number of case histories, the clinical nature of the population, or biased theoretical approach" (p. 136).

With these limitations in mind, findings indicated that homosexual husbands and their heterosexual wives have differing levels of awareness of the husband's homosexual orientation. For instance, data indicated that most often wives of gay men were unaware of their husband's homosexual orientation before marriage (Coleman, 1985; Gochros, 1989, Wolf, 1985), but gay husbands were usually aware of at least

some homosexual attractions before marrying (Bozett, 1982; Coleman, 1985; Wolf, 1985). Most often, when disclosure did occur before marriage, it was considered a partial disclosure rather than a full disclosure (Bozett, 1982; Gochros, 1989). In these cases, partial disclosure often was limited to an admission of past homosexual attraction or youthful experimentation. The full extent of the husband's current homosexual attraction was often not disclosed. In addition, gay male participants often believed that their gay sexual attractions would not interfere with adjustment to marriage (Bozett, 1982). In contrast, Gochros found that wives in that study most often knew little about homosexuality prior to disclosure and felt either slightly negative or neutral about the concept.

The heterogeneous couples who have been studied often represent members of the upper middle-class. Whether this is an accurate reflection of the demographics of this group or an artifact of sampling bias is not known. Reported income and education levels of heterogeneous couples in study samples is considered high (Coleman, 1985; Gochros, 1989; Ross, 1983; Wolf, 1985) and levels of education often exceed general population averages. For example, in one particular study (Ross, 1983), 88% of the women had an undergraduate degree or better, while a higher percentage of the males had the same credentials.

Both straight wives and their gay husbands have been questioned as to their motivations for marriage. Gochros (1989) suggested that "most wives consider themselves products of traditional middle-class, upwardly mobile families with traditional values" (p. 30). Their intention was for a life-long committed marital relationship. Responses to questionnaires indicated that many wives of gay men

considered themselves "sexually naive at marriage, mainly as a result of religious proscriptions against premarital sex and lack of adequate sex education" (Gochros, 1989, p.35). Yet, Gochros (1985) indicated that there was no evidence that women who inadvertently marry bisexual men differ in psychosexual development and identity from other women. Finally, according to Bozett (1982), Ross (1990) and Wolf (1985), gay males have their own motivations for marrying. Bozett found that homosexual men marry for a variety of reasons including: to escape being labeled as homosexual, out of deep affection for their spouse, desire for children, or family pressure to marry. Ross (1983) indicated the most commonly stated reason for marriage among homosexual men was out of love. Other common reasons included: the notion that homosexuality would disappear with marriage, wife was pregnant, pressure from girlfriend, desire for children and family, and social pressure. Following an extensive review of research on married homosexual men, Ross (1990) concluded that, "much of the phenomenon of marriage in predominantly homosexual men appears to due to social pressures or societal pressures" (p. 56).

Both Gochros (1985) and Wolf (1985) found that the majority of couples in heterogeneous marriages ranked their relationships as outstanding or better than average. As an interesting contradiction, studies have revealed that most heterogeneous marriages end in divorce (Bozett, 1982; Gochros, 1989; Hays & Samuels, 1989). It is difficult to understand why so many reportedly good relationships end in divorce. By way of partial explanation, some researchers have theorized that some couples become closer following disclosure as the wife often attempts to help the homosexual husband through his own sexual identity crisis

(Gochros, 1989; Hays & Samuels, 1989). In addition, Bozett suggested that the high incidence of divorce among heterogeneous couples is related to the gay male's inability to find full satisfaction within the framework of a heterosexual marriage.

Much of the literature reviewed above focussed primarily on a natural science orientation designed to identify descriptive information on the experience of homosexual men in heterosexual marriages. These articles tended to delineate the demographic and attitudinal characteristics of the homosexual males. While this information is no doubt related to the experience of gay males in heterogenous marriages, it does little to specifically illuminate the women's experience in this situation.

Women's Experience

It is to the women's experience that we now turn for information in the research literature. Literature searches reveal rather quickly that where there was little information on homosexual married men, there is even less on their straight spouses. As a result, often just a few authors exist for a review of the women's experience as it is revealed by the existing research literature. Limitations of these studies will be discussed following a discussion of their major findings.

Disclosure

The manner of a husband's disclosure of his homosexual orientation has been found to be an important factor in the outcome of heterogeneous marriages (Bozett, 1982; Gochros, 1985, 1989; Hays & Samuels, 1989). Employing four standardized scales, a questionnaire, and interviews with 33 participants, Gochros focussed

attention on this aspect of women's experience in heterogeneous marriage. Analyzing data using content analysis, she found the following results. First, rather than viewing a husband's homosexual disclosure as an event that occurred at a single instant in time, Gochros suggested that more often it was a process by which the wife gradually became aware of her husband's orientation and its impact on her. This process may span many years as her knowledge of homosexuality expands and the relationship changes. According to Gochros, a minority of gay or bisexual husbands disclosed previous homosexual activities to their wives prior to marriage. Gochros called this a "partial disclosure". Often partial disclosures were offered and interpreted as sexual experimentation during youth. Typically the female partner viewed this disclosure with little concern and viewed her fiancé as having been very honest with her.

Gochros (1985) drew a distinction between positive and negative disclosures. Findings of the study suggested that a positive disclosure on the part of a homosexual husband included: (1) voluntarily given by the husband, (2) the husband's homosexual activity was infrequent or limited to fantasy, (3) the husband displayed honesty, love and concern, (4) disclosure occurred within a good marriage and, (5) professional and social support systems were available. A negative disclosure was defined as the extent to which the above criteria were not met.

Reactions following a positive disclosure were usually mild shock or calm in the face of severe anxiety of the husband (Gochros, 1985). Most women experienced a renewed commitment to renegotiate the marriage and empathized with their husband's dilemma. According to Buxton (1991) and Gochros (1989), after a period of

months to years, most of the women faced a crisis stage where old coping mechanisms failed them, and they began to view the marriage more negatively. This stage is often characterized by shock, disbelief, anger and resentment (Brownfain, 1985; Fredlund, 1989; Gochros, 1989;).

Gochros (1989) also found that a woman's reaction to her partner's negative disclosure was often less focussed on concern for the gay partner's well-being. This was usually because he had displayed little concern and sensitivity for his straight spouse. Findings also indicated that women confronted with negative disclosures often felt used and betrayed. Of these negative disclosures, those husbands who refused to work toward problem-solving and empathy with their wives contributed little to an often destabilized and deteriorating marriage (Gochros, 1985).

Isolation and Stigma

Existing research also indicates that social homophobia has a great impact on the experience of women who discover that they are in a relationship with a gay man. The analogy used for gay anonymity is that of a closet. The homosexual "metaphorically" stays in a closet in order to conceal his sexual orientation. This analogy has been adopted by those who write on straight women's experience and is evidenced by titles such as: *When Husbands Come Out of the Closet* (Gochros, 1989), and *The Other Side of the Closet; The Coming Out Crisis for Straight Spouses* (Buxton, 1991). These titles alone speak to the fear and isolation that often pervades this issue for both members of the heterogeneous couple. Stigma and isolation have been identified as two key elements in the experience of the women with respect to

this phenomenon (Buxton, 1991; Gochros, 1989; Hays & Samuels, 1989, Schneider & Schneider, 1990). A factor that seemed to support the contention that women felt isolated was their reported lack of supportive friends or family that could empathize and support them in their situation (Gochros, 1989). Hays and Samuels (1989) suggested that the stigma of homosexuality appeared to cloud the heterogeneous relationship and contributed to the women's reluctance to share their pain with either friends or helping professionals. The lack of awareness of this phenomenon led many women to believe that they were the only individuals to have ever been married to a gay man (Buxton, 1991; Gochros, 1989).

This is somewhat contradictory to Fredlund (1989). In an ethnographically based study of 10 women which analyzed interview data using content analysis, she found that the majority of respondents denied experiencing stigmatization. Yet, themes relating to isolation and fear of sharing remained predominant. Fredlund addressed this discrepancy stating that it may have been an artifact of her direct questioning method rather than a complete absence of stigma experiences on the part of her subjects. It was hypothesized that the socially unacceptable nature of stigma may have induced participants in that study to deny experiencing stigma. Furthermore, the need for future research to clarify this issue was identified with the suggestion that, "stigma should be handled in a more indirect manner" (p. 133).

Damage to Sexual Identity

Research suggests that the impact of a gay partner's homosexuality on a straight spouse can be profound. Gochros (1985) indicated that the heterosexual partner may

question her sexual adequacy, or worry about whether she has been too masculine or feminine. Buxton (1991) concurred with this finding and suggested that, "some spouses may begin to doubt their own orientation" (p. 28) as they question what it must mean that they have married a gay man. According to Buxton, this revealed an aspect of self-blame where the wife may feel somehow responsible for her husband's sexual orientation. Fredlund (1989) also found that following disclosure women often blamed themselves, wondering if they had been deficient as lovers. Other women reported feeling exploited and used as cover-ups for their husbands' covert sexual activity. In addition, some women reported feeling used as tools by which their husbands could have the children they wanted (Buxton, 1991). These findings suggest that a woman may often experience a damaged sexual identity as a result of a husband's homosexual orientation.

Loss, Identity Crisis, and Recovery

Buxton (1991) and Gochros (1985) both identified a period of mourning over the loss of the old marital relationship. They also identified a period of confusion as the couples often attempted to accommodate gayness within the marriage. Fredlund (1989) identified an analogous period as women attempt to accommodate homosexuality into the marriage and begin to become aware of their own feelings and reactions. Ultimately, many of the women felt lost and alone as their marriages began to deteriorate. Buxton specifically addressed issues of identity. The researcher described the experience saying, "many experience an overwhelming feeling of

helplessness and feel abandoned by their partners. They feel devalued as people" (p. 139).

Schneider and Schneider (1990) conducted a study of couples who were in treatment for sexual addiction amongst the bisexual men. They found that, for the 22 couples in their study, "the eventual disclosure of the husband's bisexuality precipitated a major crisis . . . disclosure of actual sexual encounters with other men was often devastating. Many women felt anger, betrayal, and fear of abandonment" (p. 238). In addition, many of the women reported lost trust in their partners, experienced low self-esteem and felt cut off from themselves emotionally.

Fredlund (1989) developed a five stage model which reflected the process which her participants experienced upon their husband's disclosure. According to Fredlund, adjustment to a husband's homosexual disclosure progresses through the following stages: (1) pre-disclosure, where clues are denied, (2) accommodation following disclosure, which includes denial, family maintenance and confusion, (3) self-awareness, which includes coping mechanisms, (4) acceptance, which includes a change in locus of control, and (5) detachment, which includes a rebuilding of self and a fear of new relationships. The third to fifth stages of this model are linked by *connectors*, which are events that Fredlund maintains act to draw a woman back to an earlier stage and remind her of anger and hurt from the past.

Gochros also identified identity issues and the study further revealed growth following identity issues to be a strong theme. In this study, the researcher was able to identify some of the positive long range consequences of disclosure and listed them as:

(1) an increased autonomy and self-direction, (2) an increase in self-esteem that is not based on a relationship with a man, (3) an increase in assertiveness and ability to cope and, (4) an increase in sexual satisfaction.

As indicated, some researchers, though few in number, have committed a great deal of time and effort to researching the phenomenon of women's experience in learning that their partner is homosexual (Buxton, 1991; Fredlund, 1989; Gochros, 1985, 1989; Hays & Samuels, 1989). Nevertheless, most of these studies possess common limitations. Generally, sample sizes tend to be small and based on accessible populations, making generalization difficult. In addition, some of the studies employed interviews, researcher questionnaires and standardized tests, on which little reliability or validity information was supplied. To compound these difficulties, validity of data analysis is of concern. Most of these studies analyzed interview information using content analysis, but this technique can vary widely and most often little information was provided on the specific methods used during content analysis. Fredlund (1989) was the one exception in this case. Her research methodology was more clearly explained and provided information which would be needed should replication of the study be of interest to another researcher.

Finally, little information bracketing the researcher's experience is given. Differences the authors suggest with respect to the long-term viability of heterogenous marriage is not easily explained merely by the data or bracketing information given. For example, Gochros (1989) appeared to support the viability of heterogenous marriages, while Buxton appeared more skeptical about the long-term success of these

marriages. In addition, Fredlund (1989) did not include any information on prior understandings which she may have had on the topic. It would appear that more information on the researchers' prior knowledge and preconceptions may explain the differences in their interpretation of the findings presented.

Media Coverage

This topic has not escaped media attention. A cursory review of popular literature reflects a somewhat sensationalized approach to this phenomenon with titles like: *After the Bombshell* (Detroit News, 1989), *When the Other Woman is a Man* (Geraldo, 1989) and *My Problem and How I Solved It; My Husband was Gay* (Good Housekeeping, 1987). Most of these exposés are based on the story of a woman's experience, yet often appear to be produced to capitalize on public interest and increase market shares. In a commentary on the media's approach to this phenomenon entitled, *Out of the Closet and into the Network Ratings*, Wilder (1989) outlined the way in which the media exploit human suffering as a means to enhance profit. She said that there is often a "blatant exploitation of human suffering" (p. unnumbered) when women share their confusion, grief and pain with the media. She contended that there were real issues that needed to be addressed which were at odds with the media hype.

Media coverage may serve to heighten public awareness and slightly reduce the isolation of women in relationships with gay men. Yet, the information which the media conveys typically fails to illuminate much of the essence of this experience. Certainly the conclusions which are drawn by the media are often of questionable

validity. The media's mandate appears to be at cross purposes as it attempts to report on the phenomenon while capitalizing on the apparent sensation involved in this situation. As a result, though this topic may have received increased public attention over the past years, it is not necessarily any better understood.

It is with this in mind that the current study is purposed. The intention is to closely describe and interpret the experience of women who have struggled to find resolution within their heterogeneous relationships. It is the essence of their experience that is important.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Selection of Methodology

The goal of phenomenological research is to elucidate meaning and to understand human experience through description. With this emphasis, an *a priori* procedural framework, as commonly associated with a natural science perspective, is contraindicated. Instead, it is important to select or construct a method of data collection and analysis that fully illuminates the phenomenon under study. The ultimate goal is to capture the essence of the experience as it is described. The methodology chosen must have the flexibility to allow the researcher to explore, examine, and ultimately reflect each individual's life experience as accurately as possible. The method of data interpretation must remain open so as not to limit the variety of experiences which are capable of being addressed by the methodology. This is particularly important based on the priority which phenomenology places on the interconnectedness of experience and the importance of a wholistic perspective.

A number of researchers have proposed various guidelines for phenomenological research. These approaches often pay special attention to issues of reliability, validity and generalizability (Kvale, 1983; Shapiro, 1986; Wertz, 1986). Colaizzi (1978) has proposed an empirical reflective method that I find conducive to a description and illumination of women's experience on learning that their intimate partner is homosexual. This empirical reflective method begins with the selection of co-researchers, or participants, who have experienced the phenomenon and are willing

to share their experience either verbally or in written form. They are referred to as co-researchers as a reflection of their interest in understanding the topic and the integral role they play in providing data with which to illuminate the essence of experience. In this current study, co-researchers provided descriptions of their experience. These descriptions were analyzed for themes by the researcher and concluded with a description of the phenomenon.

Phenomenology relies on the 'expert' descriptions of those who know the experience best. As a result, the value of learning about these women's experience as they describe it cannot be underestimated. This is particularly important considering that the women's experience in relationships with gay men is too often viewed as evidence of pathology -- their concerns, angers and fears seen as inherent character flaws of a weak personality (Hatterer, 1974). Consequently, lay individuals and professionals alike prematurely form opinions on stereotypes rather than listening carefully to those who know the experience best. Gochros' (1989) reflection on common therapist reactions points to the need to listen carefully to women's stories, rather than approaching them with an *a priori* framework that assumes the presence of pathology.

If straight therapists were most apt to focus on "battered wife syndromes," gay therapists were apt to focus on "hysteria" and "vindictiveness" of wives following disclosure, to ascribe husbands' dysfunctional irrational behaviours to stigma, and wives' behaviours to neurosis and homophobia (p. 139).

With the importance of the participants' descriptions in mind, we now turn to the selection of participants and research procedures.

The Participants

Two factors are most important in the selection of participants in a phenomenological study (Osborne, 1990). First, all participants must have directly experienced the phenomenon being studied. Second, as co-researchers, participants must be able and willing to share details of their personal experience. Other considerations are also important. For example, differences in opinion exist on the value of a homogeneous sample as opposed to a heterogeneous sample. Becker (1986) maintained that a homogeneous sample aids in the articulation of the essential structures of a phenomenon. On the other hand, Wertz (1984) encouraged heterogeneity among co-researchers as a method of validity checking. If the true essence of an experience has been revealed through the research, it should be common across a variety of other mediating circumstances (e.g., age, education, religious background).

For this present study, five co-researchers agreed to participate in this investigation. Each had learned of her intimate partner's homosexual orientation during the relationship. In some respects they were homogeneous; in other respects they were heterogeneous. The most salient characteristic that four of the five women shared was membership in a support group for partners of gay men. In many other respects, the women differed from one another, these differences included, a broad age range from early 20's to 70 years of age. Four of the women had been married, while

one woman had not been married but had been involved in a serious dating relationship. Three of the women were raising children, while one woman had raised her family and the other was childless. Three of the women had chosen to leave their intimate gay partner, while two had chosen to remain married to their gay husbands at the time of our interviews. Finally, religious family backgrounds differed from strict fundamentalist Christian to a loose church affiliation.

The number of co-researchers required for a phenomenological study is not fixed. The most important consideration is whether themes or clusters have become saturated. This means that as more participants are added to the investigation, a number of common themes begin to emerge. When no new themes are introduced with the addition of more participants, the themes are said to be saturated and the essence of the phenomenon is assumed to have been revealed. According to Wertz (1984),

the researcher uses the number of subjects necessary to manifest the various aspects of the whole phenomenon (each individual discloses a given aspect with greater or less salience) and the variations of the phenomenon critical for achieving the aimed-at generality . . . (p. 36).

As common themes began to emerge out of the various experiences of the co-researchers, it was determined that five co-researchers was sufficient.

Procedure

A reflective methodology based on Colaizzi (1978) and Giorgi (1975) was employed. The specific sequence which was used included both a tabular presentation and a narrative presentation as discussed by Osborne (1990). This format appeared

appropriate to the topic and, because both formats were included, it allowed for an additional step in recycling systematically through the data. This was done in an effort to enhance the validity of the findings.

Co-researchers in this project were interviewed for approximately one and a half hours using an open-ended format. The open-ended format is preferable because, “minimally structured interviews are more likely to produce data which might otherwise be missed” (Osborne, 1990, p. 84). Probing questions were designed to guide the interview (see Appendix A for a list of interview questions). In an attempt to reduce the influence of a priori assumptions regarding the findings of this research, the questions remained relatively non-specific. In this way, little information regarding my expectations, as a researcher, was conveyed to the participants. None of the participants appeared to be unwilling to share the salient aspects of her experience. As a result, the probing questions which were designed were used very sparingly throughout all five interviews and were employed only if a co-researcher lost her train of thought.

With each participant, I attempted to develop a warm and open relationship in preliminary conversations before the interview. According to Becker (1986) and Wertz (1984), this is an important aspect in establishing a situation which is likely to yield valid data. On our initial contact, I shared my past experience with the phenomenon with each participant, though I chose not to share many details in effort not to bias the women’s descriptions. It was important to share my personal knowledge of the topic in order to develop a safe environment for sharing and to

establish my ability to empathize with their stories. According to Becker and Wertz, by developing rapport and trust prior to the interview, threats to valid description are reduced.

In addition, because of the sensitive nature of the topic under investigation, each woman was given her choice of location for her interview and each was encouraged to select a space in which she felt comfortable and safe to talk. Consequently, two women chose to be interviewed at the home of a friend, two women chose their own homes and one woman chose to be interviewed at my home. A letter was given to each participant prior to our interview meeting. This letter described my research interest and guidelines for their participation (see Appendix B). Each interview was audio-taped with the permission of the participants and transcribed in preparation for analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Because of the sensitive nature of the information which participants were requested to share for this investigation, ethical precautions to protect participant confidentiality was paramount. To begin with, all contact with potential participants was made indirectly in one of two ways. First, individuals who knew of eligible participants made contact with these eligible participants and provided them with my phone number. Those women who were interested in participating, were requested to call me. Four participants were obtained using this method. Second, advertisements requesting participants were placed in public locations. One participant was obtained using this method. Participants were required to sign a letter of consent to participate

in the research (see Appendix C). All information including participant names and phone numbers were maintained in a secure location accessible only to the researcher. To remove any potentially identifying information, all names, dates and locations were changed on interview data. As a final precaution, portions of the unpublished thesis were returned to each participant to double check that any identifying information which was of concern to them was removed (see Appendix D for request for participants' approval).

Data Analysis

Following the research interview, a series of steps were followed in order to analyze the material in a reflective and meaningful manner. The specific approach used to analyze the data is outlined below along with a description of each of the steps.

Description of Analysis Sequence

1. Interview as a Whole. Initially, the taped interview was listened to in its entirety. The researcher attempted to gain an awareness of the co-researchers experience as described in the interview. Included in this first level of analysis was an awareness of timbre of voice and any body language that was noted during the interview.
2. Interview as Text. Next, the researcher became familiar with the transcribed text of the interview, reading it several times. This second level of analysis focused on key words that may have been evocative or repeated temporal or verbal sequences (see Appendix E).

3. Meaning Units. The text was then divided into meaning units. These were sentences, phrases or paragraphs that suggested a particular aspect of the co-researcher's experience. The focus was on identifying the experience of the participant as described by her. Any identified meaning unit must have been seen to explicate the co-researcher's experience to be included. A more detailed explanation of the tabular analysis procedure is found later in this same chapter.

4. Paraphrasing and Thematic Analysis. Further analysis involved paraphrasing each meaning unit into psychological language. Following this, a theme was identified with each paraphrase. The theme, also in psychological language, was an attempt to retain the essence of the experience in brief professional language. This was written in tabular form.

5. First Order Thematic Clustering. On completion of thematic analysis, the themes were clustered based on meaningful relationships. Those themes that were most similar or related in nature were clustered together under one heading. Each heading included a descriptive paragraph which was meant to capture the meanings included in that cluster. This also was written in tabular form.

6. Written Synthesis - Within Person Synthesis. A written synthesis followed the thematic clustering and represented a written descriptive form of the data. The written synthesis is a description of the experience of the participant and is called "within person analysis". The written synthesis represented the product of analyzing the data systematically. Because the researcher introduced as little interpretation as possible, the validity of the analysis was increased. At this point, participants were

asked to confirm that the written synthesis of their individual experience was valid and congruent with their experience of the phenomenon.

7. Second Order Thematic Clustering. This was the beginning of the “across person analysis.” First order thematic clusters were gathered for all participants. They were then re-clustered based on meaningful similarities in experience. Themes that emerged as similar were clustered together under a main heading and descriptive statements that defined the meanings in that cluster were included.

8. Final Analysis - Across Person Synthesis. The researcher examined the major themes that emerged across all participants’ description of their experience to develop a final level of analysis. This was considered the fundamental description and was synthesized into narrative form revealing common structures of the phenomenon. The across person synthesis represented the final step in data analysis and provides information that conveys essential elements of the phenomenon to the research community.

Chart of Analysis Sequence

The following steps represent the order in which data was analyzed for each co-researcher.

1. Interview - with each participant
⇓
2. Interview as Whole
⇓
3. Interview as Text
⇓
4. Meaning Units
⇓
5. Paraphrasing and First Order Thematic Analysis
⇓
6. First Order Thematic Clustering
⇓
7. Within Person Written Synthesis
⇓

Once all five within person syntheses were complete, the following steps were conducted. These represent the results of the study.

8. Second Order Thematic Clustering
⇓
9. Final Across Person Synthesis

Example of Tabular Analysis Procedure

The following explanation demonstrates the rigorous methodology employed during data analysis. The following step by step explanation highlights how results in the final level of analysis were derived from the data which the participants provided. Samples of Winny's protocol will be used in this section to demonstrate the procedures which were implemented.

Step 1.

In the first step, sample excerpts, which represent meaning units from Winny's interview, are presented in the first column of Sample Table 1 below. They appear in the order in which they occurred during our interview. The second column of Sample Table 1 is the first stage of interpretive analysis and contains a paraphrased statement which begins to capture the meaning of the transcript excerpt in psychological language. The third column of Sample Table 1 represents a further abstraction. Here, themes are identified to closely reflect the essential aspects of the excerpt.

Sample Table 1First Order Thematic Abstraction of Winnie's Experience

Excerpts from Transcribed Interview	Paraphrases	Themes
1. . . . now certainly he knew he was gay prior to that, and I knew from time to time, there was something not quite fitting in the relationship, but I couldn't put my finger on it.	Experience a vague sense of something "amiss" in the relationship	Awareness of something out of place in relationship
2. And he said, "I've got something I want to share with you." And he said, "I just want to tell you that I'm homosexual." And I said, "Oh, I don't know what that is."	Lack of knowledge about homosexuality following spouse's disclosure.	Lack of awareness of homosexuality.
3. Now I don't know if it's some kind of disease or something. And I'm, it didn't bother me because we were working with a psychiatrist and I think even John mentioned that night, that he said hey, there's nothing to worry about, we'll pray about this and you'll be healed from this. And so I wasn't worried, I wasn't concerned, I was surprised that John was making such a big thing of it.	As a result of psychiatric help and religious beliefs, she is unconcerned about husband's disclosure yet surprised by his strong reaction to his disclosure.	Outside sources provide security; surprised by husband's strong reaction.
4. And, as you know, I come from a very strong fundamentalist background, and for me conforming to family values and church values were a priority. So again this was kind a value thing and it was something we believed in, so I hung on to that. For years	Conformity to conservative church and family values were main approach to life.	Strong adherence to fundamentalist values central to worldview.
5. And I felt in a way that he was more important than I was, and that made me a little anxious and envious, I got to thinking why don't they deal with the total situation – instead of just him, and I knew he was praying about the homosexual issues. Because he was a specialist in that area. Again, not fully understanding why it was such a big deal.	Experienced feelings of jealousy and being ignored as husband's homosexuality became primary focus of concern rather than the impact of disclosure on her or the marriage.	Sense that she was an outsider in an issue that affected her.

- | | | | |
|-----|--|--|--|
| 6. | And not to work on any of my needs. Which was a need for intimacy and acceptance. | Recognition of the lack of attention to her unmet needs for intimacy and acceptance. | Recognition of unmet needs. |
| 7. | Perhaps a bit confused, because I admit I wasn't that much in touch with my own feelings. I knew in my head that there was stuff going on. I knew it was pretty heavy stuff and it was a little upsetting, and again behind it all was that belief that this will do it. Whatever it is, it's going to work and, you know, there are no more problems. We were certainly sexually involved, we had our intimacy and everything was marvelous for me. | Experience confusion between discomfort over her neglected emotions and her belief and hope in a solution; sexual intimacy remains satisfying for her. | Difficulty reconciling unmet needs and beliefs and hopes for a solution. |
| 8. | Again, it wasn't really confronting, wasn't bothersome to me until it got to the place where John was quite involved with some of the groups in the city. | Husband's increased involvement in gay community is seen as confrontational and bothersome. | Troubled by husband's increased contact with gay community. |
| 9. | And they were certainly good toward to me, I didn't feel any judgment. But I was – how did I feel about them, I felt angry. I felt left out, and I felt really upset about not being a part of whatever was going on, because I couldn't quite again, identify with it all. | Though she sensed an openness from her husband's gay friends, she felt isolated and angry. | Alone in a crowd.
Misfit / Alien. |
| 10. | And I remember once, since I was in sales, I went around one afternoon purposely just brochuring so I wouldn't have to be here at the house . . . I just felt like I wanted to run. I felt like, that this was something behind it all was pushing us apart. It would begin to, but that was just kind of the beginning and the groups continued. | Avoiding home was easier than confronting husband's homosexuality and separation fears. | Flight from threatening situation. |
| 11. | And although I was nice, and I tend to – growing up being nice, and I know that really gets in the way. I was really uncomfortable. It was almost – I mean it was all male that night. | Experience discomfort when socializing with husband's gay friends, yet remains congenial. | Keeping up appearances.
Discrepancy between feelings and action. |
| 12. | I saw John's excitement and enthusiasm about it all. Maybe that's also something that made it difficult to kind of accept where they were coming from. | Husband's pleasure over gay affiliations increased her difficulty in accepting his gay friends. | Hard to accept husband's enthusiasm and gay friends. |

Step 2.

During the second step of analysis, another table was constructed (see Sample Table 2). In Sample Table 2, the themes which were identified in Sample Table 1, as well as all subsequent themes, are clustered into more essential themes based on meaningful relationships. Those themes that are most similar in nature are clustered under a common heading. Column 1 in Sample Table 2 reveals these common headings and includes the numbers of those themes which compose the thematic clusters. Column 2 of Sample Table 2 is a short description which explains the ways in which themes included in this cluster are related.

Once analysis of Winny's entire protocol was completed, these first two steps were repeated for the remaining four participants (see Appendix F for all tables of analyses).

Sample Table 2First Order Thematic Clusters of Winny's Experience

First Order Clusters	Cluster Description
1. Conservative family of origin and early married life (2, 3, 4, 13, 40)	Winny's family background is Christian fundamentalist. This cluster highlights the influence of her conservative church and family values as they influenced how she chose to cope with John's disclosure.
2. Alien in a gay culture (9, 15, 17, 20)	Winny experienced strong feelings of alienation when attempting to associate with her husband's gay friends and social groups. This cluster describes instances where Winny had difficulty making a personal connection with John's gay contacts.
3. Fear of separation evokes feelings of anger, abandonment, rejection and loss (25, 26, 29, 32, 34, 38, 47, 51, 53)	Winny had a strong emotional response to her husband's increasing involvement in a gay sub-culture and his emotional separation from her. His lack of focus and attention on the marriage in addition to his extramarital gay interests evoked feelings of anger, abandonment, rejection and loss.
4. Self-blame (39, 40)	At times, Winny attempted to find someone responsible for the emotional pain she was experiencing. This cluster highlights the responsibility she took for her husband's gay activities. She felt as though she had failed both him and the marriage.
5. Growing inability to escape the gay issue either cognitively or physically (1, 8, 12, 16, 17, 24, 50)	John's increasing involvement in gay social, sexual and support settings increased Winny's contact with the gay sub-culture as well. The many ways in which Winny was in constant contact with both gay sub-culture and John's increasing interest in gay activities is contained within this cluster.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>6. Feelings of separation and loss lead to identity crisis</p> <p>(27, 28, 31, 44, 45, 46, 48)</p> | <p>Winnie experienced a strong panic response when faced with the possibility of leading life alone. This cluster delineates Winnie's existential struggle against loss and isolation.</p> |
| <p>7. Awakening self-awareness</p> <p>(5, 6, 7, 11, 37, 49, 66, 67, 69, 70)</p> | <p>Working through the implications of John's disclosure leads Winnie to gradually become more aware of her needs and emotions. Included in this cluster are references that she makes to her level of self-awareness and openness.</p> |
| <p>8. Sharing her experience as a way of coping and learning about herself</p> <p>(14, 18, 19, 21, 35, 41, 43, 65)</p> | <p>Winnie expressed a strong desire to share her story throughout the text. This cluster contains her references to attempts she made to share her story and the feelings and thoughts that this elicited.</p> |
| <p>9. Physical activities as coping responses</p> <p>(10, 33, 36, 42)</p> | <p>At times, Winnie appeared to be overwhelmed by her situation and would use a physical response to cope. This cluster contains elements of Winnie's experience that highlight her increased physical activities as coping responses.</p> |
| <p>10. Limited marital communication</p> <p>(23, 38, 54, 55)</p> | <p>Marital communication was not a strong focus during Winnie's interview. This may be because at times their communication seemed to be limited and strained. This cluster, then, includes direct references that Winnie makes regarding communication between John and herself and meaning units that may highlight the limited and strained nature of their communication throughout this experience.</p> |

11. **Increased individuality and independence**
(30, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 62, 68)

Following the identity crisis which Winny identifies, she describes her feelings of increased independence and individuality. She had experienced a shift in her marriage relationship. She no longer felt as dependent on John as she had earlier in the marriage. This cluster includes descriptions of her process of increased independence and change within the marital relationship.

12. **Lack of support and misunderstanding**
(43, 63, 64)

Winny found it difficult to identify supportive individuals following John's disclosure. This cluster contains themes which highlight her difficulty finding safe opportunities for sharing and individuals who were able to understand her dilemma. It also includes differences in other's reactions to both her and John.

Step 3.

Once all five protocols were analyzed in the manner delineated above, a higher order table was constructed to include elements which were common across each of the five protocols. The elements of this table are determined by similarities in clusters found across participants including the thematic clusters present in Winny's protocol. The results of this study indicated that nine major themes were present in the data which were collected. A table of these second order clusters is found in Chapter 4 (see Table 11). In addition, these themes represent the results of the research and are discussed at length at the end of Chapter 4.

Evaluating Phenomenological Research and this Study:

Issues of Validity and Reliability

The subjective nature of phenomenological research has been criticized by strict adherents of natural scientific investigation. For researchers who favour positivistic methodology, the underpinnings of scientific methods (i.e., validity, reliability and generalizability), appear to be jeopardized by the radically different philosophy which underlies human scientific research. Where objectivity and distance provide the basis for positivistic research, subjectivity and relationship are necessary for qualitative research. Where control and probabilities form the foundation of results in positivistic research, purposeful selection and meaningful interchange provide the foundation of results of qualitative research. According to Osborne (1990), "Natural science aims at objectivity through explanation, control and prediction, while phenomenological research aims at the elucidation of meaning and understanding of human existence

from an individual's point of view" (p. 86). Since phenomenological methods are based on a radically different paradigm than positivistic methods, issues of validity, reliability and generalizability must be re-examined and considered in light of the philosophy which provides robust underpinnings to human science.

Reliability

In natural science, the consistency, replicability and stability of measurement is evidence of reliable findings. Provided that all experimental procedures and conditions are controlled by way of experiments, the identical results can be expected. The conception of reliability in phenomenological research is very different. The notion that an interview could be exactly replicated is impossible because the interview process is a dynamic and relational event. Instead, concepts based on human perception become important. Human perception is considered to be perspectival and contextual. Phenomenological reliability acknowledges that there are likely several perspectives of the same phenomenon. Reliability is provided by the elements which remain the same across disparate perspectives. In contrast to natural science, then, consistency does not necessarily result from exactly the same set of preconditions. Instead, in phenomenology, sameness (reliability) results most often from similarities found in alternate perspectives. As a result, "co-researchers produce situations which are never repeatable but which provide multiple perspectives which can lead to a unified description of a shared phenomenon . . . stable meanings can transcend variable facts" (Osborne, 1990, p. 87). As a result, heterogeneity of participants is considered an asset. As indicated previously, the co-researchers selected for the present study

provide a variety of backgrounds in a number of ways including: age, marital status, marital outcome, children, and religious background.

According to Kvale (1983), the greatest risk to reliability, as well as validity, is found in the interpretation of data. Here Kvale warns that, “the researcher can read the data as the devil reads the bible, selecting and interpreting interview statements according to one’s own preconceptions and prejudices” (p. 190). The best defense against such threats to the reliability and validity of interpretation are a keen examination by the researcher of her own biases. This self-awareness is often written in the form of a bracketing statement as a method of keeping her biases in check. In addition, the interpretation of data is always subject to alternative interpretation. As a result, the validity and reliability of a researcher’s interpretation is based on the persuasiveness of the interpretive argument, supported by the data and offered to the reader for judgment.

The present study is conducted with this in mind. A statement bracketing my experience is included below. The data has been analyzed carefully in an attempt to reduce the influence of researcher bias and arguments are consistently supported by the co-researcher’s data. In addition, interpretive arguments are welcome as they are considered to provide alternative perspectives to the interpretation and illumination of meaning.

Validity

Validity in phenomenological research can be determined in four main ways (Osborne, 1990). Each of these ways is discussed below and applied to this current research study.

1. Bracketing: Here validity is enhanced when the researcher makes any foreknowledge and biases regarding the topic explicit for the reader. In addition, the exact research methodology and procedures for data analysis should be clearly delineated. This allows the reader to clearly determine how interpretations of the data were made, though readers are at liberty to disagree with the researcher's reflective analysis.

In this present study, the exact procedure employed in data analysis is presented both in written and chart form. In addition, information bracketing my experience is contained below.

2. Goodness of fit: Validity of analysis is also enhanced when the researcher checks interpretations with co-researchers to be sure that their experience is accurately reflected in the analysis. This can be done both during the interview process and after written analysis has occurred. Kvale (1983) refers to this as a "self-corrective interview." Here the participant "gets an opportunity to correct and elaborate upon the interviewer's interpretation of his statements" (Kvale, 1983, p. 182).

Osborne (1990) noted that problems may arise when participants reject a researcher's interpretations despite their validity. It is believed that this may result

from a participants' defensiveness and for this reason goodness of fit is a suggested form of validity check rather than an absolute prerequisite for validity.

This study made explicit use of participants' reflection on the researcher's interpretation. During the interview process, discussions which may have resulted in misunderstandings were clarified. After the within person syntheses were completed, each participant was contacted with a copy of the analysis of her interview. Reactions were consistently positive, as each woman indicated that her story had been accurately portrayed. Further, any additional comments which the women made were used to enhance the descriptions of their experience and thereby enhance validity.

3. Juridical validity: This represents the most critical means of assessing validity. Phenomenological interpretation is subject to the scrutiny of the research community. As a result, the process of presenting convincing, coherent, and robust arguments is essential in the course of providing interpretative statements. The essential structures of the phenomenon which are presented must be a faithful reflection of the data and capable of withstanding critical assessment. (Osborne, 1990).

Given the importance of a well-conceived argument which is based on the data, this study was conducted with the utmost consideration to detail and rhetoric. It remains to be seen whether these arguments withstand the careful scrutiny of other researchers and satisfy their demands for well-considered arguments which accurately reflect the data.

4. Resonance with others: This assessment of validity relies on the extent to which the final structure that has emerged through analysis resonates with

nonparticipants who have experience with the phenomenon. Shapiro (1986) has theorized about this form of validity assessment. According to Shapiro, verification of a final structure is based on the readers' ability to empathically understand, through their own experiences, the description that the researcher has provided. As a consequence, "Any reader . . . can be as a co-researcher with respect to verifying a tentative formulation" (Shapiro, 1986, p. 178). This is called empathic generalizability and is the most valuable tool for countering allegations of arbitrary subjectivity in phenomenological research.

Bracketing

One of the strengths of qualitative research is a recognition that researchers often select topics that are personally meaningful. This can have both positive repercussions as well as negative. Researching a topic that is personally meaningful may tend to motivate a researcher into putting greater effort into the question being posed. It also allows those with experience in a particular area to address that phenomenon with a practical awareness of the participants' experience. However, there are also drawbacks to researching phenomena that have a personal meaning. Previous experience gives a researcher foreknowledge of a phenomenon. This foreknowledge may result in bias in a researchers' interpretation of the data. As result, it is important for the researcher to put into writing prior knowledge of the phenomenon and any preconceptions that may exist. This is a difficult task but has the potential to greatly increase the validity of qualitative findings. In addition, it allows the reader to understand ways in which the

researcher may have been influenced during data analysis, since a description which is absolutely free of all presupposition is impossible.

When studying a topic such as women's experience in learning that their intimate partner is homosexual, a researcher's previous experience may be helpful in easing the participants' concerns about sharing sensitive information. Previous experience may also put certain preconceptions in place. With this in mind, I will share some of my experience in order to give the reader an understanding of my foreknowledge and interest in this topic.

1. As the ex-wife of a man who struggled with his sexual orientation, I have first-hand experience with the impact this phenomenon can have on a woman. Shortly after our marriage, I discovered that my husband had gay attractions, though he was uncertain whether he was, in fact, homosexual. I remember caring deeply for my husband and attempting to help him through some very difficult emotional times in the early years of our marriage. The stigma, isolation, and fear that I experienced along with his emotional struggles created a great deal of strain on the relationship and on me personally. The lack of support groups or knowledgeable professionals deepened my sense of isolation.

The marriage lasted approximately five years before either of us were willing to accept that we could not maintain a relationship where we were both satisfied. In my experience, loss played a large role in my adjustment to my husband's orientation. Dreams of a long married life were shattered along with strong beliefs that I had about

my husband and my world. I was forced to re-examine my own judgment, needs, goals and dreams.

2. Through the years I have maintained contact with other wives of gay men. I have seen their need for information about their situations as they lacked both role models and support in a homophobic society. I have also witnessed their wishes for understanding and support.

3. As a student of the social sciences, I have always been fascinated with people and their relationships. All relationships present unique characteristics and the heterogenous couple is certainly no exception. The small amount of literature in the area leaves much of the phenomenon as yet unexplored and provides an intrinsically interesting field for social science research.

CHAPTER IV

Results and Discussion

This chapter presents an in-depth focus on each of the participants. Essential descriptions are presented for each participant. Each description includes: (1) an introduction including personal and biographical information, and (2) an overall narrative synthesis of each co-researcher's experience. Throughout the overall syntheses of each participant's experience, numbers appear in brackets. These numbers refer to the meaning units of each participant's interview protocol and are found in chart form in Appendix F.

In conclusion, an integrative across person synthesis is included which describes central themes across protocols. Here, similarities and differences across protocols are compared revealing a generalized description of the essential themes which were common across experiences.

Winnie

Personal Information

Winnie is seventy years of age and retired from a career in sales. She is presently involved in several social groups, some with her husband John and others independently. Co-researcher is an appropriate way to describe her involvement in this topic. She has been married to a gay man for the last 50 years and they have several children and grandchildren. During the many years since her husband's initial disclosure, both she and her husband have researched and worked to understand and negotiate a heterogenous marriage. I have known Winnie through occasional contact

over the last six years. Through these years, she has maintained an ongoing commitment to the research and the support of others who experience their intimate partners' homosexual disclosure.

Overall Synthesis of Winny's Experience

Early married life for Winny included a strong focus on religious and family values. At the time of her husband's initial disclosure, they had been married for approximately 20 years, they were serving as missionaries in the Far East and had four children. It is against this cultural backdrop, in the mid 1960's, that Winny's response to her husband's disclosure of his gay sexual orientation must be viewed.

Though the 1960's may have been an era of "free love" and sexual exploration, it is unlikely that American pop culture had much of an impact on Winny. As the mother of four children and wife of a minister in a distant country, Winny likely had little contact with popular culture back home. Even if she had, the sexual revolution of the 1960's was not focussed on homosexuality per se. As a result, when initially faced with her husband's homosexuality, Winny expressed no concern or worry (3). She simply did not understand what homosexuality was (2). Winny does state that she sensed that something was amiss in the relationship prior to disclosure. Yet, her lack of awareness of homosexuality likely made it more difficult to "put her finger on" the problem (1). Further, the couple's strong religious beliefs provided reassurance that, through prayer, John would be healed of this affliction (3,4,5).

The early days then for Winny, post-disclosure, were hopeful as she believed that faith would resolve John's homosexuality. When they returned home to Canada a few years after John's disclosure, Winny's attitude appeared to be changing. No longer was she as unconcerned or worry free. The impact of their ongoing struggle with John's sexual orientation had left her feeling anxious and envious. It was as though her needs for intimacy and acceptance were being ignored and all attention was placed on

him (5, 6). Winny's anxiety and envy over the strong focus placed on John's orientation represents the beginning of a self-awareness process for her. This process of self-awareness unfolded with greater detail as she gradually faced the extent of her husband's homosexuality.

Reflecting back on her self-awareness at that time, Winny says, "I admit that I wasn't that in touch with my own feelings" (7). She remembers that she had grown up being "nice" and avoided confrontation and anger (11, 49). Her socialization had not encouraged her to identify and put forth her own needs. With John's disclosure, Winny, true to being nice, found it not only difficult to identify her own feelings, but to act on them as well.

Back home in Canada, John's increasing involvement in the gay community propelled Winny on a journey that encouraged self-reflection. The more involved John became in homosexual culture, the more reasons Winny had for re-evaluating her life. She began to be faced with a variety of difficult issues that her fundamentalist background likely left her unprepared for. Initially, she experienced a sense of alienation and confusion when she tried to socialize and fit in with John's gay social contacts (9, 15, 20). She provided an example of her difficulty at understanding gay humor. She relates, ". . . I didn't always understand their cracks and their jokes that were going back and forth" (15). If we consider humour as a complex form of communication, this provides insight into Winny's difficulty in adjusting to the gay social scene in which she found herself. It was as though she had entered a foreign culture with a basic working knowledge of the language and customs, but was unprepared or sufficiently socialized to understand the subtleties and complexities of the foreign humour.

She describes her contact with gay men at this time as difficult. John's decision to remain active in the homosexual community meant that she was in contact with the gay community also. Gay social events held at their home left her feeling

uncomfortable (11). She felt that there was no relief from the gay focus in her life (16). In addition, the gay people she knew were excessively focussed on gay sex and she found herself depersonalizing them as sexual actors rather than total human beings (17). Again, she felt distanced and alien from those around her.

Alienation escalated to feelings of isolation, rejection and abandonment as John's gay contacts became more serious. She identifies one particular event as crucial. John's five week trip (a sort of gay exploration for him) evoked feelings of abandonment and fear of separation in her (25, 26, 29, 34). They had always planned lengthy trips together (22) and she was faced with no involvement concerning this trip. She describes this as a "secrecy" he kept regarding the trip. Her use of the word "secrecy" may imply not only a lack of communication but some suspicions that she had about the purpose of his trip (23). She notes that he had begun to carry condoms in his pocket (24, 26), was making contacts with gay bed and breakfasts and was possibly making contact with gays through ads in the personals.

Winnie's use of the word "secrecy" points to a lack of communication at the time that John was planning his trip. Throughout the interview, Winnie comments on dialogue between herself and John, yet she makes few remarks about the nature of their communication (23, 54). She suggests a willingness by both partners to negotiate the terms of the marriage but a lack of belief in John's statements of love for her (54). She also states that during one of their heated arguments John had been "very patient with her" (55). Finally, it appears to have been John's decision that they permanently abstain from marital sex, despite Winnie's positive experience of their sexual relationship (38). Through these examples, it appears that marital communication was limited and somewhat unidirectional with John's wishes taking precedence.

Winnie's fear reached panic proportions when John left her home alone for the five week duration of his trip. More than twenty years after his initial disclosure she

was faced with the physical reality of being alone. This forced a confrontation with self, a confrontation of an existential nature (28). To the question "Who am I?" she could no longer answer "A loving wife in a traditional marriage." A definition of self that relied on John's presence was impossible (27). With the loss of John as a defining feature of her existence, Winny experienced a disintegration of the life she knew. The fear that ensued represented a death of her old worldview (31). In fact, as John left on his trip, she yelled through the door at him "I too shall live!" (28). This indicated quite clearly her strong perception that her existence was threatened. Her world was broken and she felt this both physically and emotionally. Symbolizing her brokenness, at night she would lie in bed with her arms wrapped around herself holding her precarious and broken existence together (33).

With the powerful impact of John's absence upon her, Winny looked for a cause or someone to blame for her pain and her loss. She blamed both John and herself. She assumed that she could have found a way to make John more sexually interested in her (39). She had thought that, if this were true, he would have no need for the trip he was embarked on. He would have remained at home and the marriage would have been intact. She also blamed herself for not maintaining a normal marriage (40). This may be linked to her fundamentalist conception of a sanctioned marriage.

She also blamed John. Her feelings of abandonment and rejection needed an object. Being left alone on his trip had induced a panic response in her. She saw John as the cause of her pain and blamed him for it. She felt victimized by his potential gay activities while he was away (29).

With John's departure, Winny faced the death of her old worldview, yet she did not have an immediate replacement or new way of seeing life for herself (45, 46). She wondered, "How am I going to face the world alone?" (46). One of her most valuable coping mechanisms began to show her new ways of being in the world. Through sharing with others, Winny began to learn new approaches to life and independence.

During data analysis, a very strong theme for Winny was her desire to share personally with others (14, 18, 19, 35, 41, 43). In addition, Winny's commitment to sharing and personal support is evidenced currently by her leadership of a support group for wives of gay men.

While Winny's desire to share her story has always been strong, this could be seen both as an added difficulty for her as well as a benefit to her. The fear of homophobia and stigmatization may have made it difficult to identify anyone who would be safe to share her story with (34, 43). Undoubtedly this added to Winny's sense of isolation and the perception that she was the only woman married to a gay man (14, 20). Over time, Winny found safe places and ways to share with others, through church organizations, gay groups and personal growth workshops (18, 19, 21, 35, 41, 43).

It was through her opportunities to share her story and connect others that Winny began to learn about herself (30). John's disclosure had initiated a process of gradual self-awareness (6, 7, 11, 37, 49) which was eventually to lead to greater independence. John's trip provided an opportunity for Winny to shift her focus away from being a couple to more of a focus on herself. She now identifies this with getting in touch with her own power. At the time, she began to realize her dependence on John and eventually defined their relationship in terms of a co-dependency (58). While she remained frightened by many of John's gay activities, including his gay lover, she recognized the need for a changed marital relationship based on her individual needs as well as his. To this end she accepted his decision to abstain from marital sex completely (57). She now found keeping separate bedrooms, rather than threatening, a welcome opportunity to maintain their own space and personal interests (55, 56).

Though the marriage underwent dramatic changes to accommodate John's sexual orientation, Winny now views the experience as producing a major change that she needed. Though it has been extremely painful at times she said, "It's the best thing

that ever happened to us . . . it opens doors to getting in touch with my own power"
(62), a power that Winny felt that she was unaware of before John's disclosure.

Sandy

Personal Information

Sandy is a middle aged mother of two adolescent sons. She has some native Canadian ancestry. At the time of our interview, she was completing a Bachelor's degree at university and maintained a part-time job working with mentally ill clients. She grew up in a stable two-parent home with several siblings. Her intimate relationship began as a platonic friendship which grew as the couple became closer emotionally. Marriage took place following her first pregnancy and her husband's disclosure occurred several years later. Our interview occurred several years after her husband Terry's initial disclosure and the couple had been divorced for some time. Sandy expressed interest in participating in this study after being approached by one of the other research participants.

Overall Synthesis of Sandy's Experience

Sandy describes herself as coming from a traditional, conservative, Catholic family. She was the fifth of eight children and has some Native Canadian ancestry. Family values and her Catholic upbringing represent salient factors in Sandy's reaction to Terry's homosexual disclosure. She placed a high value on an intact two parent family. Divorce was unthinkable and she was convinced that, despite any marital difficulties encountered, she and Terry would remain together (1, 3, 24, 25). Providing her children with parental supervision and support was also important to Sandy. So much so that in spite of the additional strain on the marriage, she chose to work shifts staggered with her husband so that the children would remain home rather than attend day care.

During courtship and early cohabitation, the relationship had been supportive for Sandy. At a young age, she had decided to leave home and strike out on her own. Leaving her own home hundreds of miles away, she called on Terry when she arrived in her new home city. She had known him for some time. He proved himself a wonderful resource, helping her finding living accommodation and employment (71). After Terry's relationship with another woman broke down, Sandy and Terry had agreed to live together platonically as a means of saving money (72). The relationship grew and Sandy recognized qualities in Terry that she found both attractive and which filled a need for her (70). She struggled with weight loss and shyness and Terry was willing to gently support and encourage her attempts to deal with these issues (74).

It was after Sandy's pregnancy that the couple decided to marry (73). Sandy sees this decision as having been made freely without any undue influence from family or church. Before marriage, communication had been open, free and satisfying for Sandy. She says, "before . . . we had gotten married, we used to communicate. I really found him to be a great friend" (34). Following marriage, she identified a significant change in communication patterns. The presence of children and staggered shift work took a toll on the couple's time together and communication deteriorated (33, 34). Sandy attempted different methods to enhance their communication, but it never returned to what it had been before. Sandy later learned that during this time Terry was secretly engaging in homosexual contacts (28).

At that time, Sandy had no indication or suspicion of Terry's homosexuality. In the form of a hypothetical question, he had broached the topic of divorce with her (2). She gave him a strongly definitive answer that left no doubt about her strong convictions against divorce. She was of the opinion that things could always be worked out. In retrospect, Sandy realizes that Terry was struggling with his sexual orientation. He was testing her to determine her reaction and ascertain what his orientation may mean for the family. During our interview she was struck by the

subtlety of his question. She says, ". . . to this day it never dawned on me talking about divorce was his way of telling me (that he was gay)" (26). She now sees that Terry may even have been attempting to give Sandy a clue or a partial disclosure as to his struggle.

Looking back, Sandy says she knew that something was slightly out of place in the relationship (85), yet his full disclosure five years into their marriage came as a complete shock to her. His disclosure was met with utter disbelief (4, 39). Sandy would not or could not believe that her husband and father of her children could possibly be homosexual. She struggled with disbelief and questions about his sexuality and their own sexual relationship saying, "This is not true! You're lying! How can you be? . . . You've been with me!"(39). She experienced a profound inability to understand what his disclosure would mean to her and the family (7). Almost instantly, living together and trying to handle disclosure with two preschoolers began to break down. Terry moved out three months after disclosure (8). Custody and living arrangements were thrown into flux and trial and error were the watch words as they worked through issues and financial arrangements (6, 9, 10).

Following disclosure Terry revealed his homosexual infidelity to Sandy. This awareness shattered all trust in him and has been difficult to rebuild in any form (30, 88). This knowledge seemed to make things worse for her (11, 12, 29). She says, "I wouldn't have wanted to know . . . it was so hard for me to deal with" (29). Yet, the necessity of AIDS testing required that she know. She began to wonder if he was honest regarding his whereabouts when he was not at home (87). Not only had she lost trust in him, but she was plagued by visualizations of Terry involved in homosexual acts (49). These thoughts were hard to ignore and occasionally trouble Sandy even now, several years after separation and divorce (47, 48).

For Sandy, the extreme pain she experienced made it impossible for her to console her husband through his struggles (55). She struggled as her emotions

fluctuated between hope and despair over his unresolved sexual orientation crisis (43). At times she blamed herself, wondering if she had caused his homosexual orientation (84). At other times, she blamed him for destroying her family (51, 75). No longer would her sons have the intact family with a mother and father as she had envisioned it. Her belief structure and values were shaken and threatened. She could no longer provide her sons with the two parent family and the solid marriage that she valued (63) and she resented her husband for taking that dream away from her and their sons. She had difficulty coping with emotional difficulties at work. Eventually she decided to take time off (40).

Several months following disclosure, she decided to spend some time living alone (57). This was a dramatic shift from the roles of wife and mother to living as an independent single woman. Though this was a major shift in Sandy's life circumstances, in many ways it felt positive for her. Terry's disclosure had left her reeling and she welcomed the opportunity to be alone. She needed to face the issue in solitude, away from the influence and concerns of Terry and the children (37, 56). On reflection, she says, "I know that I really pushed him away and I had to deal with it myself. So I more or less blocked him out completely until I got my life together and whatnot. I needed my own space, definitely" (37). She felt free and savored the feelings of independence and control that being alone gave her (58, 66). She took actions to symbolize the end of her marriage and the beginning of a new life. She discarded old wedding materials like her dress, wedding cards and rings (38, 60). She began to acknowledge strengths in herself that she had not realized before. Her self confidence and self-esteem grew (62). She also sees that it was her children that saw her through this time. After just a few months on her own, she says, "I think the thing that kept me going was the kids. Just decided, well I've got to care for them . . ." (61).

All was not so easy, though. Her traditional family values were in question. She found herself living a family life that was incongruent with the beliefs that she had held.

It wasn't until she began to question her values and beliefs that she was able to reconstruct a life for herself that felt right (63, 64). She needed to see a reason for this pain and struggle in her life. The meaning in this experience began to emerge as she examined her views on homosexuality. She had always had an awareness and tacit acceptance of homosexuality (5), but this experience provided strong encouragement to learn more and to expand her view of it. She also found meaning in her expanded awareness of homosexuality and homophobia (22, 36, 99), lessons she feels that she could have never learned had it not been for her experience. The experience also provided encouragement for her to examine her marriage with new understanding (69). In retrospect, she says, "I can say now I'm glad this happened. It opened me up so much as far as . . . learning things about the marriage (32).

In time, she sought counselling available to her through her employer. This provided the initial help that she needed. For reasons that she found hard to define, she felt that she could trust this counsellor, whom she later learned was homosexual himself (41). In him, she found an accepting and open listener who was also able to suggest helpful readings for her. For Sandy, the sharing and support of friends were vital to her journey. Homophobic reactions of friends and family conflicted with her need to share her pain and her life (16, 18, 19, 20). Thinking back, she says, "So at that time, too, it was really hard because it was so hard to find somebody that could help you " (14). Not surprisingly, given her religious background, she sought help from a priest. Though he expressed concern, he was ill equipped to be a resource for her (15). Negative opinions and attitudes from friends did not help Sandy and she soon found herself screening her conversations and checking to see if she could trust her friends with her story. At times a homophobic joke or an incidental conversation about someone homosexual would let her know whether a friend was safe to share her feelings with (93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98).

Sandy found additional acceptance in a support group for wives of gay men (17). She began to heal through group readings and sharing her combined pain over her husband's homosexual disclosure and the breakdown of her family (21). The women in her support group provided a deeper level of understanding that was not possible with others. She describes it in this manner, "It's so hard . . . to have told some friends and to me they still didn't quite understand. And so the group really helped where the women were in the same situation . . . (They) knew where I was coming from" (18).

Resolving her relationships with others also became important. Sandy learned that even her parents found it difficult to emotionally support her. She remarked that, ". . . when I told my Mom and Dad . . . it was not really support there . . . they don't talk about him. Just on the surface" (90). Thankfully, she found support from two sisters, particularly a sister who discovered that her husband (Terry's brother) was also homosexual (89). Eventually, she found the courage to discuss Terry's disclosure with his parents. She was relieved to learn that they continued to be open and accepting of her. This calmed some of her fears about the future of her relationship with them (91).

Sandy describes her current relationship with Terry in conflicted terms (45, 46, 52). They continue to have contact through their sons. Terry appears to want a closer, friendlier relationship with Sandy. In contrast, Sandy sees the relationship as one centered exclusively on the welfare of their children (50, 51). She maintains that if it were not for the children she would want nothing to do with Terry (44). She finds his attempts to discuss his new homosexual relationship painful and would prefer to be totally disconnected from his life (50).

With respect to Terry's homosexuality, Sandy's main concerns are with her sons (78, 80). She feels strongly that she must not discuss her opinions about Terry with the children (77, 81). She worries because neither son discusses his father's orientation with her. The eldest, an adolescent, now spends little time with his father and refuses to sleep over at his father's home. Sandy has tried to discuss the issue with

her son but he has refused. She is very concerned about his developing sexuality and any concerns that he may have regarding his father's orientation or his own (79, 82, 83). She expresses her thoughts this way, "I think my biggest concern is they understand that there's, you know, another way of life. And . . . I just wish they'd talk to me about it and how they feel" (80). She is unsure of how to approach the topic with her son and struggles with its impact on him.

Sandy has continued on with her life independently. Though she has enjoyed dating (65), she prefers to be single with her children. She comments on singlehood saying, ". . . I seem quite happy to be on my own. Being my own boss. Not having anyone to talk to" (66). She suggested that one day she may meet her "soul mate", but sounded uncertain as to this likelihood (67). Remarriage seems to hold little attraction for her (68). She no longer works in the transportation industry. Several years ago she returned to college and trained to work in the mental health field. She now works part-time and continues to further her education.

Anne

Personal Information

Anne is a middle aged woman with two grade school daughters. University educated, she is employed professionally. Anne grew up in a two parent household with one sister. When Anne married she was unaware of any questions regarding her husband Gary's sexual orientation. Immediately following the birth of their second daughter, Gary disclosed his desire to pursue his homosexual orientation. This interview was conducted several years after Gary's disclosure and the couple's subsequent divorce. Anne agreed to participate in this study after being approached by another participant.

Overall Synthesis of Anne's Experience

Friends thought that Anne and Gary had the ideal relationship (26). The couple had been married for 11 years and had two young children. Anne had never heard any concerns from Gary about his sexual orientation (1). In fact, she never even considered that he might be struggling with homosexuality (2). Gary's full disclosure of homosexuality came as a shock to Anne when it occurred just five months after the birth of their youngest daughter. She said, "It (Gary's disclosure) just came out of the blue" (6). In retrospect, Anne remarked that she saw small hints that Gary was providing about his orientation struggle, yet they had meant nothing to her prior to disclosure (6). At the time of this interview, nearly ten years after Gary's disclosure, Anne believed that Gary had married out of genuine commitment and honest intentions

(4, 50). However, following his disclosure she had not believed this to be the case (49, 62, 73); it had taken time and emotional struggle to get to this point.

Gary's disclosure was an event that shattered Anne's world. Instantly her world was devastated and her sense of stability was gone. She described the night that Gary disclosed his homosexual orientation as a shattering explosion saying, "There it was like a bomb . . . Just like a bomb had fallen in the middle of our lives" (5). The definition of her family was forced to change and Anne felt overwhelmed (8). Gary's disclosure had left her with tremendous emotional fall out and she had to deal with a struggle that included emotional pain, denial and anger (48, 49). Despite Gary's disclosure, Anne did not feel ready to separate from him. Nevertheless, Gary insisted that in the long run it would be best for both of them. Anne felt compelled to accept his decision (7, 12, 14). As a result, she was faced with caring for their two small children alone as she and Gary alternated custody. In addition, she faced the forced dissolution of her marriage (13). Anne later commented, "He could not love me in the way a husband should love a wife. He said that he didn't want to rob me of the possibility of that happening to me in another relationship and he too wanted to experience a complete relationship with a man. At the time, I did not believe him (or want to believe him), but I have come to understand in time" (correspondence and personal discussion).

For Anne, feelings of abandonment and a loss of power over her own destiny and the destiny of her family overwhelmed her as she struggled to make sense of her new situation (13, 66, 67, 68). Anne questioned whether she had the ability to survive

independently as she realized that she had depended a great deal on Gary (21). She remarked, "I was feeling abandoned, I didn't know how I'd support myself" (13).

Anne's pain was beyond any proportion she had ever known. Describing her pain with intensity, Anne said, "You never know how much pain you can feel until you feel it" (69). Manifestations of her grief were both emotional and physical. She cried like a child (71) and said it was like "there was a hole in your stomach . . . I guess it was an emptiness . . . but it was physical" (70).

With her pain, came a profound anger that was new to Anne but in many ways she found it healing. For six months following his disclosure to Anne, Gary chose to stay with her for financial reasons and this provided her with an opportunity to resolve many issues with him (18). She addressed emotional issues with Gary that ultimately made the transition to separation easier for her (19). During this time, she expressed anger over her loss of control in the relationship (11) and this provided an emotional release that Anne found important (17). By expressing her rage, she found that she did not become immobilized by it (34). She said, "I was furious with him and furious with everybody (9) . . . I don't yell and scream and I don't -- harbour things up and blow and all that kind of thing. But I really found at this time that I could really do that if I wanted to" (10). Anne's feelings of anger and isolation became more acute when she saw Gary begin to gain support and new connections within the gay community (16). He appeared excited over his new gay lifestyle and this angered her. Anne described it as being "like he was getting more excited about his new life, and that really ticked me off" (15). At times, Anne felt so angry that she considered sharing

Gary's disclosure with friends in order to portray him as a villain in their separation.

Yet, she considered this approach vengeful and she resisted the temptation (9, 25).

Anne's trust in Gary and their marriage was shaken. She wondered whether she had been deceived and began to ask herself painful questions like, "Why did we get married? and Was he lying to me the whole time?" (49). She was concerned that Gary had been dishonest in his sexual response to her in the past (73). Her anger was pervasive and she began to feel angry with all men (59). She feared new relationships and questioned other men's sexual orientation (62). She struggled with self-esteem. Gary's disclosure had raised issues about her own sexuality identity and threatened her sense of womanhood. She wondered what Gary's homosexuality may say about her by implication (51, 75). What did it mean about her if a gay man to decided to marry her? She questioned whether she would ever be found desirable by anyone else (74).

Unaccustomed to being single and parenting alone, Anne experienced a deep lack of confidence in her ability to cope on her own (52). Looking back, she recognized that even as a child she had experienced herself as a quiet person and less confident than others. Confronted with being single, Anne was unsure of herself. She was particularly concerned about her ability to parent her children without Gary's presence (38).

She became very concerned with her children's adjustment after Gary left the family home. She experienced a variety of concerns focussed primarily on her ability to raise the children alone (20, 53) and the children's adjustment to the loss of their father. She felt saddened and guilty that the children would not have the two parent

household that she had planned for them, but had no power to change Gary's departure from the family (39, 45, 65). She was unsure how to best raise her children with a gay father. Anne knew of no "role models" for how to deal with a homosexual parent. Since the children were young, Anne's concern for the children wasn't focussed on Gary's homosexuality as much as the profound impact that separation would have on the children. She said, "The gay issue really wasn't the thing. It was the separation that was the thing. And it was hard. I mean it's hard when you have to tell your children that you're not going to live together" (45).

One aspect on which she and Gary agreed was that the children should have full disclosure immediately and that Gary should speak with the children (35). Against the advice of some friends, Anne believed that the children needed Gary and she recognized that he had a valuable parenting contribution to make. For these reasons, she chose flexible joint custody arrangements (40). As a means of providing consistency for the children, Anne found that hiring a nanny to travel between their two homes with the children was very helpful (20, 102). It wasn't until some years later that disclosure issues became more relevant for the children (82). As time passed and Gary became involved with a new partner, Anne's concerns centered around the children's relationship with Gary's partner (97). Yet, she saw his home as out of her influence (98). She also believed that she was able to provide more attention for the children in her home as a result of her being single (99).

Anne found her own parents reaction to Gary's disclosure difficult to deal with. They reacted to Gary's disclosure and the couple's subsequent separation with

anger and intolerance (86, 87, 88). Rather than feeling supported by her parents' concern, Anne found their reaction difficult as she attempted to develop a positive relationship with Gary (87). She said, "It was difficult for me to see them harbour so much anger when I was trying to get rid of all that kind of stuff" (88). Over time, her mother has attempted to become more tolerant, but Anne has continued to alter family occasions to suit her mother's attitude. This has frustrated Anne (89,90). Even Anne and Gary's children have remarked that their grandmother is closed to the topic of their father and the children are confused by their grandmother's reaction (90). Ultimately, Anne attempted to model her own acceptance of Gary as a means of helping her parents to adjust (104).

Not only did Anne's parents display a homophobic reaction to Gary's disclosure, but Anne described a variety of ways in which she had been hurt by the homophobic reactions of others (24, 27, 41, 42, 77, 78). After disclosing Gary's homosexuality to a number of friends, the friendships were lost. She said, "Some couples, when they found out why, that was it. They didn't want anything to do with him, and it sort of worked in some ways with me, too. Just 'cause the homophobic kind of attitude" (27). Anne became afraid to discuss gay issues realizing that she may face prejudice, so she concealed her story to protect herself (78). In addition, she was concerned that Gary may lose his job if co-workers were to discover his homosexual orientation (77). As time progressed, Anne began to heal despite those who were discriminatory around her. She became less concerned about homophobic reactions, yet she stated that she still chooses her words carefully when discussing her ex-

husband with others (83). At the time of this interview, she also stated that she is now more willing to confront the homophobic reactions of others than she has been in the past (79).

A remaining concern for Anne has been the homophobic treatment her children may encounter (42). On one occasion, she witnessed one of her daughters encounter homophobia when her daughter disclosed Gary's homosexual orientation to friends (42). Anne commented on her daughter's experience saying, "She has learned that -- the hard way, that you don't tell everybody that your father is gay and there's another man in the house . . . And that hurts me to see them -- a friend not being able to play with her because of that" (42). For Anne, homophobia was an integral part of her experience and she perceived homophobia as a pervasive, violent and uninformed aspect of society (106). She commented that she hoped that her own children would learn to be more tolerant and "better people than if we [took] another path" (100). She also remarked that research, such as this study, may serve to enlighten misunderstood aspects of homosexuality and its impact (106).

Anne's own personal transition to Gary's departure took time and friends were integral to her adjustment. Even though the support she had enjoyed with Gary was gone, she began to expand her social network without him (22). Some old family friends remained supportive of her and she appreciated the time they spent with her (29). There were times when she would share her pain with family and friends (31), yet other times she merely sought their company and companionship. She did not wish to burden her friendships with stories of her struggle (30). Anne remembered

that the support of family and friends had helped her to begin to believe that she could cope without Gary. She said, "They would give me pats on the back and tell me that things seemed to be looking well . . . I guess I began to believe it" (56). Her in-laws also remained supportive of Anne and she was glad not to have lost them following Gary's disclosure (85).

Another important support for Anne was her contact with a professional counsellor. She attended therapy sessions for about eight or nine months as she made the transition through the marital separation (31). Anne found that her counsellor's belief in her enhanced her own self-confidence (56). Nevertheless, she was apprehensive about the effectiveness of her coping skills when she discontinued therapy (32). A local support group for wives of gay men provided Anne with additional support, but she chose not to become involved in other activities within the gay sub-culture (76).

With the help of those who were supportive of her, Anne began to redefine her life (23). She said, "It was more me learning a new kind of life . . . so that's what I did" (33). In the months following Gary's departure, Anne found that her young children needed her and this helped her to cope with being alone (72). She found that with time she made new discoveries about herself and her self-confidence grew. She commented, "What I discovered as the time went on is that I was much more capable and confident and much stronger than I ever thought I was (54). She began to see that she was able to single parent her children and maintain her career (55, 103). She even

found herself standing up to Gary when she disagreed with his decisions and this felt empowering (57).

Mourning, acceptance and adjustment took time and it wasn't until years later that Anne could see benefits in not being married to Gary (63). For several months following their separation, Anne had held faint hope that Gary would return to the family having changed his mind about his sexual orientation. However, when he established a new homosexual relationship, Anne painfully acknowledged that her wish for a reunited family was impossible (93). Here was proof that Gary would not return and Anne found she no longer even wished for a reconciliation (94). With this realization, Anne was able to accept Gary's new relationship (91, 96) and as the pain over her loss healed, she became curious about Gary's new partner (95).

No longer wishing to reunite, Anne began to notice aspects of Gary which she found undesirable (64). Increasingly she enjoyed her new single status (92) and her newly discovered self-sufficiency. She described it saying, "I'm enjoying being on my own. Like I can do my own thing. I'm quite capable of doing whatever I want to do" (60). She also began to realize that many of the issues that Gary's homosexuality had raised about her own womanhood had disappeared, though she was mystified about the process that had allowed healing of her sexual identity to happen (75). The intensity of her pain had waned and she no longer felt an urgency to share her story with friends (81). Her attitude about men shifted also. No longer was she filled with anger, but open to new relationship possibilities for herself (61). She had a hope and curiosity for the future (103).

Over the course of her experience, Anne's attitude and knowledge of homosexuality shifted. Initially, following Gary's disclosure, she had been ambivalent and unwilling to defend homosexuality (28). Later, as her own acceptance and comfort grew, she would openly defend homosexuals against discriminatory jokes with little concern for others' opinions (84). Through the experience she had gained a strong conviction that society should and her children would become more accepting of homosexuality (43). She remarked, "I've found I've become more tolerant of any different kind of situation . . . that's the way it works . . . that's what education does" (105).

Nicole

Personal Information

Nicole is a woman in her early twenties. She was raised in a two parent home with one younger sister. At the time of this interview, she was completing a Bachelor's degree and was self-employed. Her relationship with Mark began as a long standing friendship which developed into a more intimate relationship. At the time of Mark's disclosure, the couple had made their relationship public and they had defined their relationship as exclusive and intimate for several months. Following Mark's disclosure the relationship gradually became less intimate though they maintained a business relationship. This interview took place approximately two years after Mark's full disclosure and Nicole had begun a new relationship. She became involved in this research through advertising.

Overall Synthesis of Nicole's Experience

Nicole and Mark's relationship seemed to grow naturally from a long-term friendship into a more intimate relationship (1). They had known one another for a few years and were members of the same conservative church. As college-age young people with similar backgrounds and a close friendship, their decision to become romantically involved seemed natural. As Nicole entered this new phase of their relationship she had hopes for a long future together. She characterized their early intimate relationship this way, "I saw the potential for us to stay together for a long time. I mean it was a very, very, very close relationship for me. A very important relationship" (13).

Over time, the relationship began to deepen and Mark became increasingly uneasy and discontented with expectations for increased intimacy (2,4). Just as they began to identify themselves as a couple, Mark shared his uneasiness with Nicole and began to disclose his confusion over his sexual orientation (3, 4, 6). It was as though the greater demands and expectations placed on him in their newly defined relationship resulted in more of an anxiety over his sexual orientation. However, the nature of his disclosure was not complete (5). Mark had told her, "This is (his sexual orientation struggle) something I'm a little bit worried about, it's just something that's going to make this relationship more difficult for me and you just need to know about it" (4). He shared his confusion and concerns but appeared unclear about his own orientation. He down played the significance of his struggle and offered explanations that seemed to account for his homosexual attractions (22, 23, 24). Mark, himself, had difficulty accepting that may be gay (5, 7) and Nicole knew this saying, "I mean the last thing he wanted was to be gay at the time. It was so important to him that it wasn't true" (6). Family and religious sanctions against homosexuality gave Mark strong motivation to deny his homosexual impulses. Both Mark and Nicole believed that it would create a family crisis if Mark were gay (18) and this ultimately proved to be the case (80, 81, 82).

Mark's disclosure was a process that evolved over time for the couple. A part of Mark's sexual orientation exploration included sharing his secret fears and concerns with Nicole (23). In earlier partial disclosures, Mark had discussed his concerns though he never fully accepted a gay orientation. At each instance prior to full

disclosure, Mark shared his fears, but was able to offer rationalizations for his homosexual attractions (22, 24). For Nicole, Mark's explanations were sufficient to dissuade any concerns she had regarding his sexual orientation (25). Instead of dissuading her, Mark's willingness to share intimate personal concerns gave her a heightened sense of intimacy.

Rather than distance Nicole, the profound honesty with which Mark shared his struggle and sexual orientation fears served to strengthen Nicole's connection with Mark (14). His honesty provided a basis for Mark to be genuine in the relationship and Nicole felt she could be understanding of Mark in a way that no one else was or could be (6, 10, 40). He had shared with her parts of himself that were deep, very intimate and painful and this drew her closer to him. It became very important to Nicole to support Mark and understand what he needed through his struggle with his sexual orientation and she began to focus on his needs (9). She said, "I was so focussed on him. . . that's all I felt and that's all I could think about was what he needed me to be in that relationship" (8).

Her desire to help Mark through his pain and their desire for intimacy were elements that encouraged deep personal disclosure. The night of Mark's full disclosure of his homosexual orientation exemplifies the complex way in which intimacy developed for the couple. Nicole poignantly described Mark's full disclosure as "gay night" (25). On that night, Nicole's desire to support and care for Mark was coupled with Mark's orientation struggle and his need to be genuine in the relationship. As the evening progressed, Nicole worked desperately to reassure Mark of her support and

acceptance as Mark reluctantly disclosed his homosexual orientation (27, 29). Nicole described that scenario this way, "He was so vague. He was so scared to tell me I think . . . Right away . . . I was there a hundred percent to care about him" (27). While his disclosure shook her belief in the foundation of the relationship, Mark's desire to remain together reassured her and addressed her need to remain connected with him (32, 33, 34). As a result, Mark's full disclosure initially served to draw the young couple together as Nicole attempted to remain close to Mark and provide support through a very bewildering time (40).

Following "gay night," an understanding of the impact of Mark's disclosure came slowly for Nicole. During this period, a gradual change occurred in the relationship (21) which was coupled with a confusing mixture of emotions for Nicole (41). Despite Mark's reassurances, there were times when Nicole felt his disclosure as an impending threat to the relationship and this frightened her (21). She had difficulty defining the relationship because, when her understanding of the relationship had changed, the warm nature of their contact remained the same. Nicole described it this way, "It was kind of confusing because you never really explained it to other people, they don't really understand the nature of it and I'm still feeling close to him and it's changed but it really hasn't" (52). And yet, Nicole found that Mark's disclosure provided a relieving explanation for their lack of physical intimacy (26).

For Nicole it became important to be recognized publicly as a couple as their relationship left her feeling unsure. She needed and relied on outside signs that their relationship was a close one. She took her cues from Mark as well as others. Their

earlier decision to personally and publicly define their relationship as an intimate couple had served to signify a deep change in the relationship for Nicole and reassure her of their mutual and exclusive commitment to the relationship (13). Others' recognition of them as a couple had also enhanced her sense that this was a close relationship (12) so much so that following disclosure both Nicole and Mark declined to correct others' misconceptions about their current relationship. There was a security in others' misconceptions. It allowed them to avoid the potential loss that neither of them wanted to face. She said, "It's so strange because what other people thought was so important to us because we both wanted the ideal relationship, that looked nice to everybody else and that's what we had and it didn't matter to us that we weren't [physical] . . . so it was nice for everyone to see the relationship in this ideal way" (48). Finally, Mark's continual reassurances and need for Nicole's support convinced her that the relationship was viable even following disclosure (16, 19, 32). She felt he needed her.

Over time, Nicole found herself in a helping role with Mark. His pain over the orientation crisis and overwhelming fear led Nicole to focus almost exclusively on supporting him (8). Her pattern of caring and supporting was established even before full disclosure as she initially attempted to help him reveal his deep anxieties (27). She wanted Mark to be straight and she saw part of her role as providing Mark with the opportunity to do this. She relates, "if this relationship could work out, that would mean he wasn't gay . . . I was there and helping him with that" (17). Following full disclosure, Mark's need for her support seemed to increase as he faced a crisis point in

his sexual orientation struggle (29). Through her intense focus on Mark, Nicole was able to support Mark through a very difficult time. Her intense focus on Mark's needs left little time to focus on her own fears and pain over his disclosure (30, 37, 44).

Though their intimate relationship had been relatively brief, Nicole's emotional investment appears to have been great. Her hopes and dreams for their relationship together in the future were threatened by Mark's disclosure and she unwittingly began to avoid dealing with her own fears of impending loss by focussing on Mark's needs. She submerged feelings of pain saying it was like "totally cutting off everything that was vulnerable and saying, 'OK, I'm strong and I'm in this relationship and I'm happy with it.' I was always turning to the closet and cutting off the pain" (43). She cut herself off from a relationship with herself and her pain. She described her denial this way, "I've got to the point where it's okay with me. That it's nothing more than a friendship -- it's like I was forcing myself to believe that" (68). She relied on and sought public appearances of togetherness, finding it difficult to correct others' misconceptions of an intact relationship (46, 47, 49, 51). Occasionally she caught glimpses of her pain and most often silenced them through denial. Finally, when the relationship began to break down and Mark became involved in gay culture, Nicole began to deny the meaning that the relationship held for her (42, 58, 69).

As Mark became more involved in gay culture, an imbalance in their relationship became more apparent to Nicole. The relationship seemed to be based on meeting his emotional needs (20, 57). Through her denial came a sense of anger and having been cheated. Her unwavering support of Mark seemed to have a built-in

irony. Her presence with and support of Mark had given him the courage to explore his homosexuality and was leading to her abandonment (28). She felt incredible pain and anger that Mark seemed unconcerned about her needs and fears (61, 73). Following disclosure, Mark's focus had changed, turning away from their relationship to a solitary journey of self-discovery and exploration. Mark's new relationship with himself precluded a reciprocal caring relationship with Nicole. She characterized this period of their relationship by saying, "I think he's worked so hard at being comfortable with who he is and screw anyone else who isn't comfortable with who he is. . . It's a relationship of him with himself" (77). She was expected to follow Mark's journey and she found it demanding, tiring and confusing. It was as though Nicole was trailing after Mark trying to keep up in a male homosexual world where she didn't belong. She says, "and it became so tiring, because there was so many changes in his life, he became such a different person" (62).

Mark's rejection of a physical relationship with Nicole denied her need for physical connection. She blamed herself for Mark's disinterest in a sexual relationship and wondered if she was responsible for this missing element in their relationship. She felt ashamed and insecure about herself and their lack of physical intimacy (personal communication).

Nicole began to face an existential crisis of her own. Very early in the relationship, she had made a great investment of herself in this relationship and had become what Mark needed her to be (8). Initially shaken by Mark's full disclosure, Nicole had begun to question her connection with Mark (35, 36, 39). Yet, she

managed to avoid many aspects of her own crisis preferring to focus on Mark's needs and insecurities. The problem was that with Mark's growing homosexual self-acceptance he no longer needed Nicole's support (56) and this left her without a role. Her self definition, to be what Mark needed, began to vanish. She poignantly described it by saying, "It was all about his needs. But his needs weren't there anymore. Because it wasn't about what I needed. That wasn't even the question. So if he didn't need me anymore then there was no relationship. There was no basis for it. No basis for closeness" (57). She felt exposed and alone without Mark's need for her (57). She began to address the inequities in the relationship and her own aloneness. "I was scared that he didn't need me anymore and I felt angry that I'd been the one who was there, and he didn't need to be. . . Now that you're OK-- Where am I?" (59), she thought. Though she and Mark remained in contact, she began to grieve the loss of Mark as the friend and partner she had once known (76, 78). Her commitment and connections remained deep (68), and she chose not to completely abandon her relationship with Mark. Even at the time of this interview, she continued to live with Mark as a roommate and the two operated a business together. However, Nicole reported that the relationship was strained (75).

Nicole's road to personal healing seems to have followed an evolving process, just as her relationship with Mark and his disclosure did. She chose to share her story with a very limited number of people. Throughout her struggles with Mark, Nicole revealed her situation to very few friends. She shared her story with a long time female friend, though she denied that it was of any major concern. As a result, a

trusted sister was Nicole's primary confidante (66). It seems that Nicole's early denial of her own process limited her need to share her story. Eventually, a personal counsellor provided a breakthrough point when she encouraged Nicole to acknowledge the depth of her relationship with Mark and gave Nicole permission to acknowledge her own needs (67, 70, 72). Nicole said, "And she encouraged me to quit labeling things and feel whatever it was that there was there. It felt so good to be able to do that -- to [be able to] let go of my need to be okay (70). This was a profound turning point in Nicole's journey, which began to bring peace and understanding to her process" (71). The opportunity to share and receive validation seems to have been important for Nicole. Even this interview, as co-researcher, seemed to lend insight to her and validate her story as important (50, 85).

A new relationship after Mark provided opportunities for Nicole to address other issues. Mark's aversion to physical contact with Nicole had taken its toll on how she perceived her body. She said, "That was another thing I was completely cut off from -- was feeling that I was so unattractive to my new partner . . . It makes you feel almost disgusting to him" (84). Her body image had suffered and her new relationship had raised these issues and had begun to heal her wounds (84). Nicole's most valuable insights appear to have been revealed when she took the risk to share her story and gave herself the opportunity to be validated. She described the opportunity to share and be validated this way, "When I heard that my experience is being studied, it [felt] so good -- it was almost like I responded right away. I thought I would like to talk to her. . . Nobody understands, that this even could be difficult" (85). This powerful

experience of sharing for Nicole is contrasted with the sensitive nature of her story and her tendency to avoid sharing to reduce the risks to herself. Nicole has never chosen to share this story with her parents as she fears that their reaction will be less than supportive. She states that she believes that they would never understand saying, "I didn't tell them . . . I don't think they'd accept it" (83).

In my last contact with Nicole, months following our first interview, one additional opportunity for sharing and understanding had become very important for her. The passage of time, the opportunity to read and reflect on the written synthesis of her experience, and Mark's decision to move a long distance away had provided the impetus for Nicole and Mark to discuss their past. This proved to be a very important occasion for Nicole to learn what their relationship had meant to Mark. She experienced relief at learning of the special place that their relationship held in Mark's memory. She had been afraid that it had not meant the same to Mark as it had to her. It was satisfying and reassuring to hear Mark acknowledge that the relationship had been an important mutual connection and would not be forgotten.

Justine

Personal Information

Justine is middle aged woman with three adolescent sons. At the time of our interview, she had been married for twenty-seven years. She is university educated and maintains a successful professional career. Before marriage, Justine's husband had revealed homosexual inclinations to her but she had not considered them to be of any consequence. Through the years of their marriage he had remained a faithful husband and father. A year and a half prior to our interview her husband had revealed a strong need to explore his homosexuality. This interview occurred in the midst of a crisis for Justine over Gary's full disclosure. She was under psychiatric care and on anti-depressant medication.

Justine became involved as a research participant through contact with another participant in this study. Initially, she had been ambivalent about sharing her story. Months after our initial contact she agreed to participate when she felt more ready to discuss her experience.

Overall Synthesis of Justine's Experience

Justine was emotionally distressed at the time of this interview. The nature of her marriage was in question and together she and her husband, Steve, were working to redefine the parameters of the marriage relationship. Theirs had been a twenty-seven year relationship and they had three sons who were now teenagers. Steve had often acknowledged his homosexual attractions with Justine including disclosure before marriage (1). Yet, for Justine their discussions regarding Steve's orientation did not greatly worry

her (2, 3). The meaning and potential implications of Steve's homosexuality were unclear to her, because Steve was not actively homosexual (36). As a devoted and responsible father and husband, Steve's repeated disclosures held more confusion than concern for Justine (12). Through the years, Justine found herself concerned primarily for Steve. Whenever he was struggling with his orientation, Justine believed that talking through his concerns would ease his discomfort (45). This seemed to satisfy both Justine and Steve until approximately a year and a half before this interview.

At this time, Steve had been away on business and returned home with the stated intention to more actively explore his homosexuality. He explained to Justine that he no longer felt that he could deny his "gay half" (4, 6, 14). Steve's intentions to explore his homosexuality instantly sent Justine's world into a tail spin. Justine felt that the foundations and ultimately the future of their relationship was immediately jeopardised (5). She began to experience a dizzying array of emotions for which she felt ill prepared. A crisis was building in which Justine began to question her relationship and ultimately herself (32). She had felt secure, stable and satisfied with the relationship before disclosure, and Steve's disclosure threatened to destroy this. She seemed to be faced with two dissatisfying options. Either she would be unwillingly faced with an uncertain future alone or the relationship would be dramatically redefined (35). Both options presented a loss of the relationship as she had known it. Justine began to experience a deep fear and mistrust of the future and corresponding severe depression. The situation seemed overwhelming and beyond her control; pain seemed inevitable (31, 33). She was terrified of being

abandoned, yet she felt powerless to prevent it (5). The future loomed threatening and uncertain before her (7, 29, 35).

Past upbringing had taught Justine little self-reliance and her now uncertain future demanded a self-reliance she lacked. As a child, she had learned to suppress her emotions, question her abilities and acquiesce to others' needs (49, 52). With the loss of her stability with Steve, she felt ill prepared to provide her own stability. If she no longer could count on the relationship as it was, could she rely on herself? She wondered who she was on her own. It was a question of survival through loss and she wondered whether she could survive alone if necessary (29, 35, 47). In addition, the threat of Steve's homosexuality to her stability angered her, but she felt lost for mechanisms to express this and turned it inward (31, 48, 50). She stated, "I had no ability in anything I did. It was his decision-making and I was really torn because I was feeling, starting to feel desperate and starting to feel very angry. I very rapidly became depressed" (20). At times she seemed to deny the magnitude of her loss and the right to her anger (67). Justine felt isolated and did not know where to turn (62).

Justine found it difficult to believe that Steve's homosexual orientation was not a reflection on her (9, 11). She believed that, as Steve's wife, it was her duty to meet his needs. She blamed herself, believing that somehow she must have failed to meet those needs. She questioned her ability to sexually satisfy him and blamed his resulting sexual discontent on herself (10, 13). Justine reflected on it this way, "... I wasn't providing something in our relationship that he needed to have and so, therefore, I wasn't the good wife ... I took the blame on myself and said I was responsible ..." (19).

Sometime following Steve's expanded interest in pursuing homosexual interests, the couple renewed and restated their ongoing commitment to the marriage (6, 24). Steve's full disclosure seemed to open and expand communication between the couple. This increased communication served to enhance a sense of connection for Justine (54, 55). She says, "(I) feel closer to him than I did a year and a half ago when we talked about the fact that he was going to become more at one with himself. More caring. More loving. More concern and trust for the other person" (53). She also stated that she found Steve very supportive (70).

Nevertheless, as Justine welcomed increased communication with Steve, it was counterbalanced by demands from Steve which Justine found difficult to accept. Steve's full disclosure and the greater communication highlighted Steve's desire for homosexual sex. Justine found this extremely difficult to accommodate. Justine was greatly troubled by this for a variety of reasons. She had difficulty accepting and understanding her husband's need for homosexual sex (14, 16, 37, 46,). She explained, "I didn't understand and appreciate why he would have a need for the relationship with another man. If he wanted intimacy and we had intimacy, why would he need intimacy with another person? (15). In addition, she was angered by the prospect of a disparity between them which would allow outside sexual relations for Steve when she believed they both should remain monogamous (17). She was hurt by the implication that due to her sexual inadequacy she must permit Steve to find satisfaction outside the relationship (19). And finally, she questioned his priorities. She wondered whether a significant difference between sex with

men and sex with women existed. Instead she felt that the role of love versus desire in a sexual relationship was most important (15).

Justine felt threatened and unwilling to accept a homosexual affair on Steve's part but felt bound to allow it since she could not meet his homosexual needs (18, 19, 21). It felt as though her needs were in direct opposition to his needs (21), but she felt bound to accommodate his homosexual demands. She remarked, "I should be able to allow this to happen. I do want him to be fulfilled in himself so that our marriage can be fulfilled" (19). In an attempt to satisfy this difficulty, she and Steve established a contract which emphasized a continued marital commitment and which limited Steve's homosexual contacts (22). Despite this decision, Justine experienced misgivings about the contract, for though she could limit Steve's homosexual contact she felt powerless to control the marital relationship and continued to perceive a threat though it was lessened (26, 27, 28). She commented that the contract was "helpful because I felt less threatened. Not really in control, just that there was -- it was less threatening (27). Yet, the degree of Justine's fear over Steve's homosexual activity and the magnitude of the threat she perceived to herself and the relationship was highlighted through her depression which at the time of the interview had prevented implementation of the contract. Justine aptly described the unavoidable threat Steve's potential homosexual behaviour had for her this way, "It's like being able to close a dragon in a closet -- or behind a door -- you know you have to go through the door at some point in time. But at least you can hold it in abeyance for a little while" (23).

Through the retelling of her experience, Justine identified ways in which she found sharing with others both important and difficult. First, there were several ways in which others were supportive of both Justine and Steve, and she found this vitally important. As a couple, they began to visit a psychiatrist and Justine found this helpful both individually and as a couple (8, 56, 65,). An additional supportive experience for Justine was a support group for wives of gay men where she felt less isolated by her experience with Steve (59, 63, 64). She stated that, "I have found that the people there are very warm and accepting. Accepting of you as you are as opposed to being judgmental of who you are and who you are with and what the circumstance is" (63). In this group, she was able to relax in the safety of receptive listeners. Though many of the other women had chosen to divorce, an outcome Justine rejects, she was able to learn from them (60, 61). Finally, on disclosure to their children, all of Justine's sons have been accepting of the situation (25, 26).

In contrast, Justine found some other forms of sharing more difficult, at times awkward and at other times painful. For Justine, sharing her pain required a personal strength that she sometimes felt she was lacking. For, though she is close with her sister, Justine had not shared with her because Justine found it difficult to broach her difficulty with her sister (57, 66, 68). In addition, she chose not to share with long-term friends because, on outward appearance, nothing has changed for she and Steve (58). In addition, an experience sharing with Steve's brother, although initially greeted with acceptance, resulted in prejudicial comments that hurt (57). She described the experience this way, "His brother is biased and prejudiced and cuts us both with little comments that are rather

hurtful” (57). Finally, on a larger scale, Justine questioned the need for society at large to know the nature of their relationship, though it may be different from mainstream culture (30).

During our interview, Justine identified ways in which she felt she had begun to grow through this experience and through the support of others. She found that through others acceptance and support she was able to begin to accept and explore herself (34). She had begun to identify her strength in her ability to cope in this difficult situation (69). Finally, she had identified personal work she wanted to do in addressing her anger (24).

Justine also identified a growth in her own knowledge of homosexuality. When she had been younger, her impression of homosexuality had been negative and heavily influenced by homophobia (38). Justine found that contact with the homosexual community had lead her to greater acceptance of homosexuality (39, 41, 43). Because Justine saw her own past knowledge of homosexuality as limited, she found it important to provide her own children with a broader understanding of homosexuality (42).

Finally, Justine’s experience seemed to be set in a broader social atmosphere that is both ignorant of and negative with respect to homosexuality (73). She stated, “We haven’t shared with a lot of people. . . . I do know that the stigma, there’s a big stigma and a big prejudice against homosexuals. And a lot of it is misunderstanding” (71). This negative perspective has touched Justine through the negative bias her parents held against homosexuality (44) and the lack of empathy that Steve’s brother displayed (74). Yet, Justine maintained that, despite her personal struggles with Steve’s homosexuality, the

social prejudice which she has experienced toward homosexuals is contrary to her own personal experience with homosexual individuals (40).

Overall Synthesis of Shared Experience

The following section concludes the analytic process. Here a consolidation of the data is presented as a synthesis of all five protocols. This process is initiated by the researcher. The goal is for the researcher to immerse herself in the experience of her participants and to provide an intuitive reflection on the phenomenon which integrates each individual's experience. The synthesis reflects the integration of the essential structures which were revealed through the unique experiences of each of the five co-researchers. Here, the focus shifts from the idiosyncratic aspects of each co-researcher's experience to the essential structural features of the phenomenon.

This analysis takes two forms. The first format is in tabular form, while the second format is presented in a narrative form. The tabular form of the across person synthesis encompasses the major and corresponding minor themes which were identified across experiences. These major themes result from a final clustering of themes from the individual thematic analysis in Tables 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 (see Appendix F). Deriving the major themes provided an opportunity to re-cycle through the data to reflect other minor themes that were present in each of the interviews.

The second format is presented in narrative form and provides a description of each of the major themes which emerged from the data. This across person narrative description encompasses the major elements found in each of the protocols.

A Musical Analogy for the Experience

There are many ways that the themes could be presented which would provide alternate perspectives on the phenomenon. I have chosen to present the themes in a

loose chronological sequence. This was done for two reasons. First, the constraints of written language require that material be presented in some order, no matter how arbitrarily that order is imposed. Second, the major themes which emerged appeared to follow a fairly consistent timeline across the women's experience. Yet, it is important to recognize that while these sequential patterns emerged as the data was analyzed, this was not necessarily the way in which the women encountered the experience.

An analogy of a musical score or symphony seems to reflect in more depth and with greater accuracy the nature of the experience and the intricate and complicated relationships between the major themes in this study. Consider a musical score with nine voices, each of which represents a major theme revealed in this study. In this analogy, each of the nine voices is each necessary to perform the work fully. Without any one voice, the musical experience would be lacking a necessary dimension. It would not be clearly understood. I believe that this is just the case with the nine themes revealed in this study. Without any one of these themes, the full depth of the experience could not be fully understood.

The musical analogy is also appropriate in others ways. Musical work is certainly temporally bound but it is not necessarily goal directed. The end of a musical piece is often not clearly anticipated by the listener. Instead, it is the process and the emotional experience which the music conjures in the listener that is important. This bears a striking resemblance to the experience which participants in this study described. As they entered and traveled through this experience, the end was not clear. It was the process and the issues which they experienced that made the experience

unique. For this was not a step-by-step recipe to emotional recovery, but a process replete with swells in intensity, quiet whisperings, tensions, resolutions, and visits of the unexpected.

Just as in a symphony, different voices take prominence only to later fade into harmony. So too did the themes of the women's experience. No theme ever disappeared and no theme was the solo voice of the experience. Just as themes recur in a symphony, altered and varied by the circumstance of the other voices, so were the themes of the women's experience. When one theme found prominence in a participant's life, the other themes provided the context and harmony for her immediate experience. Later, other themes would prevail. Yet, each time a theme recurred, it was potentially altered by the mediating experience of the other themes. As a result, when a theme resurfaced, though it remained familiar to a woman, it also contained new elements for contemplation.

Thinking of the following nine themes as voices in a symphony may allow the reader an illuminated glimpse at the depth of the experience though it is restricted by the linear format of written language.

Table 11

Second Order Clusters:
Major Themes Abstracted From Individual Thematic Analyses

Major Themes	Individual Themes
1. Impact of conservative family background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Conservative family of origin and religious background -Family and social prejudice against homosexuality
2. Disclosure as a process of understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Partner appeared as good mate and father -Initial meaninglessness of partner's disclosure -Disbelief/confusion -Ignorance about homosexuality -Hints of partner sexual orientation in retrospect -Growing awareness of meaning of disclosure -Inability to escape partner's homosexuality physically or emotionally -Alien in a gay culture
3. Impact of disclosure on relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Disclosure enhances communication and intimacy -Desire to help partner -Disclosure limits relationship communication

4. **Loss of relationship foundation as struggle for identity**
- Fear of separation
 - Anger
 - Abandonment
 - Rejection
 - Shaken trust and deception
 - Loss
 - Alien in gay culture
 - Self blame
 - Powerlessness
 - Self-doubt
 - Devalued womanhood/sexuality
 - Unaddressed needs/Relationship imbalance
 - Depression
 - Self alienation
 - Fear of the future
5. **Coping Mechanisms**
- Importance of supportive individuals:
Professionals,
Friends (old and new)
Family (immediate and in-laws)
Support group
 - Knowledge of self from relationship with others
 - Sharing as validation of experience
 - Activities and physical responses
 - Denial
 - New structures:
Renegotiate marriage contract
Nanny
6. **Homophobia and difficulty with support network**
- Caution selecting individuals to share story with
 - Limited support network
 - Fear of rejection
 - Fear of loss of employment
 - Misunderstood
 - Anger at lack of understanding
 - Negative reactions of family members and friends
 - Influence of negative attitudes

7. **Personal growth through self valuing**
 - Awakening self awareness through contact with emotions and needs
 - Expression of anger
 - Healing through acceptance of loss
 - Evidence of personal competence
 - Growing independence
 - Satisfaction with being single
 - Self-prizing-acknowledge self as important
 - Friendships

8. **Concern over children's adjustment**
 - Concern over adjustment to divorce
 - Concern over adjustment to father's homosexuality and behaviour
 - Concern over children's psycho-sexual development
 - Concern about reactions of others

9. **Growth in understanding and acceptance of homosexuality**
 - Initial ignorance about homosexuality
 - Study of homosexuality
 - Increased knowledge about homosexuality
 - Acceptance of homosexuality
 - Defend homosexuality publicly
 - Growth in knowledge as meaning of the experience
 - Need for tolerance in society

Final Analysis - Across Person Synthesis

1. Conservative family background.

I mean his family was a big factor. It would be the end of the world if he was gay to his family.

- Nicole

All of the participants in this study made reference to a conservative family background. Three of the women (Sandy, Winny, Nicole) were from strong Christian backgrounds which ascribed to traditional values. In each of these cases, the legitimacy of a homosexual orientation was denied by religious proscription. This was reflected in a number of ways which differed slightly for each woman. Winny's initial response to John's disclosure was a religious response calling for healing through prayer. Winny described her approach saying, "I come from a strong fundamentalist background, and for me conforming to family values and church values were a priority. So again this was kind of a value thing and it was something we believed in, so I hung on to that for years . . ." Her husband, a preacher, had assured her saying "We'll pray about this and . . . be healed from this".

Sandy held strong beliefs in a two parent family and had strong religious convictions against divorce. Nicole's conservative church and family values provided the belief that homosexuality was wrong and would never be accepted by their families. She reflected on her religious background and her attitudes about homosexuality at the time of Mark's disclosure and commented, "We both grew up in a strict conservative church where [homosexuality] is totally a sin and I hadn't been exposed to it at all -- except that it's a sin and it's freaky." As a result, Nicole

attempted to help Mark resolve his sexual orientation crisis and maintain outward impressions of a stable, traditional relationship. Further evidence of the impact of traditional religious values were found in Nicole's refusal to share her experience with her parents, as she expected a negative reaction.

Both of the remaining participants (Anne, Justine) denied strong religious convictions against homosexuality in their family background. Yet, the discomfort and homophobic reactions of parents and other family members once again provided a family historical backdrop for each woman's experience. Justine described her parents as holding negative attitudes about homosexuality which influenced her initial opinions about homosexuality. She said, "It was a bias our parents had and we grew up with . . . I was quite naive about the whole thing. And [I thought] that there were gays who lived together. There was a cult". In addition, Justine described an instance in which Steve's brother made negative remarks about Steve's homosexual orientation. Finally, in Anne's case, angry reactions by both of her parents following Gary's disclosure highlighted their lack of acceptance. In addition, ongoing aversion by her mother continued to reveal her discomfort and non-acceptance of Gary's homosexuality.

For all participants, their partners' disclosure appears to have been met with an almost instantaneous conviction that homosexuality was not acceptable, at least in terms of their family and religious background. I believe that this, in part, set the stage for much of their subsequent experience by lengthening the time each needed to understand the meaning contained in their partners' disclosure and increasing each

woman's fears in sharing her story. For example, understanding the meaning of their partners' disclosure was confounded by family beliefs that homosexuality was wrong and could be corrected. Knowing that homosexuality was unacceptable within family and religious convictions, provided them with misgivings and fears about sharing their "unacceptable" story.

2. Disclosure as a process of understanding.

Homosexuality from my aspect was probably one of those things that I felt would go away. It's sort of like if you have a headache . . . I was totally unprepared for the total impact of the whole situation.

- Justine

All participants spoke of feeling confused or shocked by their partners' disclosure. None had anticipated a homosexual disclosure by their partner and the relationships had appeared to be solid prior to disclosure. In fact, confusion and disbelief seemed to be by-products of being caught off guard by their partners' disclosure because each woman had the sense that the relationship was stable. Each felt satisfied within the relationship. Initial disclosure often made no impact or resulted in confusion because the women felt satisfied that their relationships were successful. Any passing events or comments, later regarded as clues to their partners' orientation struggle, were treated casually. In Anne's case, Gary academic interest in homosexual issues did not alert her to his sexual orientation struggles. She related, "He went to university and one of the projects he did was on gay issues and gay men . . . And I

don't know if that brought it up but it didn't really go anywhere then and I didn't really think much of it because it was a university project."

Full disclosure seemed to be in direct opposition to what they were experiencing. It was confusing because the women saw their relationships as stable and satisfying. Many of the women knew their partners to be good husbands and fathers. Many also described sexual relationships with their partners as active and satisfying prior to disclosure. For several of the women (Winny, Nicole, Justine), long term negative consequences of their partners' initial disclosures seemed unlikely, since each perceived the relationship as fulfilling. Winny described herself as

perhaps a bit confused . . . I knew in my head that there was stuff going on. I knew it was pretty heavy stuff and it was a little upsetting, and again behind it all was that belief that this will do it. Whatever it is, it's going to work and then no more problems. We were certainly sexually involved. We had our intimacy and everything was marvelous for me.

The initial reaction of disbelief and confusion lasted varying lengths of time. Disbelief seemed to be shattered more quickly for Sandy and Anne than the other participants since their partners more quickly decided to leave the relationship to pursue homosexual interests. For these women, their partners' increased interest in homosexual contact seemed to bring greater focus on the consequences of their partners' disclosure.

All of the women, with the exception of Anne, spoke of their limited knowledge about homosexuality at the outset of their experience. Winny's simple response to

John's disclosure, "Oh, I don't know what that is", demonstrates a profound ignorance of homosexuality and consequently its implications for the relationship. Justine likened Steve's disclosure to a passing physical ailment saying, "It just didn't mean anything at the time. It was just sort of like I've got a headache . . . It meant the same type of thing."

I believe that this lack of knowledge about homosexuality made determining the impact and meaning of their partners' disclosure difficult. It was not until they began to experience the impact of their partners' disclosure that they were able to determine its meaning for themselves and the relationship. For example, as time progressed, each woman described a process of becoming more knowledgeable about her partner's homosexuality and ultimately its impact on their relationship. Each woman described instances that, in retrospect, they perceived as hints about their partner's sexual orientation. It seems that these few hints had meant little to the women in the context of the successful relationships each had thought they enjoyed. With greater awareness of their partner's homosexual attractions, came a greater understanding of the hints that had preceded full disclosure.

With the exception of Sandy, all of the participants voiced an initial desire to incorporate their partners' homosexual orientation into the couple's existing relationship. Anne tried to negotiate a continuing relationship with Gary saying, "Well, why can't we just stay together and see how it goes?"

With time the women demonstrated a growing awareness and understanding of their partners' disclosures. Each had begun to accept the reality of their partner's

homosexual orientation and started making attempts to accommodate their partner's needs. These attempts included acting as an emotional resource for their partners (Nicole, Justine, Winny), participating in gay subculture (Winny), and altering the marriage contract to allow for outside homosexual sexual contact (Justine, Winny).

Ultimately, each woman appeared to be bombarded by the knowledge of her partner's homosexual orientation. Where each had once been unaware of the subtle hints provided by their partners, they were now immersed in a world of concern about their partner's homosexuality. Sandy described being immersed in thoughts about homosexuality. She said,

I noticed the gay issue was always on my mind at that time . . . I think the biggest thing for me is . . . I can't understand the same sex having a relationship. That's always confused me . . . I don't know if him telling me that he's been out experimenting just totally put me towards that.

I believe that this too set the stage for an identity crisis for the participants. Where the women had once believed that they were the center of their partner's relationship attention, they began to witness their partner's persistent focus on homosexual interests. This provided a major threat to the primacy and fidelity of their relationships.

3. Impact of disclosure on relationship.

After disclosure our relationship just did continue like it had always been, in fact, we were even closer for a while . . . I felt like we had become so close because we really were together in this and so I felt really good about our relationship for a long time.

- Nicole

There it was [disclosure] just like a bomb. Like I had just no idea. Just like a bomb had fallen in the middle of our lives.

- Anne

A first glance the impact of disclosure on each relationship appears to have been variable, almost opposite at times. Nicole, Justine and Winny described their partner's disclosure as providing profound opportunities to connect, understand and support their mates. Disclosure provided an opportunity to share their partner's deep and painful fears, as well as a mutual exploration of their partner's homosexual orientation. Nicole shared how disclosure provided an opportunity to become closer to Mark.

At that time . . . when he was telling me, I felt very close to him because he was [disclosing] and he was asking me to help him. And so I became whatever he needed me to be. . . It just made me feel very close to him because that was so important to him . . . I almost felt closer to him because we shared this. It was like I'm the one person in the world who's ever seen this much of you.

The women shared the confidences and identity crisis that each man was experiencing. In these cases, disclosure provided opportunities for genuine understanding between partners often based on the vulnerabilities that each man revealed to his partner. It appeared that the homosexual partners in each of these cases was experiencing his own sexual orientation crisis and were seeking the support which these women were willing to provide.

On the other hand, disclosure also appeared to drive a wedge between the couples. In all cases except Justine's, evidence of more limited contact and

communication seemed to be the ultimate result of the disclosure and identity crisis. In time, Nicole experienced Mark's emotional withdrawal from her and the relationship,

There definitely was a gradual change in how we were together. And that was painful in different places . . . when he started to feel comfortable with what was happening in his other relationships, he didn't need me to be there accepting him -- to be the one who affirmed him . . . So then I was alone.

While disclosure may have served to initially deepen the connection between several of the women and their partners, it ultimately provided differences between the couples that led to more independent existences. For Anne and Sandy, this was apparent from the start. Disclosure did not appear to deepen their relationship connection. Instead, differences were apparent almost immediately following disclosure. Sandy described her husband's disclosure as negative experience which drove a wedge between them almost immediately. The nature of her partner's disclosure differed from the other men. Terry's disclosure included an admission of extra-marital affairs. She was angry and in crisis as she learned of his infidelity to their relationship. She recalled "losing the trust . . . that's where your beliefs go back into your marriage. You've got to be faithful to your partner." As a result, she witnessed her husband's pain but felt unable to support him remarking, "I can remember hearing him cry downstairs. I didn't know how to comfort him because I was still dealing with my own things."

Anne had wanted to resolve relationship issues but Gary refused to consider the possibility of remaining married. Just as in Justine's case, Anne's husband appeared to

be more intent on acting on his sexual orientation. Where Nicole, Winny and Justine experienced their partners' needs for support through his sexual orientation crisis, neither Sandy nor Anne found themselves in a similar supportive role.

Finally, Justine's clinical depression and unresolved relationship status at the time of her interview suggested that she was still in a crisis phase following Gary's disclosure. It remains to be seen whether the deep connection she experienced as a result of disclosure will remain in the future.

4. Loss of relationship foundation as struggle for identity.

After he left, I felt well, "Who am I?-- as a wife, as a mother, as a homemaker, whatever . . . I kept asking myself, "Well, who am I? Where am I going? Why am I here? What's going on?"

- Winny

Each woman, without exception, described a profound crisis of self as a result of her partner's homosexual disclosure. As each woman's understanding of the impact of disclosure took hold, a struggle for identity began. Their descriptions of loss, feelings of abandonment and rejection were pervasive across experiences. Winny related her growing sense of abandonment by John saying,

[there was] a shift in our relationship because John wanted to get away and be on his own and think through his own thoughts and stuff. And at that point he was gathering more literature and gay magazines, and books; very intimate stuff he was reading. So more and more I felt kind of pushed aside.

The women had felt secure and connected within relationship. None had anticipated a life alone. Her partner's disclosure brought each woman's life-world into jeopardy. All of the women described their knowledge of self as intimately connected to their intimate relationship. For each woman, her way-of-being was in relationship and the relationship was destabilized by disclosure and its threat to the future of the relationship. The destabilizing effects of disclosure were apparent to Nicole immediately following Mark's disclosure for she asked him, "You'd better tell me what this means for me . . . What are you saying about us?" Anne describe her profound experience of loss as if a bomb had destroyed the life she knew.

All participants described feelings of powerlessness. It seemed as if their partners held the keys to maintaining their relationships and their families. They were not in control of the destiny of their relationship. Given their partners' disclosures, the viability of the relationships were in question. Whether their relationships would last ultimately seemed to rest on his decisions. Their dreams of a traditional family were at risk. For the women, self seemed to hinge on their partner's decision on whether to remain committed to the relationship and what form the relationship would take. The connection that had once defined them now destabilized them, leaving them to question who they were without it. Anne's story reflected this experience and she related it this way,

One of the things that was hardest for me at the beginning was that I had no control over what was happening . . . What could I do? I couldn't compete. I

couldn't change what was happening . . . I mean I couldn't become a man, so I mean what can you do?

Justine also felt powerless and felt that she should not impose her needs when they conflicted with Steve's needs. She said, "I felt as though I was totally out of control of the situation. I had no control . . . It was his decision making . . . I felt, 'Why should I interfere if this is what he is needing?'"

The foundation of each woman's self-knowing was rocked. Some women experienced a sense of disorientation as they began to question both their partner and themselves. Anne and Sandy initially identified feelings of mistrust about their partners. They questioned whether the relationship had been a deception from the beginning. Anne became suspicious about Gary's original reasons for marrying . Others (Justine, Winny, Nicole, Sandy) blamed themselves for their husband's homosexual interests and the dramatic changes in their relationships. Sandy questioned herself and her abilities wondering, "Was it me? Was it something that I could have prevented it I'd done it [another] way?" She and others felt that their loss may have been self induced because they had failed to satisfy their partners and the needs of the relationship. All participants questioned their value as women, sexual partners, and mates as they experienced the rejection of their partners who now appeared to favour homosexual fantasy and contact over contact with their female partners. They agonized over what it must mean about them to have their male partner reveal his homosexuality after the relationship was established. Winny said, "If I had been a better sex partner -- If I had been more understanding, perhaps this might not have occurred." Nicole described

how her body image suffered because of Mark's rejection of her stating, "There must be something unattractive about me -- something that makes [him] so uncomfortable. It affected my whole body image and how I felt about my body when I was with him -- It was just repulsive almost."

In an important way, each woman's identity was defined by this most significant relationship. The participants described feeling unsure of themselves. Aside from Sandy, each questioned her own competence and ability to survive. These participants lacked confidence without the support to which they were accustomed. Each questioned her ability to cope alone. For each, a deep fear of the future took hold. Justine agonized wondering, "I don't know if I will have the inner resources to come through this painful period . . . I get the fear that my whole world is going to explode and become disastrous." In addition, some expressed concern about their ability to parent alone and to cope financially (Sandy, Anne).

As each gay partner began to assert his homosexuality more emphatically, the incompatibility of each partner's needs within the relationship became more clear. The men expressed greater urgency and desire for homosexual relationships, while all the women found this in direct opposition to their needs for fidelity and primacy in the relationship. Several of the women perceived a struggle to maintain a balance within their relationships based on meeting their partners unaddressed homosexual identity while honouring their own needs. Often they became alien to their own pain and needs as they attempted to support their partners who were also in crisis (Winnie, Nicole, Justine). Justine drew an analogy which demonstrates the difficulty she experienced in

balancing her emotional needs within the relationship with Steve's needs outside the relationship.

I still have some difficulty with the aspect of sexuality if he was to have an affair with another male. And he doesn't understand why I would have a difficulty with that. It's sort of a question of his having his cake and eating it too. And I'm not having any cake and I'm not eating anything. I'm not getting anything.

5. Coping mechanisms.

And I said, "I've got to find somebody that I can share with so they know how I'm feeling." And I know that night I broke down and cried in the group. And there was really love and caring there that just really touched me.

- Winny

The participants described a variety of way of coping with a situation that often seemed overwhelming to them. To begin with, all of the participants described disbelief and denial at their partners' initial disclosure. Anne, Sandy and Justine did not consider homosexuality a possibility in their marriages based on their active heterosexual relationships. Sandy thought Terry's homosexual disclosure was impossible and accused him of lying.

In addition, Nicole and Justine expressed deeper levels of denial which served to help them avoid loss issues. For Nicole, denial was evident in at least two ways. First, as their intimate relationship deteriorated, Nicole maintained the public illusion that she and Mark were still together. As a result, I believe that she was not required to make

any public admission that she had experienced a loss. Second, she denied that her relationship was ever more than mere friendship, thereby denying her need to define Mark's disclosure as a loss. She described trying to metaphorically "pound" her intimate relationship desires into aspirations for mere friendship saying,

[I was] continually saying to myself, 'Well, I don't want to make him more than a friend.' That was always going through my head - pound, pound, pound. So, 'How am I feeling?' Well, I'm fine because I've got to the point where it's okay with me. That [disclosure] has got nothing to do with me. That it's nothing to do with friendship -- It's like I was forcing myself to believe that.

Justine also described herself as employing denial to cope with her situation. In her case, she felt overwhelmed by the magnitude of her pain and fear of the unknown. As a result, she deliberately delayed addressing issues as a way of managing her situation. This was clearly evident during our interview when she declined to discuss the nature of her anger as she found this too threatening. She aptly described her employment of denial as, "keeping the dragon in abeyance."

Sharing with others proved to be an important method of coping with fears, insecurities, and loss for each of the women in this study. All sought professional help and found this to be valuable. For Winny, Justine and Anne professional help lasted several months. For each of these participants, therapy helped them to adjust to their altered life circumstances and assisted in their expression of emotions, especially anger. Winny told of an experience when counselling provided a pivotal role in her healing process. She recalled,

I remember one day. I was . . . on the verge of working through stuff and [the therapist] called to her secretary and she said 'Hold anyone that's coming in, Winny needs another hour.' And it was a real break-through for me. Really getting to my anger, my resentment, my pain, bitterness, just so much garbage down there.

Nicole sought professional help on an unrelated matter but found her counsellor's brief comments regarding this issue to be supportive and this ultimately helped her acknowledge the validity of her pain. Sandy found her therapist supportive and began to learn about homosexuality with his help.

Two additional and important sources of support were family and friends. While each woman used caution in selecting individuals with which to share, a limited number of family members or long time friends were found who were supportive and understanding. Sandy and Anne found unexpected support from their parents'-in-law. Sandy expressed the importance of her in-laws warm reaction to her following Terry's disclosure. She said, "I had a chance . . . to go up to where his parents are. And had a really good talk with them. They've always said that I will always be welcome to come anytime. I think that helped quite a bit to be able to talk to them and find out how they felt." In addition, Sandy and Nicole both found the support of a sister was important. Winny found understanding from a grown daughter to be supportive (personal communication). Justine had intentions of sharing with her sister and expected understanding, but had not yet chosen to disclose.

Anne found a number of long time friends supportive. In addition, new friends were also an important resource for Winny, Sandy, Justine and Anne. One important source of new friendships for these four women was a support group for wives of gay men. This proved to be a valuable place to share their stories in safety with a level of understanding which was difficult to find elsewhere. According to Justine, her support group provided, “an opportunity to meet with other people who had similar circumstances. Although none of them are the same . . . It was important to express the feelings and the questioning that you go through and see how other people have managed”. Finally, Winny sought other personal growth groups, while Sandy indicated making new friends and sharing her story had been valuable.

For several of the women, physical actions reflected an additional form of coping. Winny, Justine, Nicole, and Anne described physically acting out their anger, through yelling, loud wailing or throwing objects. Sandy described taking concrete steps to discard property that she associated with the relationship. Anne highlighted her need to be socially active, engaging in activities with others, although not necessarily sharing her story. Finally for Sandy and Anne, the needs of their young children gave them reasons to cope and remain healthy. Anne remarked,

I didn’t really get run down or anything like that. I felt like I could have . . . I think because of the children you really had to sort of keep some kind of control over yourself . . . I think that probably [helped] me cope with, or deal with things instead of letting them drag on.”

6. Homophobia and difficulty with support network.

I think a lot of friends just totally didn't understand homosexuality. Sure they knew it existed but they just couldn't believe it or didn't want to believe it and it didn't help that they weren't in that situation . . . They were coming out with their views about what they thought of it -- It was like negative opinions.

- Sandy

For all of the women, homophobic remarks seemed to deny the need for acceptance of both the women and their partners. Evidence of homophobia or difficulty in identifying safe individuals for support was found in all five protocols. Several of the women (Winny, Anne, Sandy and Justine) indicated concern about speaking openly because they experienced fears of others' homophobic reactions. Justine remarked on her awareness of negative attitudes toward homosexuality saying, "We haven't shared with a lot of people . . . I do know that there's a big stigma and a big prejudice against homosexuals. And a lot of it is misunderstanding of homosexuals." In addition, Nicole rejected the notion of sharing with her parents for fear of their negative reaction to her story. She commented,

I didn't tell them. I didn't want to go through this. I don't think they'd accept it. Some of it would be just too much for them . . . They'd probably think that it's wrong. It's a sin. They wouldn't accept him in the same way afterwards. It seemed that it was just easier not to.

I believed that each woman's experience and perceptions of homophobia were further evidenced by the limited support network which each maintained and by the importance that support groups held for many of them. Anne and Sandy spoke of "testing" friends to determine the safety of sharing with individuals. Sandy described

the process of testing friends and learning not to share her story this way, "I get a feel for it by mentioning homosexuality. And I get their reaction and 'Whoa -- I can't tell them anything!'" For Sandy and Anne, homophobic jokes or remarks became clues about friends eligibility to share their story. Sandy found that the homophobic attitudes of friends began to negatively colour her own perception of Terry and homosexuality. In addition, Sandy experienced a lack of help from her church clergyman who said, "There's got to be help somewhere". But she found that "he said he'd make a few calls and he'd try to get back to me. But, I never heard from him. So obviously he had no idea." Anne experienced a direct fear of homophobic reprisal. She spoke of her fear that her husband would be "discovered" and lose his job -- an outcome that would have jeopardized the well-being of the whole family. Ultimately, Winny's conviction of the need for a safe place to share painful stories found root in the support group which she founded.

Most of the women related experiences of rejection, misunderstanding or homophobia from certain family members and friends. Sandy and Anne experienced their parents' discomfort and rejection as each refused to maintain close contact or fully accept the family's new situation. Justine's brother-in-law had hurt the couple with cutting remarks about homosexuality and Mark's father had hurt Nicole by blaming her for Mark's homosexuality. Mark's father had said to her, "Well, if you were a different woman, it would be different!"

7. Personal growth through self valuing

Knowing that I'm acceptable. Starting to find out that I can be all one even when I might feel that I'm alone. I can be all or part of myself and I can set some limits based on what my expectations are. Not having to be the strongest person in the world. Knowing that I can be weak and . . . that I don't have to necessarily be right. That there isn't necessarily a right or a wrong but it's a question of acceptance.

- Justine

Without exception, the resolution of identity issues for each woman focussed on an increased self-reliance and renewed independence. With eventual acceptance of her loss, each woman began to take more individual initiatives, often despite her fears. I believe that their initial risks to act independently often gave the participants the courage and evidence to prove that they could handle life alone. Winny told of learning to take responsibility for herself and facing her fears. She described an incident where a workshop leader began "confronting me about taking responsibility for myself. And there was a need for that because I had leaned on John and depended on John to always be there. And that's just not life." Sandy, on the other hand, chose independence almost from the start. She found that she needed time alone to address the rapidly changing structure of her life. She stated clearly that she needed space and solitude following Terry's disclosure.

For three of the women, Anne, Sandy and Nicole, increased independence was evidenced by the subsequent dissolution of their intimate heterogeneous relationships. In Winny's case, though she remained married to John, she became more involved in her own interests, clubs and personal growth groups, while John pursued his own homosexual activities. In addition, the couple were no longer sexually intimate. Finally,

months after our interview, Justine indicated that she now felt healthier and was engaged in more independent activities, while she and Steve intended to remain together for the time being.

Several of the women (Winny, Sandy and Anne) described their new independence as a fulfilling growth experience which they would have never experienced without their partners' disclosure. The independence they currently enjoyed seemed almost intoxicating. For Sandy, independence felt positive almost from the beginning. "Being alone was actually a good experience . . . It was an adjustment I think for me, but I didn't mind it so much. It was a good adjustment. I would say it felt free." Anne described a similar sentiment saying, "I quite enjoyed seeing how things went when I was on my own, because I'd never really been on my own."

All of the women expressed being more connected to their own feelings and needs than they previously had been. Learning to express anger had been an important and, at times, frightening step in learning to reconnect with themselves. Justine found her anger frightening but also found that she was learning to address it. She commented,

The expression of anger was there, but I didn't necessarily express it the correct way. I internalized it -- so that I was at fault. For a while, I threw dishes and plates. But that wasn't acceptable . . . but I'm learning or trying to different ways of handling the anger so that I'm realizing it is acceptable to be angry and it is good to feel.

Each woman seemed to value her greater autonomy. Those that were single (Anne and Sandy) indicated mild interest in finding a new partner, though both indicated that any new relationship must clearly satisfy their own needs. Nicole's experience in a new relationship provided an opportunity to heal her damaged body image and sense of womanhood.

8. Concern over children's adjustment.

My younger one is more impulsive and more open and she has learned the hard way that you don't tell everybody that your father is gay and there's another man that lives at his house. I mean it just doesn't work. And she's learned that the hard way. And it hurts me to see . . . a friend not being able to play with her because of that.

- Anne

Anne, Sandy and Justine had younger children who were still developing. In each case these women expressed a concern over the adjustment of the children to their father's homosexual disclosure or behaviour. These concerns were most notable for Sandy and Anne who expressed concern over the loss of a two parent home for their children and the children's adjustment to their father's lover. Anne voiced her concerns about the children's adjustment to separation this way,

I just hope . . . that the path we're taking will make our kids better people than if we take another path. Sometimes I have doubts about whether this is the very best way for them to be going. But then as I say I have to believe that, it's trial and error and we do what we feel is best.

Sandy expressed concern over the questions her adolescent sons may have about their father's sexual orientation and its impact on the boys' psycho-sexual

development. She remarked that her oldest son's adjustment to his father's homosexuality was a source of worry for her saying, "That's my biggest concern because the oldest one is struggling with his own sexuality." Justine expressed limited concern focussed on her children's adjustment to Steve's potential homosexual sexual contacts. Finally, Anne and Sandy experienced concern about homophobic reactions encountered by their children. Each expressed a need for tolerance. To this end, each of the mothers have tried to be understanding and accepting role models in an attempt to instill tolerance in their own children.

Winnie denied any real concerns over her children's adjustment (personal communication). While initial disclosure had occurred early in their family life, significant changes in the relationship did not occur until well after their children had left home and Winnie saw little impact of disclosure on her grown children.

9. Growth in understanding and acceptance of homosexuality.

Homophobia . . . There was a huge dramatic shift as soon as there was somebody I knew. The man I was very close to was homosexual and there wasn't any question about accepting that.

- Nicole

Though all of the participants had experienced homophobic intolerance within their own families of origin, their husband's disclosure and their subsequent experiences had altered their own understanding and beliefs about homosexuality. Four of the women (Sandy, Winnie, Justine, Nicole) expressed an initial ignorance of homosexuality. At the time of their partner's disclosure they had known little about

homosexuality. Anne commented on her lack of knowledge and her need to learn about homosexuality. She said, "I know for a long time I didn't understand. I read . . . a lot of books about the gay issue just to try and understand it, because I didn't know anything about it."

Through their subsequent exposure to homosexuality, every participant without exception, experienced a growth in her knowledge and understanding of the topic. Where Anne had once kept silent in the face of homophobic slurs, she stated that she began to publicly defend homosexual rights. Nicole indicated that by putting a face to homosexuality, namely that of someone she loved, acceptance was unquestionable. Each of the women grew in acceptance of the legitimacy of homosexuality. Sandy remarked on her changed attitude this way, "It makes me think when I hear people talk about homosexuality and I know my ears perk up. Homosexuality, yeah. I mean even for me it was so hard to say that word at the time." Remarkably, all of the participants indicated an understanding of their partner's needs to express a homosexual orientation despite the personal cost that it had been to themselves.

Growth in their knowledge about homosexuality had been a meaningful aspect of each woman's experience. Every protocol revealed a conviction to promote understanding and tolerance within society. Winny expressed this conviction as the founder of a support group. Anne, Justine and Sandy expressed this desire through the more open attitudes which they tried to teach their children. Justine commented on how this experience has influenced the way in which she and Steve have chosen to raise their children this way,

Both [Steve and I] had a very limiting adolescence. We felt that it was important that our children have a broader understanding of things so they have been given information. We tried not to give opinions . . . so that they can make decisions for themselves.

In addition, all participants expressed the hope that this research would shed light on their experience and the experience of their loved ones. Their hopes were for a more tolerant society where understanding, acceptance and support of homosexual issues were more readily available. Anne concluded her interview with the following remark on society and the need for more tolerance,

This [research] would be helpful I think because a lot of counsellors --well millions of people just dismiss the issue as, "What's the big deal? We should shoot them in the street." They don't know how to talk about it or they don't know how to deal with it. Yeah, it would be helpful.

CHAPTER V

Reflection

Introduction

A reflection on the results of this investigation is contained in this chapter. This section provides important information relevant to our understanding of the phenomenon in a broader context. It is hoped that knowledge of this context will provide valuable information for psychotherapists. First, I will discuss the results of this study in the context of existing research. Second, I will discuss the phenomenon as a crisis of self, in the context of women's definition of self-in-relation and the importance of societal expectations. Important aspects that this phenomenon has in common with studies of women and depression will also be addressed. Third, the context of the therapeutic situation in relation to this phenomenon will be discussed. Finally, I will suggest areas for future research.

Results in the Context of Past Literature

This study extends our understanding of heterogeneous relationships beyond previous research in two important ways. First, other studies in this area most often employed an *a priori* natural science methodology, often based on psychological measurement. In studies where a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies were employed, evidence of *a priori* notions remain and often the reader is left unclear about the exact procedures employed. The only other strictly qualitative study conducted in this area (Buxton, 1991) was presented as a self-help book for spouses experiencing a homosexual disclosure. Because of the self-help

format, the actual results of that study were obscured because they were mixed with psychological advice from the author. A succinct delineation of the phenomenon which clearly bracketed the author's experience and applied theoretical underpinnings was not found. This resulted in its decreased viability as a research document. With these limitations in mind, this current study was conducted with the intention to apply a clear qualitative methodology. In addition, careful effort was made to bracket *a priori* assumptions including the researcher's foreknowledge of the phenomenon. It was hoped that this would allow a comparison of the results of this study with the results of other research which employed differing methodological approaches.

This current study extends our knowledge of the phenomenon in a second important way. Aside from Buxton's work (1991), research into intimate relationships regardless of marital status was not found. This present study began an examination of elements common to intimate heterogeneous relationships despite marital status. Again, it was hoped that this would expand our knowledge of the phenomenon beyond the rather arbitrary distinction of marital status.

In many ways, the results of this study substantiate the results of other natural science studies which focussed on women who learn that their husband is gay. First, like participants in other studies (Bozett, 1982; Coleman, 1985; Gochros, 1989; Wolf, 1985), participants in the current study were either unaware of their partners' sexual orientation struggles before the inception of their relationship, or had only limited awareness of this and little meaning attached to this knowledge. Second, like the participants in Gochros' (1985) study, most women in this study commented on their

lack of knowledge about homosexuality prior to disclosure and reflected either a negative or neutral attitude toward homosexuality. Third, as with previous studies of heterogenous couples, the educational level for the women in this study was high with four of the five women having completed or nearly completed a university undergraduate degree. Fourth, each of the women described themselves as the product of a traditional upbringing, and each placed a high priority on traditional family structure. This is similar to Gochros' (1989) results which indicated that most participants in that study placed a high value on traditional family values.

Disclosure

Similar to the findings of Gochros (1985), each woman in the current investigation experienced her partner's disclosure as a process rather than a discrete event. Some occurred over a very lengthy time period, in Winny's case several decades. Other disclosure processes were shorter and occurred over a matter of years or even months, in Sandy's case beginning with her partner's hypothetical questions regarding divorce.

In terms of positive versus negative disclosures, as defined by Gochros (1985), some differences were found among the women in this study. Four of the five women could be described as experiencing more positive disclosures, while one (Sandy) experienced a more negative disclosure. Other than Sandy, disclosure for the women was voluntarily given. None of the men were involved in homosexual sexual activity at the time of the disclosure. Each male partner displayed a level of concern for his partner, a desire for honesty in the relationship and many indicated a deep love for

their female partner. For each of these women, disclosure occurred within a good relationship and each woman had access to some professional and social support. To varying degrees, each of these women demonstrated a willingness to try to understand and help their partner and to adjust the relationship to this new information.

On the other hand, Sandy's story was somewhat different. She and Terry had experienced a breakdown in their communication over time and Sandy missed what the relationship had once been. Terry had voluntarily given his disclosure, but during disclosure she learned that he had been sexually active with men. As a result, she found that she was at risk for AIDS and required testing. In addition, the high value which she placed on traditional family values had been betrayed by Terry's infidelity. Consequently, though Sandy was able to secure professional and social support systems, she was much less focussed on Terry's well-being. This reaction is consistent with Gochros' (1989) finding that women who experience negative disclosure are much less likely to attempt to help their gay partner.

Isolation and Stigma

The results of this study support earlier findings (Buxton, 1991; Gochros, 1989) which reported the strong influence of stigma and isolation on women's experience. Four of the nine major themes presented in this study were influenced by the women's perception of homophobia. These included: (1) conservative family background, (2) homophobia and difficulty with support network, (3) concern over children's adjustment, and (4) growth in understanding and acceptance of homosexuality. All of these major themes reflected the participants' acute awareness

that their experience occurred within a social milieu which often held a negative and damaging perception of homosexuality. By highlighting these four themes it is possible to see the pervasive impact which the social context has on women's experience of this phenomenon. Strommen (1989) commented, "it is well known that both official religious teaching and the social traditions that stem from them negatively sanction homosexual behaviour . . ." (p. 41).

Further, the present findings may serve to clarify Fredlund's (1989) findings which suggested that while the participants of her study experienced isolation, none reported directly experiencing stigma. As suggested by Fredlund, a less direct method of addressing stigma appears to have illuminated these findings. Fredlund had directly asked her participants if they had ever experienced stigma during their experience. My study did not contain any such direct questions, but rather allowed the women to reveal aspects of the experience which were salient to the women in their own words. Using more non-directive methods, the women in my study commented on their unique experience in social context. What the women in this current study revealed was a clear perception of stigma and often discrimination against both homosexuality and themselves. These women's perceptions appear consistent with public opinion which indicated a sharp decline in public support for the legalization of homosexuality in the United States (Gallup, 1987). In addition, a more recent survey continued to indicate that the majority of Americans consider homosexuality unacceptable (57%) (Gallup, 1993).

Branton (1987) made a distinction between anticipated, but not necessarily experienced discrimination in his study of married homosexuals. This may be an unnecessary distinction considering the experience as reflected in the descriptions of the women in this study. I believe that for the women in this study the perception of stigma, as based on their understanding of social attitudes, was powerful enough to prevent them from risking situations which would elicit actual experiences of discrimination. In the cases where discrimination did occur, these instances likely only served to reinforce the women's conviction to share their story most cautiously. It seems that their experiences with discrimination and prejudice, as well as their perceptions of stigma resulted in limited willingness to share their experience for fear of revealing their vulnerabilities to an unsympathetic audience.

Damage to Sexual Identity

In accord with Buxton (1991), Fredlund (1989), and Gochros (1985), the participants in the current study spoke of a number of ways in which their sexual identity became damaged through the sexual rejection of their partners. Several of the women blamed themselves for their partner's homosexual orientation and wondered about their own sexual adequacy. Some of the women also wondered whether they would be desirable to other potential partners and experienced a damaged body image.

Loss, Identity Crisis, and Recovery

The women in this study spoke often of the loss of self that occurred with the loss of their relationship. This is consistent with the findings of other research (Buxton, 1991; Fredlund, 1989; Gochros, 1985). Yet, the magnitude of the loss described by

the women in this study appears to be almost greater than that described by other researchers. The women in the present study described a loss that spoke to the core of their being and resulted in a crisis of self. It seemed that not only had they lost their partners and their relationships following disclosure, but they also experienced a disconnection or loss of self without the relationship foundation which they knew. Schneider and Schneider (1990) reflected a similar situation and described female participants as experiencing low self-esteem and feeling emotionally cut-off from themselves.

Holmgren (1987) conducted a qualitative investigation of women and depression and many of the resulting themes in that study were reflected in the loss and identity issues of the women in this current study. Descriptions of self-blame, feeling overwhelmed, dependency, isolation and helplessness were common to both studies. Clearly, several of the women in this current study experienced feelings of depression as the full impact of their partners' disclosure became known to them. Auerback and Moser (1987) reported on the role of seven therapy groups in supporting wives of gay men. They found that, "the most common presentation in the early group sessions was depression and a rather flattened affect or tearfulness" (p. 322). Gochros (1989) found that nearly all wives in her study experienced moderate to serious depression and many reported suicidal ideation related to their experience of rejection and loss. This substantiates the results of this study which indicate experiences of depression in response to disclosure.

Fredlund's (1989) model of five stages in wives' response to their husband's homosexual disclosure appears to fit with the experience of the women in this current study, though three main differences were noted. First, the discrete steps that the imposition of a stage model implies are, no doubt, somewhat arbitrary. For example, the concept of disclosure as a process loses its potency as it is applied to a discrete point on Fredlund's conceptual model. Second, unlike Fredlund's findings, the concept of connectors as links to participants' emotional past did not appear as a consistently significant occurrence in the current research. Rather, a gradual process from disclosure to crisis ultimately gave way to personal growth and acceptance. This shift appeared to be evolutionary so that as one focus began to wane a new focus began to crescendo and gain focus in a woman's life. At times, the process seemed almost circular or fluid as women began to realize the impact of various aspects of disclosure on their life. Finally, some of the themes which appear at various stages of Fredlund's model did not appear consistently in the current study. For example, (a) only one participant in the current study attempted to incorporate a gay lover into the marital relationship, (b) none of the participants spoke directly of their theory of homosexuality, and (c) fear of new relationships did not emerge as a defining feature of the final stage of adjustment.

Some differences in coping strategies were noted between the findings of Hays and Samuels (1989) and the present study. Most notably, Hays and Samuels reported that half of the women (10) in their sample had extramarital heterosexual affairs following disclosure. This was reported to act as a method of coping with the

women's unmet sexual needs. These results run contrary to the experience described by the women in the present study. While some of the participants in this study allowed their male partners to have homosexual sexual relationships, all participants reported a personal commitment to sexual fidelity. None of the women in this current investigation revealed extramarital heterosexual relationships to be a method of coping with their lack of sexual satisfaction within the heterogeneous relationship.

Congruent with Gochros' (1985) findings, the women in this present study described long range positive consequences of their experience which included increased sense of autonomy, self-direction and ability to cope. These were usually ascribed in large part to the opportunity to share their stories and gain support. Other studies have supported this finding. Auerback and Moser (1987) reported that a support group for wives of gay men resulted in a healing process for the women. Some of the most important aspects of this experience, as found in that study, were the opportunity to meet peers, to break the isolation, and to gain information on homosexuality. Finally, several of the women in this current investigation also described experiencing their ability to be self-sufficient as enhancing their sense of autonomy. This finding is consistent with others' research (Fredlund, 1989; Buxton, 1991).

Growth in Understanding and Acceptance of Homosexuality

One past study, Schneider and Schneider (1990), measured marital satisfaction following treatment for bisexuality in husbands. In this case, homosexual behaviour was defined by many of the wives and their husbands as an addiction and considered a

sexual compulsion or problem with sexual control. Acceptance of the inherent nature of homosexuality or bisexuality was not a part of these subjects' understanding. Rather, many of the male participants considered this part of themselves to be diseased. This represents a different understanding of homosexuality than that portrayed by the women in the current study. While some of the women in this study initially believed that homosexuality was sinful or wrong, all supported a tolerant, accepting and understanding position of homosexuality as their own understanding grew. None of the women in the current study continued to voice a belief that homosexuality was wrong, sinful or an illness.

Concern Over Children's Adjustment

In the current study, the three women who had young children at the time of the disclosure reported concerns about their children's adjustment. Hays and Samuels (1989) conducted a study of 21 heterosexual mothers who had learned of their husband's homosexuality after marriage. Their findings were consistent with the concerns expressed by the women in this current study. These included concerns over the children's psycho-sexual development, concerns over family dissolution, concerns over homophobic reactions the children had experienced, and concerns over the husband's new lover.

AIDS

Reference to AIDS was revealed in only one participant's story and she did not describe her concerns as pivotal to her experience. The other participants did not address AIDS issues. This was most likely because their partners' disclosure occurred

before homosexual sexual contact had begun and the women had little reason to worry about contracting AIDS. Nevertheless, these findings are consistent with another study conducted after AIDS became a concern in the gay community. Hays and Samuels (1989) found that only three of their twenty-one participants expressed a fear of AIDS as part of their experience.

This is not to suggest that AIDS is not a valid and important concern for women who experience this phenomenon. For women who discover or suspect that their intimate male partner is sexually active outside the relationship, the question of any sexually transmitted diseases must be addressed. This can be a matter of maintaining life and health.

The Phenomenon in the Context of Self-in-Relation

We now turn to theoretical models in attempt to explain women's reactions to this experience. The theory of self-in-relation proposes a paradigm of women's development based on women's unique experiences and focusses on the ability to make and maintain relationships. According to Surrey (1985), "the primary experience of self is relational, that is, the self is organized and developed in the context of important relationships" (p. 2). Where other models of development assume that individuation leads to the development of various aspects of self (i.e., Erikson), the self-in-relation model assumes that various aspects of self (e.g. creativity, autonomy, assertion) develop within the primary context of self-in-relation. This theory provides an important lens through which we can view the experience of women who learn that their intimate partner is gay. It begins to explain the commitment which many of the

participants felt for maintaining what often appear to be doomed relationships. In several ways, self-in-relation and women's experience of depression seems to describe the women in this current study and the crisis of self which they experienced. First, this section addresses the role of caretaking as maintaining relational security. Second, the social context of women as caregivers is discussed. Third, the rejection of womanhood and sexuality as a loss of self is outlined. Fourth, the loss of relationship as loss of self is discussed. Finally, the role that other relationships played in healing and defining the lost self are addressed.

Caretaking for Relationship Security

Miller (1986) authored a landmark book on the psychology of women entitled, Toward A New Psychology of Women. Her theory is supported by the results of this study. Miller asserted that male/female relationships are often based on inequality, with women in a subordinate position to men. According to Miller, for most women, the cost of maintaining a close relationship is a loss of voice which requires that they transform their needs into the needs of their spouses and their children. For these women, the cost of self-development and expression would be to "forfeit the possibility of having any close relationships" (p. 19).

These notions appear to have a direct bearing on the manner with which many women approach their partners' disclosure. Consider the tremendous emotional stress that an intimate partners' disclosure would place on a relationship. No doubt women become increasingly aware of the implicit vulnerability of the relationship following the homosexual disclosure of their partner. Given women's strong relational focus and the

value most women place on relationship, many women seek to resolve their partners' sexual orientation struggles within their own relationship. Having learned that her role is to attend to the emotional needs of her partner and that self-expression may threaten the relationship, the woman believes that focussing exclusively on her partner's needs will help to secure a faltering relationship thus maintaining her foundation of self. Unfortunately, just as with the women in the current study, this focus on other begins a process of self-alienation. A study of women's depression by Jack (1993) revealed many similar themes. The author made the following statement:

Seeking love and closeness, a woman attempts to create intimacy by altering herself to meet what she perceives to be the needs of the man she loves. But the act of altering herself - of putting herself "as a person out of the picture" - results not in the emotional and spiritual rewards of authentic intimacy, but in a diminished self (p. 54).

Consequently, women come to believe that fulfilling others' needs may be the answer to indirectly meeting their own needs and their desire for relationship. "Helping" becomes the glue which holds a relationship together. With respect to this current study, aside from Sandy, each of the women described experiences of trying to maintain a connection, to help her partner in his struggle. Each of these women requested reassurances and attempted to maintain the relationship for a time following disclosure. In Anne's case, it appears that the limits her husband placed on their relationship may have limited her opportunities to use caretaking to secure their relationship.

Women's Role as Caregiver

Women's predisposition to help and to assume the role of attending to her partners' emotional well-being does not occur in a social vacuum. Miller (1986) maintained that certain aspects of human experience have been more associated in society with women than men. Most often expressive duties associated with enigmatic relationship issues such as vulnerability, weakness, helplessness, dependency and emotional connection have been relegated to women and the home. In addition, Miller postulated that men often have little experience or skill in addressing weakness, vulnerability and personal issues which are not easily solved. She said, "Women, then, become the 'carriers' for society of certain aspects of the total human experience - those aspects that remain unsolved" (p.23).

This statement provides further explanation of the willingness that many of the co-researchers demonstrated to set aside their own needs and to focus on the needs of their partners in an attempt to stabilize and maintain the relationship. The social role of women set the participants up to attend, almost without question, to the destabilizing news of their partners' disclosure and to attend to his emotional needs. In a study of male sexual orientation crisis, Angus (1993) described male participants' struggle with homosexual orientation as a form of identity crisis. Feelings of identity confusion, vulnerability and weakness were a part of their experience. Consequently, it is not surprising that their female partners felt compelled to 'help' their mates through the difficult and unfamiliar territory of addressing personal weakness, vulnerability and the

ultimate fear of not knowing self. The role of keeper of the relationship and care of partner became cardinal concerns for several of the women in the study. In fact, I believe that it was not in spite of their partners' strong emotional struggles that the women became so deeply involved, but precisely because of the severity of their partners' emotional state that gave many of the participants cause to focus so exclusively on their partners' needs at the expense of their own. After all, as each male partner revealed his seemingly unsolvable and highly emotional crisis, his needs and the needs of the relationship must have sounded deafening alarms for each woman and for her emotional support. Unfortunately, the exclusive focus on the other added yet another element to each woman's loss of self for "the role of the selfless giver contains its own blindness and leads a woman straight into what is called dependence" (Jack, 1993, p.73).

Each woman's upbringing, with its traditional values, also likely played a pivotal role in her approach to her partner's crisis. Each woman held a commitment to a traditional family structure. None of the women held strong convictions in support of the legitimacy of homosexuality. Instead, homosexuality was considered either sinful, analogous to a minor physical ailment, odd, or only acceptable for somebody else. Their partners' disclosure was viewed as an admission of weakness or a limitation, particularly with respect to his current status in their heterosexual relationship. It appears that many of the women in this study demonstrated a belief in the transformative power of their love. For not only according to society and the church was homosexuality wrong, but divorce or breaking a commitment was also

unacceptable. Seemingly, the only answer was to love their partner through his struggle with homosexuality and free him of his afflictions. Here, Christianity seemed to provide the solution, with the belief that others can be redeemed by love. Unfortunately, this approach tended to deepen the self-denial which had begun with each woman's social role as the caregiver and her attempts to secure the relationship. According to Jack (1993), ". . . they weave a complex net that ensnares a woman in self-negation as she tries both to liberate her partner from his limitations and to create a secure relationship within which she will be needed and loved" (p. 69).

Rejection of Womanhood as a Loss of Self

In often unconsidered ways, our gender speaks to the core of who we are. This too fed each woman's growing self-alienation crisis. According to Daniluk (1993), "Sexuality is a critical component of identity formation" (p. 53). One of the most profound and painful losses that the women experienced was a loss of self through their sexuality. Each experienced an inherent rejection of herself and her body as a result of her partner's disclosure. What had once been the invisible glue of the relationship, mutual heterosexuality, was gone. Precisely because of her womanhood, each woman learned that she was no longer desirable. This was a most basic rejection of what she knew of herself. She was not enough for her partner, nor could she ever be. The message was that she was insufficient and she learned this message from the one she wanted most to connect with.

Kaschak (1992) asserted that, "Every aspect of the female body is considered to say something about a woman's value as a person and a woman" (p.96). With the

complete rejection of their bodies, the women no longer felt valued. The very core of each woman was being rejected. They were undesirable because they were women. This experience is similar to other women's experience of their sexuality in relationship where an "experience of invalidation of self, body, and pleasure . . . [is associated with an] experience of separation between self and body" (Daniluk, 1993, p.61).

A further level of self-denial began to develop around body and physical needs. Often to keep the relationship intact the participants in this present study sacrificed their needs and desire for sexual enjoyment because of their partner's reluctance to engage in heterosexual sex. The cost for each woman to maintain the relationship was great. Body image suffered and their sexual needs and desires lost priority when placed against the sexual wishes of their partners. It appears that this is not unique to these co-researchers, for Daniluk (1993) described her participants as having, "experienced their sexual needs and desires to be secondary to those of men" (p.61).

Loss of Relationship as Loss of Self

A crisis of self for each of the women followed her partners' homosexual disclosure and the impending loss of their relationship. The women experienced feelings of abandonment, rejection by the person in whom they held most self-definition. Despite attempts to maintain the relationships, the relationships either dissolved or their partner began to assert an identity which they did not know. The relationships changed dramatically. In spite of their requests and attempts to work the relationships out, the partnerships began to crumble. Many of the women were placed in the dissonant position of supporting their partner's desire to address his own sexual

orientation crisis and vulnerabilities, while placing their own position within the relationship in jeopardy. Thus, the most basic underpinning of their relationship, heterosexuality, was eroding and they found themselves encouraging this process by supporting their partner. As a result, in their desire to sublimate their own needs to maintain the relationship, the ultimate and ironic result was further peril to the relationship through the partners' growing homosexual identification and ultimately more insecurity as experienced by the women. The future of the relationships became more precarious rather than less so.

The women found themselves victims of their own self-betrayal. By consistently coaching and giving to their partners and by sacrificing their needs to maintain their attachments, they ultimately lost both their partners and their own identity. Commenting on women's beliefs about intimacy, Jack (1993) remarked, "[the] beliefs about how to make and maintain intimacy lead women to socially supported self-negating behaviours and feelings that erode both their relationships and their sense of self" (p.121). All participants demonstrated anger as their attempts to stabilize the relationship failed and their partners failed to reciprocate by caring for their female mate. Again, this is common. "Resentment also results from the setting aside of her own needs and wishes and from the lack of mutuality in her relationships" (Jack, 1993, p.142).

Anger, confusion, powerlessness and dependency were some of the most common experiences that the participants described. The loss of their relationship seemed to threaten their very existence and for these women their survival was in

question. Erik Erikson's term, identity crisis, bears some relevance here to the description of the loss that each woman experienced. He postulated that identity crisis occurs when roles for the individual become confused (Erikson, 1963). As the roles that each woman was accustomed to in a relationship became lost to her, she began to lose self-definition and the confusion lead to an identity crisis and a threat to her sense of being.

Other Relationships Provide Healing

Each woman described a healing process that took place as she worked to survive the losses she had experienced and to regain a sense of self. Contact, connection, and sharing with others became important ways for the women to dialogue and connect with themselves. While each woman chose her support network within the constraints of her situation, each found that empathetic, non-judgmental support was vital. It came in various forms including professionals, family, friends, and support groups. The value of sensitive others became an important way for the women to know themselves and to validate their feelings and the impact of their experience. According to Jack (1993), "Dialogue is a form of relation . . . It provides a way to come into new forms of relation with others, with self, and with the world beyond self" (p. 190). Paradoxically, this was one of the most important ways that the women in this study began to experience themselves as independent. It was within relationship with others that the women described a growing sense of autonomy. With a declining dependence on their partners, each began to experience a growing sense of competence, independence and acceptance of her loss.

Homophobia played a damaging and threatening part in each woman's rediscovery of self. The essential role that relationship played in the woman's healing was often jeopardized by her fear of others' reactions. Needs for a supportive and sensitive listener were almost always weighed against the pain that rejecting, bigoted responses could inflict. As a result, the women were isolated, restricted to sharing only in those situations where each could be almost certain of empathy, even before disclosing her situation. Each of the women described a limited support network based on her assessment of safe sources for support. However, several described actual instances of homophobic reactions to their disclosure, often resulting in their feeling misunderstood and attacked. The fear of homophobic reactions, no doubt impaired each woman's ability to share and gain an understanding of self through dialogue with others. Thus the women attempted to protect themselves from being vulnerable to hateful messages in their surroundings, while seeking to meet their essential need for dialogue with others.

The Phenomenon in the Context of Therapy

Acceptance of Homosexual/Bisexual Orientation

A male partners' homosexual disclosure to his intimate female partner often results in a dramatic life altering circumstance for the woman. The findings of this study, as well as others (i.e., Buxton, 1991; Gochros, 1989), highlight the serious nature of the issues which women experience when learning that their partner is gay. Depression appears to be a pervasive theme across most women's experience, as is the impact of homophobia. Across women's stories, one of the strongest themes that

emerges to counteract the damaging results of disclosure is the support of others. This suggests that the therapist in such cases holds a role of key importance in women's adjustment to this dilemma. There is reason to believe that many women seek professional support following their intimate partners' disclosure. According to Bell and Weinberg (1978), gay individuals seek counselling two to four times more often than heterosexuals. While no comparable statistics exist for partners of homosexuals, it is possible that they too may seek psychotherapy more often than the general population.

According to Rudolph (1988), professional counsellors are torn between the mandates of their profession and the negative attitudes of the society in which they are embedded. He suggested that therapists are, "formally told one thing about homosexuality from the profession (i.e., 'homosexuality is okay'), and more informally, but no less persuasively, quite another from society-at-large [sic] 'homosexuality is not okay'" (p. 167). Further, it has been found that counsellor attitudes profoundly affect the therapeutic relationship when working with homosexual clients. Bell and Weinberg (1978) found that many homosexual clients experience dissatisfaction with therapy based on therapists' negative attitudes and lack of understanding of homosexual issues. Given women's need for support in this situation and the integral role that homophobia played in women's decisions to share their story, it would seem imperative that therapists working with such women must have an accepting attitude toward homosexuality and a knowledge of the topic. Rudolph made the following comment about working with homosexual clients but the words appear

to be equally applicable to working with their female partners, "It is important that counselors who wish to work with homosexual clients be cognizant (i.e., vigorously self-conscious) of their attitudes toward homosexuality . . ." (p.167).

Importance of Relationship

Focus on the value of relationships to women also appears to be critical to the therapeutic relationship. While the high value that women in this dilemma often place on maintaining a relationship may appear to be maladjusted, we now understand some of the reasons both psychological and social for this focus. As a result, it is imperative that these notions become part of therapeutic understanding and treatment. Jack (1993), in discussing depression and women, stated it most clearly when she wrote,

It is important to recognize that the value these women place on relationship leads them to believe that staying is the right thing to do, and that it requires strength. We need to acknowledge the women's genuine attempts to love their partners into relatedness, and recognize the cultural as well as psychological impediments to realizing such a goal (p.67).

Conarton and Silverman (1988) have also recognized the important role that relationships play in women's lives. With respect to therapy, they encourage counsellors to be aware of imbalances in many women's relationships and help women to learn to nurture themselves. Again, this appears particularly appropriate to women's experience in heterogeneous relationships. Conarton and Silverman have written,

It is deeply satisfying to feel needed, and it may take a long time before a woman realizes that her relationships are unbalanced. She does all the giving, while others in her world are doing all the receiving. Therapy should involve examining the extent to which she might be fostering unnecessary dependency in others, helping her develop mutually satisfying relationships, and teaching her how to care for herself - how to be self-nurturing. (p. 47)

Body Image

Finally, the results of this study indicate that a woman's own sense of sexuality and body image can be profoundly affected by her homosexual partner's sexual rejection. This is a deep personal cost and often shame of one's own body is associated with this experience. Because of the sense of shame which is associated with this experience, it may be difficult for women to broach this issue with a therapist, nevertheless, it is very important. As a result, therapists working with women experiencing their partners' homosexual disclosure are encouraged to be sensitive to addressing painful issues of body image. Cammaert and Larsen (1988) have suggested that comfort with body image is a major goal for treatment outcome with women and this is certainly reflected in the experiences of the women in this study. Cammaert and Larsen write that women must be allowed to "redefine female sexuality from the viewpoint of their own experiences and desires" (p. 23). While this may take time and work for women who have rejected or become detached from their sexuality, it would seem to be a necessary step to re-integration and healing.

Implications for Further Research

Several possibilities for further research grow out of the findings of this research. First, this study can be seen as an initial attempt to include unmarried women in the study of homosexual disclosure to an intimate female partner. The findings suggest that themes are common across married and unmarried relationships alike. Further research designed to include more non-married intimate partners' experience with this phenomenon may prove useful to expanding our knowledge on the pervasiveness of the themes which have been identified. In addition, further research in this area may uncover other important issues which have not been addressed.

Second, the study of women's long-term experience in a heterogenous relationship as compared to the experience of those who dissolve their heterogeneous relationship may prove valuable. Additional information may be found on women's decisions to remain in relationship as opposed to their decisions to leave. This may provide useful information for counselling and the long-term implications of this pivotal life experience. It may also provide a predictive paradigm to women who are contemplating an intimate relationship with a gay or bisexual man.

Third, similarities may exist between the experience of women who learn that their intimate partner is gay and the experience of women who learn that their intimate partner is involved with another woman. Further research comparing the experience of these two phenomena may highlight important ways in which these two dilemmas are both similar and different.

Finally, it appears that depression and identity issues, as related to women's experience of self-in-relation, play a major role in women's experience of learning that their intimate partner is gay. Almost no literature exists on the experience of men who learn that their partner is lesbian. It would be interesting and useful to know to what extent men's experience may or may not be similar to women's experience. Research on this topic may reveal some interesting and useful results pertaining specifically to men's experience and needs under these circumstances.

Concluding Remarks

The goal of this study was to investigate five women's experience on learning that their intimate partner was gay. The use of existential-phenomenology as a foundation for this study underlines the desire to illuminate the inner-world of the co-researchers' experience. This research is a response to requests from those involved in this experience for information. It is also a response to other researcher's requests for additional information in this field (Coleman, 1985; Gochros, 1985; Strommen, 1989). This study expands on the limited research which has been completed in this area and also begins to expand the topic to investigate both married and unmarried intimate relationships. It is hoped that the findings of this study will provide a sense of shared experience for straight partners of gay men and provide therapists with a deeper understanding of the issues involved.

Postlude

At the end of the research process, I felt compelled to return to what I knew from my own experience. It was important for me to reflect on my experience in

relation to the nine themes which I had discerned when analyzing the research data. As a woman who has experienced this phenomenon, did this description fit for me? Had I experienced this symphony as I had described it? Throughout the research process, I felt that it had been very important for me to listen, with as few presuppositions as possible, to my participants' stories. I wanted their voices and their stories to be heard as experts on their own experience. This was born not only out of theory, but also out of personal conviction. It had been my own personal experience that few people had listened to my story without imposing their own biases on my experience. As a result, I had chosen to tell all of the research participants of my own experience prior to our interviews, but had shared little of the details in an effort not to influence the expressions of their own stories. In addition, I continued to bracketing my prior knowledge through each step of the analysis process.

The women had surprised me with elements of their experience, but their stories had been similar to mine. Since I had no children at the time of my husband's disclosure, the women who had children taught me about the dilemmas of addressing their children's needs. They also taught me about the pressures of those in need around them. The demands of their own parents, their children, their gay partners and themselves seemed to sandwich them between too many needy people, making it more difficult to cope. This had been a voice in their symphony which I had not heard as clearly as they had.

I was also surprised by the positive experience which each of the women, without exception, described as a result of seeking the support of helping

professionals. In my own experience, I had been very dissatisfied by the response of several professionals and clergy from whom I had sought help. I had felt misunderstood, insulted and pathologized. My story had even appeared to frighten one therapist. Reflecting on my participants' stories, I was relieved that they had found help where I had not. I was also relieved for my profession knowing that a number of helping professionals exist who are able to serve women in this dilemma.

The women in this study had reinforced for me the power of telling their story and the power of being understood. Many of the women described feeling deeply understood and validated by reading their stories which had been written in my words. For some, the written synthesis had acted as a catalyst for discussion with their partners. For others, it seemed that my careful attention, accurate description and empathy with their story had served to validate the meaning that this experience held for them. It was as though sharing their stories had allowed the deep and personal meanings of this experience to become more clearly understood to them.

Not only did the women validate my written synthesis of their experience, but I found that their descriptions also resonated with my own experience. I was surprised by the accuracy with which I found my own experience reflected in the stories and themes of the participants. Their musical score of experience had been mine as well. My research interest had been driven by my continuing desire for knowledge and understanding, and by my continuing concern for others, as well as for myself. It seems that for me, while some themes have become less predominant over time, they all remain a part of my experience and I will likely continue to grow in my

understanding of this phenomenon. For me and for the others, this may be the unending symphony of experience and life.

The symphony, no doubt, continues for all of us who have learned that their intimate partner is homosexual. My abiding conviction, as a result of my own personal experience and through my research experience, is that this phenomenon is very much process driven. Reflection, personal work, education and time may help a woman to grow through this experience. But it is the process and a woman's need to at least control the pace of her own process and learning that provides for an element of healing. This may be an important notion for therapists who would wish to see faster change. Change took time for all the women in this study and also for myself. Education, support, and trust in a woman's ability to learn to nurture herself may be some of the most important ingredients to providing help for women in this circumstance. It was for me.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

- How did you discover that your husband was gay? What was that like for you?
- What was your experience when you first learned that your husband was gay?
- How did you feel about your spouse when you first learned that he was gay?
- How did you experience your relationship with your husband when you first found out that he was gay?
- Over a longer period of time, what was your experience of your husband being gay?
- As time passed, how did you feel towards your husband?
- As time passed, how did you experience the marriage relationship?
- What impact if any, did this have on your family?
- When you first learned that your husband was gay, how did you cope with this new information? What did you do? Did you feel that it helped?
- Was support available for you? If so, in what form? If not, how was it that support was unavailable for you?
- What did you find helpful in working through this experience?
- What did you find less helpful in working through this experience?
- Do you have any comment on what this interview has been like for you?

Appendix B

Letter to Participants

Dear Madam,

I am interested in gaining an understanding of women's experiences in intimate relationships with gay men. The information I obtain will be used toward my Master's Thesis in completion of my counselling degree. My interest in this topic stems from both personal experience and experience with others.

I would like to briefly describe what I am looking for and the nature of the research that I am working on. When we meet, I would like you to tell me about your experience of learning that your partner was gay. I want you to tell me about your experience as it actually happened. Don't worry about the way your story comes out. It doesn't have to be in any particular order. There is no right or wrong way of telling your story, just tell it as it comes to mind. I am particularly interested in hearing about your thoughts and feelings during this experience. Although you likely have opinions about your experience, I am most interested in your actual experience rather than how you may have analyzed it. Most importantly, I would like you to concentrate on HOW you experienced discovering that your partner was gay.

If you have time before our first meeting, I would appreciate if you would reflect upon your experience and jot down any recollections that come to mind. When we meet we will have time to talk and I look forward to listening to the story of your experience. Thank you for being willing to share a very personal part of your life with me.

Yours truly,
Denise Larsen

Appendix C

Letter of Consent

Project Title: Women's Experiences on Learning that Their Intimate Partner is Homosexual

Principle Investigator: Denise Larsen, University of Alberta M. Ed. Student

Research Participant:

I, _____, voluntarily consent to participate in an interview with Denise Larsen, a graduate student in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Alberta. The purpose of the study has been explained to me and I understand that the information given by me will be used solely for research purposes. I further understand that every effort will be made to remove all identifying information. I agree to allow the interview to be taped with the understanding that the tapes will be erased when the research project is completed. I also understand that I may refuse continued participation at any point during the research process. Finally, I am aware that if I have any concerns, as a result of the interviewing process, a referral to counselling will be available.

Participant Signature

Date

Witness

Appendix D

Request for Participant Approval

Dear Participant,

It's a long time since we have spoken so I wanted to touch base with you. Since last fall I have continued to work on the research project which you were involved in. It has taken somewhat longer than I had hoped but thankfully the summer provides me with extra time to finish the project.

As I work through this research project I am constantly reminded of how extremely generous you were in willing to spend time with me during our interview. Your information and experience has lent a great deal to the direction of my study.

In this package, I have included a draft copy of a summary I have made of our interview together. You will see that throughout the document there are several numbers in brackets. These merely represent a coding system which I used to go through a transcript of the interview. I would kindly ask you to read through the summary and make any comments which you may have in the margins of the document. This is an important step in the project because it allows me to more accurately represented your story. Please feel free to highlight any misconceptions or inaccuracies which may be included in the summary. In addition, please check that names, dates or places which appear in the summary are altered to your satisfaction. I have included a stamped return mail envelope with this document in order that you may return it to me.

In addition to receiving written comments from you, I would appreciate an opportunity to speak with you directly. I will place a call you in late May or early June to discuss any questions which you may have regarding the interview summary or other aspects of the study. Should you chose to call me, please telephone collect at (403) 454-6298. Finally, I plan to complete this thesis by mid to late August and would appreciate a return copy of the summary as soon as possible.

Again, my many thanks for your hard work and participation. I know that discussing and focussing on these issues is often difficult. I appreciate your patience in this lengthy research process and look forward to speaking with you soon.

Yours truly,

Denise Larsen

Appendix E

Sample Interview Transcript

- Q What I just would ask you first Winny, then, is how you learned that your husband was gay, and the feelings or the experience you had around that?
- A I guess maybe the first exposure I had, now certainly he knew he was gay prior to that, and I knew from time to time, there was something not quite fitting in the relationship, but I couldn't put my finger on it. It was probably 1965. When our son was working with a psychiatrist in India. And I remember he worked with the whole family individually. So at that point, Denise, John came in once from a session with the psychiatrist, and he just couldn't believe that finally, someone accepted him just as he was, because he'd shared who he was. And then he came back to the place where we were staying at the time and he said, you know, he called me outside, because we had the four kids around us.
- Q Sure.
- A And he said, "I've got something I want to share with you". And he said, "I just want to tell you that I'm homosexual". And I said, "Oh, I don't know what that is".
- Q Right.
- A Now I don't know if it's some kind of disease or something. And I'm, it didn't bother me because we were working with a psychiatrist and I think even John mentioned that night, that he said hey, there's nothing to worry about, we'll pray about this and you'll be healed from this. And so I wasn't worried, I wasn't concerned, I was surprised that John was making such a big thing of it. So it -- it honestly didn't register anything. I can't remember ever reading anything about that. I wasn't into reading and studying as much as he was. So that was the first inference we had.
- Q And your reaction at that time?
- A My reaction --
- Q Or your feelings?
- A It wasn't, it wasn't any kind of fear or anxiety, confusion. I just felt hopeful. I thought, "Well there's nothing to worry about." If you can pray about it and be healed, then what is there to worry about. And, as you know, I come from a very strong fundamentalist background, and for me conforming to family values and church values were a priority. So again this was kind a value thing and it was something we believed in, so I hung on to that. For years.... Actually, until we came home. We came home in '67, it was probably, maybe '69 or '70 when John wanted to go to a workshop. And at that point that was held by Amanda Thomas, and she was an Anglican pastor who laid on hands and had healing sessions. And this was a week for healing. I couldn't quite understand why they had so many long sessions with John, it was both a man and a woman that would be praying for him and he'd come back just wiped out, all this crying and weeping. And I felt in a way that he was more important than I was, and that made me a little anxious and envious, got to thinking why don't they deal with

the total situation -- instead of just him, and I knew he was praying about the homosexual issues. Because he was a specialist in that area. Again, not fully understanding why it was such a big deal.

Q Here you were --

A And not to work on any of my needs. Which was a need for intimacy and acceptance.

Q How did you feel those needs at that time?

A Perhaps a bit confused, because I admit I wasn't that much in touch with my own feelings. I knew in my head that there was stuff going on. I knew it was pretty heavy stuff and it was a little upsetting, and again behind it all was that belief that this will do it. Whatever it is, it's going to work and, you know, there are no more problems. We were certainly sexually involved, we had our intimacy and everything was marvelous for me. So I had no problem along that area at home, it was okay. And then we were back in Canada and coming back here, John retrained to be a counsellor so there were a lot of -- some group sessions and some sharing family life education and stuff we were involved with together. And from time to time this issue kept coming up on him being gay or homosexual. Again, it wasn't really confronting, wasn't bothersome to me until it got to the place where John was quite involved with some of the groups in the city.

Q And then how was that?

A Okay... for me there were times that were very distressful. Like one time, I know there was a group of men that met here at the house for a potluck. And they were certainly good toward to me, I didn't feel any judgment. But I was -- how did I feel about them, I felt angry. I felt left out, and I felt really upset about not being a part of whatever was going on, because I couldn't quite again, identify with it all. And I remember once, since I was in sales, I went around one afternoon purposely just brochuring so I wouldn't have to be here at the house. When I got back they invited me, you know, to have some supper and treated me very well.

Q Can you tell me about not wanting to be at the house?

A Yeah, I just felt like I wanted to run. I felt like, (quaver in her voice) that this was something behind it all was pushing us apart. It would begin to, but that was just kind of the beginning and the groups continued. There was another time at Christmas time, there was a big group downstairs, really a big group. And I think John had set aside one bedroom, if anybody wanted to kind of sit and chat more intimately and so forth. I thought, "Why did he have to set aside that one bedroom". And although I was nice, and I tend to -- growing up being nice, and I know that really gets in the way. I was really uncomfortable. It was almost -- I mean it was all male that night. Probably a group of 50 or so. And again, I felt alienated from the group, I was not part of what was there and yet I saw John's excitement and enthusiasm about it all. Maybe that's also something that made it difficult to kind of accept where they were coming from.

Q To see his enthusiasm?

A Yeah. And then I got to the place where I was getting a little involved with a gay church group and got to know them individually. And a lot of the meetings were held at one of the, they were parents of a lesbian woman, and it was held out in their place and I felt, you know, they're very -- a wonderful group. I got to know them as individuals and I knew them as individuals and even as a group they weren't scary and it helped and took some of my fear away just to get to know them. And also at that point there were more and more women becoming involved. So I thought, "Hey, this is all right." I loved the people that were gathering, I think at first when I started to get involved I kept saying, "You know, here I am, the only . . . (heterosexual)". I wasn't though there because the other couple were also homosexual/heterosexual, and all the rest were homosexual people.

Q Okay. Now this group that you speak of now and --

A And occasionally I went to a gay church. But not very much at that point. How else did I get involved? But I still thought of myself as me and them. Which is certainly changed because that no longer fits but at that point again I felt very alone and somehow confused in that I didn't always understand their cracks and their jokes that were going back and forth. And I didn't feel threatened at that point.

Q But you felt threatened before that?

A A bit, more later on, really threatened, yeah. Not so much at that point. And then where did we go from there? I think I gradually became involved more with the gay church. Again, sometimes I got really tired of just always talking about the gay issue and the homosexual issue.

Q Okay.

A Although they had said that, hey, that you know, we're a total person, but they did dwell so much on sexuality and the partners being together, and often times it was an issue that they were representing in, you know, in their legislature or something like that, so I can understand that.

Q But somehow there wasn't a great deal for you?

A Yeah. And for me too, I was hung up oftentimes thinking of the sexuality part and not taking that person as a whole person, just as who they are. So it was -- that caught my way particularly in the beginning. And I certainly didn't understand the whole thing, hadn't done this much reading on it. So it was partly the process of understanding better where people were coming from and so on. And I think, one significant time, there was a group here at the house, there was probably 25 - 30 people here in the room, and they were sharing individually with how work was going in the hospitals and schools and so on, and then one minister, he was a young fellow, he was just sitting over here. He had just been ordained. A very gifted guy. He started to cry, and he said well, my problem is I have a lover and I've also you know committed myself to the church and I know I've got to make a decision one way or the other. He says I'm really, really torn, I don't know what to do because I feel so alone. Because I remember it was after Mel shared that I had the courage to share and again there were women here that night too. I said, "Well, Mel, I feel alone, but in a

- different way. And I don't know any other wives of gays, and although I know you accept me just as I am and I really -- I accept and appreciate each one of you." And I really did, I was beginning to feel at home with anyone I knew, if it was someone I didn't know, I wasn't quite sure where they were coming from. And I said, "I've got to find somebody that I can share with so they know how I'm feeling". And I know that night I broke down and cried in the group. And there was really love and caring there that was just really touched me. But it was important to share because I think it's a lot of stuff that I had stuffed for a while. I'm really not -- I'm with you, but I'm really not one of you. And so it was good to share that and to trust that to that group.
- Q What were some of the things that you had shared with them, if you don't mind sharing that with me?
- A I think mainly that I felt very alone. Loneliness was a big key thing because there was this strong support group with John, and a group I had come to know and I've accepted them, we gave each other hugs and everything as they came and went. But I had felt they didn't know who I was. They didn't know anything about my pain. There was no fear at that point it was more a feeling separate, more a feeling. I can't think of anything else alone that made me feel very different than we did say in our couples group. That was a different story with them. So that's where I was with that group. Then we gradually (that was maybe a little later) became involved with the gay church. Again, which is a gay church. And out of that was a cell group and we met every week, and there were two women and maybe five guys in the group. And everybody shared very personally -- so I felt in that group, whether we were on a topic or talking individually about ourselves, there were just no barriers. It was marvelous. And later, that group was very significant for me because it was later that John was away, and you may remember sharing that with you in 1987, in January of '87 he began planning for a trip and that was going to be five weeks away from home. And John and I have always done things together. And particularly on a, you know, chunk of time like that. And that became very, very scary and threatening to me.
- Q I was wondering how that would be...
- A Yeah. That was perhaps the worst time of my life.
- Q What kind of scary, what --
- A Okay. For me the first part was scary from January 'til May. He was planning this trip on his own. It was the secrecy of it that frightened me. Like he would spend a lot of time getting information on a gay bed and breakfasts and hostels and contacts with people and as you know, there's a lot of personal ads that people send out, you know, looking for partners, looking for a friend. The secrecy of that scared me. Because I didn't know for sure whether he was going to go looking for a partner or if he just wanted to get away from me. And also at that point he had condoms, he was picking up condoms, granted he was involved with AIDS awareness. But I thought, "Oh, come on now, why does he need a condom? Just because he didn't take a condom in his pocket when he was a kid in school, why would he have to carry it around now? That really

frightened me. And that was kind of the beginning of a fear that revolved into a panic while he was away. But although here he was four or five months ahead of time making, planning this trip. And that trip in my mind was just enormous. And I think, again I know it's analyzing, but looking back it was a big shift in my life, a shift from a regular church situation to more of a commitment in the gay church. A shift from our relationship, because John wanted to get away and be on his own and think through his own thoughts and stuff. And also at that point he was gathering up more and more gay literature and gay magazines, and books; very intimate sort of stuff he was reading. So more and more I felt kind of pushed aside.

Q Sure. So you went through this processing, call it a crucial point.

A Yeah. Major.

Q And you talked about some of your -- that was so scary for you.

A Yeah.

Q And what kind of threats did you perceive, did you see around for yourself now? Well I'd like to -- I want to explore about you and John. But just about yourself now, what kind of threats for you.

A Oh, for me. Major stuff was fear of maybe working toward separateness. Again, redefining my identity, you know.

Q Redefining --

A After he left, I felt well, "Who am I?" You know, as a wife, as a mother, as a homemaker, whatever. I really, really and glancing through that stuff from last night, I kept asking myself, "Well who am I? Where am I going? Why am I here? What's going on?" Again, it's tied in with that secrecy and it really wasn't secrecy. He just had to do his own planning. So that made me feel left out, unneeded, unwanted is the way I judged it. So that was --

Q You felt --

A I felt and I know the day that he left from here, he was so excited about going. And I yelled at him at the door just as he left, through tears, "I too shall live!" And I was so fearful, I was just almost frozen. But it was gutty stuff that I had to get at. And I knew that. And the whole thing kind of locked me up, my stomach was tight, my throat was tight as it's feeling right now.

Q Your whole body just thinking about it.

A Yeah. Again, I guess maybe at that point I felt abandoned, you know. Like he had rejected with me, he didn't want to take me on the trip. What's wrong with me? I really hit the victim stage in every level of tears and poor me, and blaming, and angry at John and worried and a lot of illusions about what he would be doing, and who he would be with and where he'd be. (husky voice) And again, seeing myself in this house alone. And that didn't feel comfortable.

Q You felt that hurt.

A Yeah, because that's the position I took, yes. At that point I felt really victimized and that came across. At that point I had a marvelous workshop, a personal growth workshop. And somebody in that group said Winny, "Why do you keep giving away your power?" That's very familiar to me now but it wasn't then. And I thought, "What do you mean, giving away my power?" And

basically really confronting me about taking responsibility for myself. And there was a need for that because I had leaned John and depended on John to always be there. And that's just not life. So again -- like I was re-evaluating my whole life. I really went through my own little death at that time, during the period he was away and I know there was some times it hit it was even worse than others. One was when John phoned from the west coast at one point, and he had gone to a park with a male friend whom he had just met, but I think they were very close. And decided to phone me from the park from some special booth or place there where a lot of stuff was going on. And he said, "Would you like to speak to Phil." Phil spoke to me too. And I got off the phone and my legs felt like jelly, I felt totally weak, my whole body felt like it was going to fall apart. I wept and cried and again overwhelming fear and feeling so alone, you know. Really, really abandoned. So through that process I found that I would go to bed at night and I'd get to the place where I'd just lie in bed naked and wrap my arms around myself to hold my body together. Because I felt like I was just, I couldn't take anything more. I felt I couldn't breathe, I felt like it was the end of the world.

Q So it was a very physical sensation to you?

A Oh, major. I lost about 10 pounds over that period of time. And I didn't know who to share with. And, but John did keep up phoning and calling. But every time he called I was kind of, again had this illusion or visualization of all the terrible things he'd be doing, you know.

Q Can you describe terrible things to me?

A Yes. I would assume stuff like some of the men's baths, bath houses, some intimacy with one or two individuals and just really losing it, as any connection with me and the family. SCARY YEH! (crying) And that was my perception of what was going on. Which was way off, you know, I understand. But still as far as I was concerned it was real.

Q Yes, it was real for you.

A Yes, it really was. So that hit a spot so deep in my belly, I have never before experienced such a depth of pain and I went to three different counsellors. The first two, one was a Jungian counsellor, that have you drawing pictures of your dreams and everything and I couldn't put that together. One was a new counsellor down at a counseling centre. Then I went to Amy Robertson who teaches miracles and does workshops along that line. And I had gone to her a couple of times and then I remember one day I was down with her just on the verge of working through stuff and she called to her secretary and she said, hold anyone that's coming in, Winny needs another hour. And it was a real breakthrough for me. Really getting to my anger, my resentment, my pain, bitterness, just so much garbage down there. And then I came home and I was the only one at the house, so I went downstairs with a broomstick and a pillow and I tell you I really went to work and got a lot of that anger out that had been building up and tied in with all this fear that was going on.

Q The anger.

A Oh, unbelievable. Anger and fear had really crippled me. And it helped to loosen up. More about dealing with myself as a whole person instead of just blaming, although the blaming was there for quite a while.

Q Did the blaming go with the anger?

A Blaming definitely went with the anger and I wasn't resuming responsibility. There was a lot of blame toward John. Feeling that, you know, we should be doing this together or our sexuality was another thing. We had not been sexually involved for maybe 10 or 12 years. And even at that time, 10 or 12 years prior to that, John just felt like he was not performing and that he didn't want to carry on. But I still felt rejected when he said, "Hey you know, we're not going to carry on sexually when we feel like it's not being fulfilling." And I said, "Well it's been good for me." But it wasn't for him. And somehow even then, I assumed the blame. I assumed that somehow or other there could have been something I can do to make things better.

Q Something about you --

A Yeah, keep our relationship intimate and meaningful. So again, the victim position, it was ridiculous. But that was all tied in with judging, the relationship as not being adequate or not being normal, whatever for me. And then when John came back from this trip we went to the couples group one night, and at the couples group he shared there that he was intimately involved on this trip. And I just fell apart.

Q Had you known that?

A Not for sure. He hadn't stated it in those words, but he did out there because he knew I would have support with the group and he would too. It was the night when some of the couples really went into the woodwork, disappeared all together and it was the women who came forward and I know I had a woman on either side of me that were very very supportive. And they were also supportive to John, which was good. And finally the group came around and supported each one of us. But again, it was good to fall apart in a trusting group. Very loving and very warm. (choked up)

Q Yeah.

A Beginning to take some of that loneliness away. The pain that had collected. I lived working in sales at that time, and I guess it was my highest income for an average of any month over the 14 years I had been in sales. But it was simply that I had to keep my mind off of it, I was working like crazy and then -- and also there were a time or two, I met for breakfast too with one or two women that I knew well enough that I could share this with. And I'd have breakfast with them and I'd go to work afterwards. And it really helped to be able to share a little bit of that pain. Again, it was people that didn't know exactly where I was coming from. And that helped take some of the loneliness away from it. (choked up) Because again, I was making the assumption -- again, it was partly true. John's always been able to reach out and find lots of friends. And I'd sort of been telling myself, I have to go find my own friends, my own groups, and I was sort of saying I didn't have any friends. And I did, but I just was so blind to seeing any hope anywhere.

- Q You felt hopeless.
- A Yeah, hopeless was a very strong feeling. ~~Weak~~ and hopeless and felt -- I had somehow read in my mind I couldn't see anything other than separateness.
- Q Yes.
- A You know.
- Q Separateness isn't --
- A It just didn't fit after 42, 43 years at that time. And I thought, jeez, you know, how was I going to face the world alone. How am I going to endure it. And I didn't know. So from there when he did come back from his trip, we went for a trip down to Portland. And I think I cried most of the way down, most of the way back, part of the time there. And again, he couldn't understand and I said well, you know, things are going to be different, just not the same. I was still living on that trip that we were going to go our separate -- actually I don't know whether I told him, but I know I had in my journal, that this is probably our last trip together. And I really thought yeah, this is it. (crying) So it was a death. That whole process was a real death of what we had, it was a death of the togetherness and more or less having to face myself. Which I think I've always avoided. And so it was a major shift all the way around.
- Q You mentioned something about always wanting to be nice just a while ago. Does that relate to the death, or can you explain it? Maybe I'm putting words in your mouth.
- A No, this is a good question. I think part of being a nice person was you never showed any anger, or never confronted anybody, never put anybody down. Always accept -- the other person always came first. And I -- that's still one of my tendencies, I can do that even in a women's group I'm in now. I think "Okay, how can I express something without being really open and honest about it?" (rhetorical) So there's a little fear of being really open. Being nice. Which turns me off. But it -- I think -- again, it comes out of a home background, and a church background, where you felt like everybody had a big smile on and was always nice and always -- they weren't going to cause any waves, you know. So it was breaking from that although, you know, part of who I was the -- everybody's life was in transition and I think I'd certainly been in transition since we came back from India. But it was still -- and it continues to be stuff to work on. What was I thinking -- yeah, when John came back again, the issue kept coming up of: Where do we go from here? And this gay issue kept getting in the way and I know that John had started at that point to have a special friend here in at home. And when he started to see and Don was in the closet, he was not out, even to the gay community. And John would go over there and see him and I was resenting it more and more, angry about it. And really, really pissed off, feeling like again somebody else comes before I do. Or that it wasn't a monogamous relationship any more with me. So we went to see a counsellor, and the counsellor asked mainly one question, "Winny, what do you want, dah, dah, dah?" "John, what do you want?" And I guess I wanted some assurance from John that we would be -- we would try to work this out, that we would stay together, I don't know what all it was, but John -- the one thing John was

asking for was one night a week to be out until 11 o'clock in a very intimate personal relationship with Don. And again, I was crying my eyes out through the thing. Fear again, keeps coming back. A lot of fear. And John would go over to Don's and I know any time he was over there, I would try to phone other friends, perhaps women from the Wives' Support Group, perhaps friends I knew or doing some reading, and then when he did come home, a time or two I was screaming and yelling at him, I was very angry. I said, "What am I supposed to say when you come back home? What am I supposed to do? Am I supposed to say, 'You had a good evening?'" And so I was very resentful, very very angry at him.

Q You must have had lots of fear?

A Lots of fear. But that was one of the things that the counsellor helped negotiate with that John would be out one evening a week, and maybe occasionally for a weekend that he could be out with his friends. And if any of that became too difficult or too painful for me, he would -- John promised that, he said you still come first and that he would, you know, cancel that out if it was too heavy going. So I appreciated that, but he kept saying he loved me and I didn't believe it. And I remember one day, I said, "I've just had enough of it. I want you to get out." And he was very calm and quiet about it. He's been very patient with me. He said, "Well I'm not moving." I said, "Well I'm sure as hell not moving!" So, you know, we were kind of at that point saying, "Here's where we are. We don't like what we've got so we're not changing right now." It did help and I think it may have been before John's trip, no it wasn't. I guess it was after John's trip. So we decided we'd sleep in different bedrooms, which was good. Which was really good. He had taken his ring off when he went on this trip, which was another threatening thing to me.

Q How was that?

A Yes, I thought, okay, he's saying, "That's it. This is part of this stuff we're saying is just not working." And just moving into another bedroom really helped. I had my own space. He had his own space, his own things, his own pictures of gay males and so forth, which he's got in his room right now. But it's not a threat to me any more. And he's got his own little toys and stuff for his own, you know, experimentation or whatever. And I've got my space. So that's -- that worked very well. And I think, it was -- whether it was after that or just when it was, I know I decided to take my ring off as well. I thought, "Hey, I don't need that." Because ours is more of a Platonic relationship now. And I think we'd gotten away from even giving each other a hug and a kiss when we headed off to work or out of the house. You know, we'd give each other a little hug perhaps we're going away for a week otherwise we don't have any affectionate sort of responses like that. We know the caring, the togetherness is there. So it was a process again after that of working through a co-dependency.

Q What was your experience of that, because I see a transition now from fear, a lot of fear, and correct me. And to something different now.

A Yeah, it was different. Again, I kind of felt at first I was just dependent on him. But then I got to thinking, "Hey, that's partly right, but it goes both ways." So it

was more of a co-dependency and again that was scary thing, a different measure of a scary thing to look at because basically it was searching for my own personal identity as an individual. Rather, than just a couple. And in trying to figure out how do we break this, how do I break this co-dependency thing, where we keep getting hooked on what the other person chooses to do or where they are going, or what they are doing. And it became even more frightening when John's personal close relationship changed from Don to a fellow by the name of Barry. Barry also was a guy who had not come out of the closet. He was a businessman and John wasn't just sexually involved with him, but was beginning to really fall in love. So even he himself realized that, "Hey, you know, do I want this to go in this direction?" And again it was frightening, but also I realized and was more prepared to looking into this co-dependency and saying, trying to get in touch with my own power, my own strength, continuing to work at personal growth work, continuing to work with women's groups, and so forth, really filled --

Q Some of your own outlets.

A Yeah, yeah. More of my own stuff. And I had groups I was meeting with that was not the same as John met with and that was freeing John up a bit more. Again, it was a slow process of getting the place where it was okay for him to go to go to a movie and it was okay for me to go to away, if my friend was going down there and so some of the fear was going and let go, like it was a matter -- tied in with that was a matter of control. And I think my fear was controlling myself, my own feelings, but also trying to control John and what he had chosen to do. And then I guess maybe it was two or three years ago when he shared with a couples groups that hey, he had chosen not to be involved any more with Barry and Don in a very -- he didn't use those names, but in a very personal way, that he felt like -- what he really wanted was just personal sharing in a men's group. Whether it's gay or straight men, or whatever. But that's what he really wanted. And I may be right or not, but I assume that perhaps he wasn't -- he was kind of impotent in some of those relationships. Again, that's on him not on me. But it took a lot of the pressure off of me just to know that he was not intimately involved with somebody. So I was more relaxed with where I was at.

Q Do have anything that you would like to add before we end our interview, Winny?

A It's the best that ever happened to us. The most painful. But it opens doors to getting in touch with my power. And I needed that and I continue to need that. It's a major shift.

Q Even 10 more minutes? If you're up for it?

A Yeah, very good.

Let's see, I mentioned this personal growth group. I went to the first one on my own and then John went later on his own. That was okay with me. And then we went to the second one together, which was a pretty powerful experience there. John shared that he was gay with the group. Again, probably a group of 25, 30 people. And he was dealing with a lot of his stuff when a note came in to

- the facilitator, said, "There's somebody else involved in this issue of John's being gay. Remember Winny's in the group too."
- Q Yeah. And that's what I was thinking, how was it for you?
- A I shared with the group what a lonely, painful journey it had been for me. In dealing with this whole gay issue. And how frightened I was. It was, again, I felt in that group that I had support and a lot of people perhaps could identify with my position easier than they could with John's.
- Q M-hm.
- A So, I didn't feel, I felt accepted and I felt that a lot of good things came out of that for me. In again affirming me as well as affirming John. And I needed the affirmation because I think on part of, a lot of my journey, I've compared myself with John and found myself less than as I judged it and not as informed, not as verbal, whatever. And so it was good to get to the place say where, "Hey, I don't have to compete or compare, or myself with him or try to control him in bringing to him where it's comfortable for me." So that was a very powerful experience where we felt it was okay to share this stuff with other people, when you knew you were with a counsellor a group that was empathetic and loving. Or confronting or whatever was needed.
- Q Yeah.
- A So that was part of the stuff that was important. So I don't know what other stuff I've got here that could be shared.
- Q Do you want to wrap up now or is there anything else you'd like to share?
- A Not that I can think of right now. All I can say it's the best thing that ever happened to us. The most painful. But it opened doors to doing just that, getting in touch with my own power. And I needed that and I continue to need that and work on it.
- Q Yeah.
- A It's a major shift. Some of the women asked what about your sexuality? So what does it mean to you? And in our support group for wives of gays, we did have a facilitator with us, a counsellor, and in that group she says, "Looking around this group", she said, "I feel there's one thing you all need, and she said I don't know how comfortable you are with your own sexuality."
- Q M-hm.
- A And you know we're all at different levels certainly there. So she suggested one book we all read, we can do what we want to with it, and that was on masturbation. Sounds so basic and so simple. But I think that she was right on. Because for years I've laid my expectation on John to meet my needs and that I would meet his. Again, not verbally expressed or anything. So that made it a more complete sort of thing when we felt comfortable with masturbation. Comfortable with talking about it or being part of who we really are. And I was not interested in looking for another relationship, because my primary relation still is John. So, and like I say right now, there's no other age or place in my journey I'd rather be.
- Q It's nice to see the smile on your face, yeah.

A It's amazing that you have to go through those depths to really be able to experience and feel whole.

Q M-hm. I understand from a different way, but the same sort of struggle.

A Yeah, I believe you do. And it's easy to share with you because you've gone through some of this sort of confusion, testing and questioning and wondering where do I go from here, who am I? What do I want?

Q Who has the answer?

A It's got to come from here. Everyone is different.

Appendix F
Tables of Analyses

Table 1

First Order Thematic Abstraction of Winny's Experience

Excerpts from Transcribed Interview	Paraphrases	Themes
1. . . . now certainly he was gay prior to that, and I know over time, there was something quite fitting in the relationship, but I couldn't put my finger on it.	Experience a vague sense of something "amiss" in the relationship	Awareness of something out of place in relationship
2. And he said, "I've got something I want to share with you." And he said, "I just want to tell you that I'm homosexual." And I said, "Oh, I don't know what that is."	Lack of knowledge about homosexuality following spouse's disclosure.	Lack of awareness of homosexuality.
3. Now I don't know if it's some kind of disease or something. And I'm, it didn't bother me because we were working with a psychiatrist and I think even John mentioned that night, that he said hey, there's nothing to worry about, we'll pray about this and you'll be healed from this. And so I wasn't worried, I wasn't concerned, I was surprised that John was making such a big thing of it.	As a result of psychiatric help and religious beliefs, she is unconcerned about husband's disclosure yet surprised by his strong reaction to his disclosure.	Outside sources provide security; surprised by husband's strong reaction.
4. And, as you know, I come from a very strong fundamentalist background, and for me conforming to family values and church values were a priority. So again this was kind a value thing and it was something we believed in, so I hung on to that. For years	Conformity to conservative church and family values were main approach to life.	Strong adherence to fundamentalist values central to worldview.

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| 5. | <p>And I felt in a way that he was more important than I was, and that made me a little anxious and envious, I got to thinking why don't they deal with the total situation – instead of just him, and I knew he was prying about the homosexual issues. Because he was a specialist in that area. Again, not fully understanding why it was such a big deal.</p> | <p>Experienced feelings of jealousy and being ignored as husband's homosexuality became primary focus of concern rather than the impact of disclosure on her or the marriage.</p> | <p>Sense that she was an outsider in an issue that affected her.</p> |
| 6. | <p>And not to work on any of my needs. Which was a need for intimacy and acceptance.</p> | <p>Recognition of the lack of attention to her unmet needs for intimacy and acceptance.</p> | <p>Recognition of unmet needs.</p> |
| 7. | <p>Perhaps a bit confused, because I admit I wasn't that much in touch with my own feelings. I knew in my head that there was stuff going on. I knew it was pretty heavy stuff and it was a little upsetting, and again behind it all was that belief that this will do it. Whatever it is, it's going to work and, you know, there are no more problems. We were certainly sexually involved, we had our intimacy and everything was marvelous for me.</p> | <p>Experience confusion between discomfort over her neglected emotions and her belief and hope in a solution; sexual intimacy remains satisfying for her.</p> | <p>Difficulty reconciling unmet needs and beliefs and hopes for a solution.</p> |
| 8. | <p>Again, it wasn't really confronting, wasn't bothersome to me until it got to the place where John was quite involved with some of the groups in the city.</p> | <p>Husband's increased involvement in gay community is seen as confrontational and bothersome.</p> | <p>Troubled by husband's increased contact with gay community.</p> |
| 9. | <p>And they were certainly good toward to me, I didn't feel any judgment. But I was – how did I feel about them, I felt angry. I felt left out, and I felt really upset about not being a part of whatever was going on, because I couldn't quite again, identify with it all.</p> | <p>Though she sensed an openness from her husband's gay friends, she felt isolated and angry.</p> | <p>Alone in a crowd.
Misfit / Alien.</p> |
| 10. | <p>And I remember once, since I was in sales, I was around one afternoon purposely just brochuring so I wouldn't have to be here at the house . . . I just felt like I wanted to run. I felt like, that this was something behind it all was pushing us apart. It would begin to, but that was just kind of the beginning and the groups continued.</p> | <p>Avoiding home was easier than confronting husband's homosexuality and separation fears.</p> | <p>Flee't from threatening situation.</p> |

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| 11. | And although I was nice, and I tend to – growing up being nice, and I know that really gets in the way. I was really uncomfortable. It was almost – I mean it was all male that night. | Experience discomfort when socializing with husband's gay friends, yet remains congenial. | Keeping up appearances. Discrepancy between feelings and action. |
| 12. | I saw John's excitement and enthusiasm about it all. Maybe that's also something that made it difficult to kind of accept where they were coming from. | Husband's pleasure over gay affiliations increased her difficulty in accepting his gay friends. | Hard to accept husband's enthusiasm and gay friends. |
| 13. | And then I got to the place where I was getting a little involved with a gay church group and got to know them individually. And a lot of the meetings were held at one of the, they were parents of a lesbian woman, and it was held out in their place and I felt, you know, they're very – a wonderful group. I got to know them as individuals and I knew them as individuals and even as a group they weren't scary and it helped and took some of my fear away just to get to know them. And also at that point there were more and more women becoming involved. | Fear about homosexuality diminishes with contact with religious gay organizations, parents of gays and more women. | Elements more familiar to her (i.e. religion, parents, women) are found in gay community and this reduces her fear. |
| 14. | I loved the people that were gathering, I think at first when I started to get involved I kept saying, "You know, here I am, the only. . . (heterosexual)". I wasn't though there because the other couple were also homosexual / heterosexual, and all the rest were homosexual people. | Perception that she is the only member of a heterogeneous couple is shattered. | Awareness of others in similar situation decreases her isolation. |
| 15. | But I still thought of myself as me and them. Which is certainly changed because that no longer fits but at that point again I felt very alone and somehow confused in that I didn't always understand their cracks and their jokes that were going back and forth. | Experience a lack of connection with gay contacts; confused by inability to relate and feelings of aloneness. | Alienation from homosexuals as a group. |

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| 16. | Again, sometimes I got really tired of just always talking about the gay issue and the homosexual issue. Although they had said that, hey, that you know, we're a total person, but they did dwell so much on sexuality and the partners being together, and often times it was an issue that they were representing in, you know, in their legislature or something like that, so I can understand that. | Experiences gay issue and sexuality as a constant and tiring focus; understanding of political needs of gays. | No relief from husband's orientation and interests. Perceives need for gay political action. |
| 17. | And for me too, I was hung up often times thinking of the sexuality part and not taking that person as a whole person, just as who they are. So it was - that caught my way particularly in the beginning. | Initially focused primarily on sex and sexuality of a gay person rather than on whole individual. | Gay individual reduced to sexual acts. |
| 18. | Because I remember it was after Mel shared that I had the courage to share and again there were women here that night too. I said, "Well, Mel, I feel alone, but in a different way. And I don't know any other wives of gays, and although I know you accept me just as I am and I really - I accept and appreciated each one of you. And I said, "I've got to find somebody that I can share with so they know how I'm feeling". And I now that night I broke down and cried in the group. And there was really love and caring there that was just really touched me. | Others shared pain encourages her to share loneliness; feels other's acceptance and caring. | A shared burden is a lighter burden. |
| 19. | But it was important to share because I think it's a lot of stuff that I had stuffed for a while. I'm really not - I'm with you, but I'm really not one of you. And so it was good to share that and to trust that to that group. | Awareness of importance of expressing feeling and sharing of her alienation; trust in other's responses. | Release of pent up alienation and courage to be honest. |
| 20. | I think mainly that I felt very alone. Loneliness was a big key thing because there was this strong support group with John, and a group I had come to know and I've accepted them, we gave each other hugs and everything as they came and went. But I had felt they didn't know who I was. They didn't know anything about my pain. There was no fear at that point it was more a feeling separate, more a feeling. | Experience separation when feeling lonely and misunderstood in a gay support group. | Loneliest when expect to be the closest; unexpected alienation. |

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| 21. | Then we gradually (that was maybe a little later) became involved with the Metropolitan Community Church. Again, which is a gay church. And out of that was a cell group and we met every week, and there were two women and maybe five guys in the group. And everybody shared very personally – so I felt in that group, whether we were on a topic or talking individually about ourselves, there were just no barriers. It was marvelous. And later, that group was very significant for me | Important deep connection is formed through sharing and openness with gay church group. | Personal, genuine connection with others is vital. |
| 22. | . . . in January of '87 he began planning for a trip and that was going to be five weeks away from home. And John and I have always done things together. And particularly on a, you know, chunk of time like that. And that became very, very, scary and threatening to me. | Experiences intense fear and feels threatened when husband plans extended vacation alone; previously they had always made these plans together. | Fear of separation. Threat of losing husband. |
| 23. | For me the first part was scary from January 'til May. He was planning his trip on his own. It was the secrecy of it that frightened me. Like he would spend a lot of time getting information on a gay bed and breakfasts and hostels and contacts with people and as you know, there's a lot of personal ads that people send out, you know, looking for partner, looking for a friend. The secrecy of that scared me. Because I didn't know, for sure whether he was going to go looking for a partner or if he just wanted to get away from me. | Husband's secrecy about his trip plans and pursuit of male contacts frightens her. She experiences uncertainty about the reasons for his trip. Is he pursuing someone else or rejecting her? | Secrecy and lack of communication in marriage engenders fear and uncertainty. |
| 24. | And also at that point he had condoms, he was picking up condoms, granted he was involved with AIDS awareness. But I thought, "Oh, come on now, why does he need a condom? Just because he didn't take a condom in his pocket when he was a kid in school, why would he carry it around now?" That really frightened me. | Unable to find reasons other than gay sex for husband to carry condoms; frightened by husband's apparent gay sexual intentions. | Experiences fear when confronted with proof of husband's gay sexual interest. |
| 25. | And that was kind of the beginning of a fear that evolved into a panic while he was away. . . | Experience of fear while husband plans trip evolves into panic during the trip. | Panic at separation from husband. |

26. And that trip in my mind was just enormous. And I think . . . but looking back on my life it was a big shift in my life, a shift from a regular church situation to more a commitment in a gay church. A shift in our relationship, because John wanted to get away and be on his own and think through his own thoughts and stuff. And also at that point he was gathering up more and more gay literature and gay magazines, and books; very intimate sort of stuff he was reading. So more and more I felt kind of pushed aside.
- Husband's trip alone invoked a major change in her life: a changed commitment from traditional church to gay church, a changed with relationship with husband as he chose to be on his own and collected gay sexual material. She experienced rejection as a result of his extra-marital interests.
- With husband's trip came a concurrent shift in religious affiliation (less traditional) and a shift in the relationship (John more focused on self). Experiences rejection.
27. Major stuff was fear of maybe working toward separateness. Again, redefining my identity, you know. . . . After he left, I felt well, "Who am I?" you know as a wife, as a mother, as a homemaker, whatever. . . . I kept asking myself well, "Who am I? Where am I going? Why am I here? What's going on?"
- Remembers a strong fear of separation with husband's absence coupled with redefining her identity. Experiences confusion over who she is without her husband.
- Without husband she experiences a loss of self-definition and identity crisis.
28. I felt I know the day that he left from here, he was so excited about going. And I yelled at him at the door just as he left, through tears, "I too shall live!" And I was so fearful, I was just almost frozen. But it was gutty stuff that I had to get at. And I knew that. And the whole thing kind of locked me up, my stomach was tight, my throat was tight as it's feeling right now.
- Strong physical response; husband's actions are seen as threatening her life/self-definition; recognition of need for self-examination.
- She fights to survive her loss of self-definition.
29. I guess maybe at that point I felt abandoned, you know. Like he had rejected with me, he didn't want to take me on the trip. "What's wrong with me?" I really hit the victim stage in every level of tears and poor me, and blaming, and angry at John and worried and a lot of illusions about what he would be doing, and who he would be with and where he'd be. And again, seeing myself in this house alone. And that didn't feel very comfortable.
- Remembers blaming husband for abandoning and rejecting her, experiences fear when imagining husband's activities while he is away and discomfort with being alone.
- Blamed husband for her feelings for abandonment and rejection. Felt victimized by husband's actions.

30. At that point I had a marvelous workshop, a personal growth workshop. And somebody in that group said, "Winnie, why do you keep giving away your power?" That's very familiar to me now but it wasn't then. And I thought, "What do you mean, giving away my power?" And basically really confronting me about taking responsibility for myself. And there was a need for that because I had leaned on John and depended on John to always be there. And that's just not life
- Introduced to the concept of personal power and confronted with her dependence on husband and her need for self-responsibility, now recognizes that there was a need for change.
- Invited to shift her life definition to include more self-reliance and less reliance on husband.
31. So again -- like I was reevaluating my whole life. I really went through my own little death at that time, during the period he was away and I know there was some times it hit it was even worse than others.
- Husband's trip encouraged her self-examination and feelings of death and loss of her previous way-of-being in the world.
- Experiences a death of her past world-view as she reevaluates her life.
32. . . . John phoned from the west coast at one point, and he had gone to a park with a male friend whom he had just met, but I think they were very close. And decided to phone me from the park from some special booth or place there where a lot of stuff was going on. And he said, "Would you like to speak to Jason?" Jason spoke to me too. And I got off the phone and my legs felt like jelly, I felt totally weak, my whole body felt like it was going to fall apart. I wept and cried and again overwhelming fear and feeling so alone, you know. Really, really abandoned.
- Experiences fear, abandonment and weakened body state when confronted with husband's gay liaison on his trip.
- Intense panic, abandonment and physical reaction when confronted with husband's gay liaison.
33. So through that process I found that I would to bed at night and I'd get to the place where I'd just lie in bed naked and wrap my arms around myself to hold my body together. Because I felt like I was just, I couldn't take anything anymore. I felt like it was the end of the world.
- Sense that her whole world is falling apart; she is at the end; uses physical expression to hold body and soul together.
- Uses physical means to express and relate to her sense of her broken world.

34. I lost about ten pounds over that period of time. And I didn't know who to share with. And, but John did keep up phoning and calling. But every time he called I was kind of, again had this illusion or visualization of all the terrible things he'd be doing, you know. . . . I would assume stuff like some of the men's bath's, bath houses, some intimacy with one or two individuals and just really losing it, as any connection with me and the family. Scary, Yeah! And that was my perception of what was going on. Which was way off, you know, I understand. But still, as far I was concerned it was real. . . . So that hit a spot so deep in my belly, I have never before experienced such a depth of pain.
- Weight loss mirrors her lack of opportunity to share; she is haunted by visualizations of husband's sex acts and assumes he is disconnected from her and the family; experiences profound emotional pain on a physical level
- Experiences concurrent weight loss and inability to share; feels profound pain when imagining husband's gay sexual contacts and assumes he loses connection to his family/her.
35. . . . then I remember one day I was down with her just on the verge of working through stuff and she called to her secretary and she said, "Hold anyone that's coming in, Winny needs another hour. And it was a real break-through for me. Really getting to my anger, my resentment, my pain, bitterness, just so much garbage down there.
- Counseling provides a needed opportunity to connect with and express her anger, resentment and fear.
- Outside help provides an important opportunity to express difficult emotions.
36. And then I came home and I was the only one at the house, so I went downstairs with a broomstick and a pillow and I tell you I really went to work and got a lot of that anger out that had been building up and tied in with all this fear that was going on. . . . anger and fear had really crippled me. And it helped to loosen up. More about dealing with myself as a whole person instead of just blaming, although the blaming was there for quite awhile.
- Experiences a sense of personal wholeness after physically "acting out" her anger and fear; still feels a lot of blame.
- Sensation of anger and fear as crippling is released with physical expression; blaming remains.
37. Blaming definitely went with the anger and I wasn't assuming responsibility. There was a lot of blame toward John. Feeling that, you know, we should be doing this together. . .
- Sees herself as having lacked personal responsibility and feeling blame and anger with husband for his independence from her.
- Now feels her anger and blame were a result of her lack of personal responsibility.

38. . . . our sexuality was another thing. We had not been sexually involved for maybe 10 or 12 years. And even at that time 10 or 12 years prior to that, John just felt like he was not performing and that he didn't want to carry on. But I still felt rejected when he said, "hey you know, we're not going to carry on sexually when we feel like its not being fulfilling." And I said, "Well its been good for me." But it wasn't for him.
- Despite lack of sexual intimacy with John, she felt rejection when he openly refused any further sexual contact; she had been satisfied with their earlier sexual intimacy
- Explicit realization of finality of husband's decision to abstain from marital sex
39. And somehow even then, I assumed blame. I assumed that somehow or other there could have been something I can do to make things better....Yeah keep our relationship intimate and meaningful.
- Sense of self-blame that could have kept the relationship sexually intimate and meaningful.
- Blames self for loss of marital intimacy.
40. But that (self-blame) was all tied in with judging the relationship as not being adequate or not being normal, whatever for me.
- Believes that self-blame grew out of her definition of a 'typical' relationship.
- Self-blame for lack of a 'normal' marriage.
41. And then when John came back from this trip we went to the couples group one night, and at the couple group he shared there that he was intimately involved on this trip. And I just fell apart. . . It was the night when some of the couples really went into the woodwork, disappeared all together and it was the women who came forward and I know I had a woman on either side of me that were very, very supportive. And they were also supportive to John, which was good. And finally, the group came around and supported each one of us. But again, it was good to fall apart in the trusting group. Very loving and very warm.
- Shares extreme pain of husband's infidelity with couple's group; both find connection, support and acceptance.
- Sharing pain with accepting friends can lighten even the heaviest burden.
42. I lived working in sales at the time, and I guess it was my highest income for an average of any month over the 14 years I had been in sales. But it was simply that I had to keep my mind off of all of it. I was working like crazy. . .
- Hard work increases her income and diverts her attention from home.
- Uses hard work to avoid home situation.

43. ... also there were a time or two, I met for breakfasts too with one or two women that I know well enough that I could share this with. And I'd have breakfast with them and I'd go to work afterwards. And it really helped to share a little bit of that pain. Again, it was people that didn't know exactly where I was coming from. And that helped take some of the loneliness away from it.
- Guarded sharing portions of her story with friends removes some of her loneliness.
- Careful sharing helped ease loneliness.
44. I was making the assumption -- again, it was partly true. John's always been able to reach out and find lots of friends. And I'd sort of been telling myself, I have to go find my own friends, my own groups, and I was sort of saying I didn't have any friends. And I did, but I just was so blind to seeing any hope anywhere.
- Remembers most of her friends were shared with her husband; felt she must make some of her own friends and did yet unable to see any hope in this.
- Needed and made her own friends yet remained feeling hopeless.
45. ... hopeless was a very strong feeling. Weak and hopeless and felt -- I had somehow read in my mind I couldn't see anything other than separateness.
- Thoughts of separateness left her feeling very hopeless and weak.
- Felt hopeless and powerless when facing life alone.
46. Separateness didn't fit after 42-43 year at that time. And I thought, jeez, you know, "How was I going to face the world alone? How am I going to endure it? And I didn't know.
- After years of marriage, separation seemed unmanageable and unsurvivable; she lacked knowledge about how to go on alone.
- After lengthy marriage, lacked knowledge about how to endure alone.
47. So from there when he did come back from his trip, we went for a trip down to Portland. And I think I cried most of the way down, most of the way back and part of the time there. And again, he couldn't understand and I said, "Well, you know, things are going to be different, just not the same." I was still living on that trip that we were going to go our separate -- actually I don't know whether I told him, but I know I had in my journal, that this is probably our last trip together. And I really thought, yeah, this is it. So it was a death.
- Perceived joint holiday after husband's return as a final act together; this initiates a grieving process over the expected death of the relationship.
- Grief over recognition of change in relationship and anticipated total loss of the relationship.
48. That whole process was a real death of what we had, it was a death of the togetherness and more or less having to face myself. Which I think I've always avoided. And so it was a major shift all the way around.
- Recognition of major life changing process in the relationship; a loss of togetherness evoked a deep self-examination that she had avoided.
- Realization of separation forces self-examination.

49. I think part of being nice was you never showed any anger, or confronted anybody, never put anybody down. Always accept – the other person always came first. And I – that's still one of my tendencies, I can do that even in a women's group I'm in now. I think, "Okay, how can I express something without being really open and honest about it?" (rhetorical) So there's a little fear of being really open. Being nice. Which really turns me off. Bit it – I think – again, it comes out of a home background, and a church background, where you felt like everybody had a big smile on and was always nice and always – they weren't going to cause any waves.
- Expresses a distaste for her current and past tendency to be congenial – suppress anger and avoid confrontation; being "nice" partially masks a fear of openness and partially reflects religious and family upbringing.
- Though personally unacceptable her tendency to avoid confrontation and anger reflect a fear of openness and early socialization.
50. . . . When John came back again, the issue kept coming up of, "Where to we go from here?" And the gay issue kept getting in the way. . .
- On husband's return unclear about the direction the relationship should take; gay issues are persistent and unavoidable.
- Husband's gayness clouds any obvious direction for marital relationship.
51. I know at that point John had started to have a special friend. . . And John would go over there and see him and I was resenting it more and more, angry about it. And really, really pissed off, feeling like again somebody else comes before I do. Or that this wasn't really a monogamous relationship anymore with me.
- Husband's gay sexual partner leaves her intensely angry, feeling unimportant and aware of the loss of their monogamous marriage
- Intense anger over husband's extramarital sexual activity.
52. And I guess I wanted some assurance from John that we would be – we would try to work this out, that we would stay together, I don't know what all it was, but John – the one thing John was asking for was one night a week to be out until 11 o'clock in a very intimate personal relationship with Don. And again, I was crying my eyes out through the thing. Fear again, keeps coming back. A lot of fear.
- Both partners identify "bottom line" expectations for the relationship. Though very fearful, she wants a commitment from John to stay together, John wants one night out per week for gay personal and sexual intimacy.
- She identifies her need for his commitment to the relationship, and is fearful. He identifies need for outside gay contact.

53. And John would go over to Don's and I know any time he was over there, I would try to phone other friends, perhaps women from the Wives' Support Group, perhaps friends I knew or doing some reading, and then when he did come home, a time or two I was screaming and yelling at him, I was very angry. I said, "What as I supposed to say when you come back home? What am I supposed to do? Am I supposed to say, 'You had a good evening?'" And so I was very resentful, very, very angry at him.
- Attempts to remain distracted while husband is on gay "dates"; experiences strong anger and resentment on husband's return.
- Needs distraction while husband with other man; experiences anger and resentment when he returns home.
54. The counsellor helped negotiate with us that John would be out one evening a week, and maybe occasionally for a weekend that he could be out with his friends. And if any of that became too difficult or too painful for me, he would - John promised that, he said, "You can come first" and that he would, you know, cancel that out if it was too heavy going. So I appreciated that, but he kept saying he loved me and I didn't believe it.
- Couple negotiate one night per week for husband's gay "dates" - if she identifies this as too painful, he will discontinue; she appreciates his consideration of her feelings yet his repeated enunciations of love for her are met with disbelief.
- Appreciates husband's apparent caring, and willingness to negotiate; cannot believe that he loves her.
55. And I remember one day, I said, "I've just had enough of it. I want you to get out." And he was very calm and quiet about it. He's been very patient with me. He said, "Well I'm not moving". I said, "You're sure as hell not moving!" So, you know, we were kind of at that point saying, "Here's where we are. We don't like what we've got so we're not changing right now" . . . So we decided we'd sleep in different bedrooms, which was good. Which was really good. He had taken his ring off when he went on this trip, which was another threatening thing to me.
- Both dissatisfied with relationship, yet refuse to move out of the marital home; decision to sleep in separate rooms felt positive; his decision to remove his wedding band felt threatening.
- Attempt to accommodate changing marital relationship; some changes felt good, some changes were threatening.
56. And just moving into another bedroom really helped. I had my own space. He had his own space, his own things, his own pictures of gay males and so forth, which he's got in his room right now. But it's not a threat to me any more. And he's got his own little toys and stuff for his own, you know, experimentation or whatever. And I've got my space. So that's -- that worked very well.
- Felt moving to own bedroom helped as they each had their own space; and John could explore his sexual interests privately; now aware that she no longer finds this threatening.
- Separate bedrooms allow each partner private space; she no longer finds this threatening.

57. And I think, it was – whether it was after that or just when it was, I know I decided to take my ring off as well. I thought, "Hey, I don't need that." Because ours is more of a Platonic relationship now. And I think we'd gotten away from even giving each other a hug and a kiss when we headed off to work or out of the house. You know, we'd give each other a little hug perhaps we're going away for a week otherwise we don't have any affectionate sort of responses like that. We know the caring, the togetherness is there.
58. So it was a process again after that of working through a co-dependency. . . . Again, I kind of felt at first I was just dependent on him. But then I got to thinking, "Hey, that's partly right, but it goes both ways." So it was more of a co-dependency and again that was scary thing, a different measure of a scary thing to look at because basically it was searching for my own personal identity as an individual. Rather than being a couple. And in trying to figure out how do we break this, how do I break this co-dependency thing, where we keep getting hooked on what the other person chooses to do or where they are going, or what they are doing.
59. And it became even more frightening when John's personal close relationship changed from Don to a fellow by the name of Barry. Barry also was a guy who had not come out of the closet. He was a businessman and John wasn't just sexually with him, but was beginning to really fall in love. So even he himself realized that, "Hey, you know, do I want this to go in this direction?" And again it was frightening, but also I realized and was more prepared to looking into this co-dependency and saying, trying to get in touch with my own power, my own strength
- Removal of her wedding ring and lack of physical affection reflect an acceptance of marriage as a Platonic relationship; perceives marriage as continued caring and togetherness.
- Initially saw herself as dependent on John, then realized his dependence on her, found this frightening because she was searching for a personal identity rather than as a couple; unsure how to break co-dependency and their established power over one another.
- Acceptance of Platonic marriage; continued bond of caring and companionship.
- Realization of a co-dependency, frightened by search for own personal identity.
- Fear of husband's close relationship with another man engenders desire to reduce her dependence on him.
- Experienced greater fear when husband began to fall in love with a new gay lover rather than merely engaging in gay sex. She experienced an increased desire to break her dependence on his activity and access her own power.

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| 60. | <p>More of my own stuff. And I had groups I was meeting with that was not the same as John met with and that was freeing John up a bit more. Again it was a slow process of getting the place where it was okay for him to go to Lunch Theater with his friend, or to go to a movie and it was okay for me to go to BC., if my friend was going down there and so some of the fear was going and let go, like it was a matter – tied in with that was a matter of control. And I think my fear was controlling myself, my own feelings, but also trying to control John and what he had chosen to do.</p> | <p>Describes process of decreasing dependency on one another, each partner now spends more time on own activities; sees her fear as controlling her in the past and trying to control John. Her fear now is decreased.</p> | <p>Perceives lessened co-dependency in relationship; experience her past fear as controlling her and trying to control John; less afraid now.</p> |
| 61. | <p>And then I guess maybe it was two or three years ago when he shared with a couples groups that hey, he had chosen not to be involved any more with Barry and Don in a very. . . personal way, that he felt like – what he really wanted was just personal sharing in a men's group. Whether it's gay or straight men, or whatever. But that's what he really wanted. (And I may be right or not, but I assume that perhaps he wasn't – he was kind of impotent in some of those relationships. . . .) But it took a lot of the pressure off of me just to know that he was not intimately involved with somebody. So I was more relaxed with where I was at.</p> | <p>John shares with couple's friends his decision to discontinue sexual contact with gay friends; Winny experiences relief that he is no longer intimately involved with others.</p> | <p>Husband's decision to discontinue gay sexual contact is experienced as relief by wife.</p> |
| 62. | <p>It's the best thing that ever happened to us. The most painful.</p> | <p>Summarizes experience as extremely painful, but important</p> | <p>Growth through difficulty</p> |
| 63. | <p>I shared with the group what a lonely, painful journey it had been for me. In dealing with this whole gay issue. And how frightened I was.</p> | <p>Experience has been lonely, painful and frightening.</p> | <p>Impact of homophobia on her life.</p> |
| 64. | <p>It was, again, I felt in that group that I had support and a lot of people perhaps could identify with my position easier than they could with John's.</p> | <p>Sharing provides more support for her than for husband.</p> | <p>Homophobia makes identification with her position easier than with husband's.</p> |

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| 65. | <p>... I felt accepted and I felt that a lot of good things came out of that for me. In again affirming me as well as affirming Tom. And I needed the affirmation because I think on part of, a lot of my journey, I've compared myself with John and found myself less than as I judged it and not as informed, not as verbal, whatever. And so it was good to get to the place say where, "Hey, I don't have to compete or compare, or myself with him or try to control him or bring myself to him where it's comfortable for me." So that was a very powerful experience where we felt it was okay to share this stuff with other people, when you knew you were with a counsellor a group that was empathetic and loving.</p> | <p>Group work and professional help provided support and understanding she needed for her own adjustment; had felt less adequate than husband</p> | <p>Sharing boosted her self-confidence and enhanced sense of own abilities; sharing discouraged her unfavourable comparison to husband.</p> |
| 66. | <p>It (this experience) opened doors to doing just that, getting in touch with my own power. And I needed that and I continue to need that and work on it.</p> | <p>Experience provided opportunity for important personal growth</p> | <p>Experience vital role in personal growth</p> |
| 67. | <p>And in our support group for wives' of gays, we did have a facilitator with us, a counsellor, and in that group she says, "Looking around this group," she said, "I feel there's one thing you all need," and she said, "I don't know how comfortable you are with your own sexuality."</p> | <p>Professional recognition of the importance of heterosexual partners' sexuality</p> | <p>Discomfort yet importance of own sexuality</p> |
| 68. | <p>So she suggested one book we all read, we can do what we want with it, and that was on masturbation. Sounds so basic and so simple. But I think that she was right on. Because for years I laid my expectation on John to meet my needs and that I would meet his. Again, not verbally expressed or anything. So that made it a more complete sort of thing when we felt comfortable with talking about it or being part of who we really are.</p> | <p>Masturbation as a means of meeting own needs rather than implicitly expecting reciprocal satisfaction with husband; recognition of sex as a part of a wholesome self</p> | <p>Masturbation as recognition of importance of own sexuality and avenue to reduce co-dependency</p> |
| 69. | <p>And I was not interested in looking for another relationship, because my primary relationship still is John. So, and like I say right now, there's no other age or place in my journey I'd rather be.</p> | <p>Husband is still most important relationship and no regrets about her chosen life.</p> | <p>Heterogenous relationship is a satisfying choice now.</p> |

70. It's amazing that you have to go through those depths to really be able to experience and feel whole . . . And it's easy to share with you because you've gone through some of this sort of confusion, testing and questioning and wondering where do I go from here? Who am I? What do I want? . . . It's got to come from here (pointing to self). Everyone is different.
- Recapitulates the existential questions she faced; emphasis that answers must come from within; ease of sharing story with researcher with similar experience.
- Only soul searching can answer the hard existential questions that this experience raises; sharing a common story is easier.

Table 2**First Order Thematic Clusters of Winny's Experience**

First Order Clusters	Cluster Description
<p>1. Conservative family of origin and early married life</p> <p>(2, 3, 4, 13, 40)</p>	<p>Winny's family background is Christian fundamentalist. This cluster highlights the influence of her conservative church and family values as they influenced how she chose to cope with John's disclosure.</p>
<p>2. Alien in a gay culture</p> <p>(9, 15, 17, 20)</p>	<p>Winny experienced strong feelings of alienation when attempting to associate with her husband's gay friends and social groups. This cluster describes instances where Winny had difficulty making a personal connection with John's gay contacts.</p>
<p>3. Fear of separation evokes feelings of anger, abandonment, rejection and loss</p> <p>(25, 26, 29, 32, 34, 38, 47, 51, 53)</p>	<p>Winny had a strong emotional response to her husband's increasing involvement in a gay sub-culture and his emotional separation from her. His lack of focus and attention on the marriage in addition to his extramarital gay interests evoked feelings of anger, abandonment, rejection and loss.</p>
<p>4. Self-blame</p> <p>(39, 40)</p>	<p>At times, Winny attempted to find someone responsible for the emotional pain she was experiencing. This cluster highlights the responsibility she took for her husband's gay activities. She felt as though she had failed both him and the marriage.</p>
<p>5. Growing inability to escape the gay issue either cognitively or physically</p> <p>(1, 8, 12, 16, 17, 24, 50)</p>	<p>John's increasing involvement in gay social, sexual and support settings increased Winny's contact with the gay sub-culture as well. The many ways in which Winny was in constant contact with both gay sub-culture and John's increasing interest in gay activities is contained within this cluster.</p>

6. **Feelings of separation and loss lead to identity crisis**
(27, 28, 31, 44, 45, 46, 48)

Winnie experienced a strong panic response when faced with the possibility of leading life alone. This cluster delineates Winnie's existential struggle against loss and isolation.
7. **Awakening self-awareness**
(5, 6, 7, 11, 37, 49, 66, 67, 69, 70)

Working through the implications of John's disclosure leads Winnie to gradually become more aware of her needs and emotions. Included in this cluster are references that she makes to her level of self-awareness and openness.
8. **Sharing her experience as a way of coping and learning about herself**
(14, 18, 19, 21, 35, 41, 43, 65)

Winnie expressed a strong desire to share her story throughout the text. This cluster contains her references to attempts she made to share her story and the feelings and thoughts that this elicited.
9. **Physical activities as coping responses**
(10, 33, 36, 42)

At times, Winnie appeared to be overwhelmed by her situation and would use a physical response to cope. This cluster contains elements of Winnie's experience that highlight her increased physical activities as coping responses.
10. **Limited marital communication**
(23, 38, 54, 55)

Marital communication was not a strong focus during Winnie's interview. This may be because at times their communication seemed to be limited and strained. This cluster, then, includes direct references that Winnie makes regarding communication between John and herself and meaning units that may highlight the limited and strained nature of their communication throughout this experience.

11. Increased individuality and independence
(30, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 62, 68)

Following the identity crisis which Winny identifies, she describes her feelings of increased independence and individuality. She had experienced a shift in her marriage relationship. She no longer felt as dependent on John as she had earlier in the marriage. This cluster includes descriptions of her process of increased independence and change within the marital relationship.

12. Lack of support and misunderstanding
(43, 63, 64)

Winny found it difficult to identify supportive individuals following John's disclosure. This cluster contains themes which highlight her difficulty finding safe opportunities for sharing and individuals who were able to understand her dilemma. It also includes differences in other's reactions to both her and John.

Table 3

First Order Thematic Abstraction of Sandy's Experience

Excerpts from Transcribed Interview	Paraphrases	Themes
1. . . . it was a couple of years before he came out. . . He asked me what I thought of divorce. And I just flipped out, you know, like I was totally against divorce. And he just dropped the topic so I didn't think about it because I couldn't see any reason for divorce.	Strongly against any suggestion of divorce; saw no personal need for it	Strong conviction against divorce
2. But now I think he was testing me out because I found out he was struggling with being gay back then.	Realization that husband's initial talk of divorce was an indication of his gay orientation and a test of her potential reaction to this	With growing awareness of his homosexuality husband, tests her reaction to divorce
3. Then a couple of years later he said we need to talk. So I said, "No matter what the problem was . . . we'd work it out." So the kids were away and that's when he came out. I didn't believe it at first.	Expresses strong commitment to working out marital difficulties; disbelief at disclosure	Expresses deep marital commitment and disbelief at disclosure.
4. They (children) were gone, so we were all by ourselves and that's when he told me about it, and I just couldn't believe it. I just said, you know, "You're kidding!"	Time alone provided opportunity for husband's disclosure; disbelief at disclosure	Husband orchestrated disclosure when alone; reaction disbelief
5. I always knew the homosexuality existed. But I always felt, "Well if that's the way they choose to live, let them live their life."	Cursory awareness of homosexuality; acceptance as a chosen lifestyle	Live and let live philosophy of homosexuality
6. I mean that was a real eye-opener for me. So I basically went into shock. And we stayed together for probably three, four months.	Husband's disclosure brought gay issue close and left her in shock; cohabitation lasted only a few more months	Gay issues impact life so strongly that marriage is in jeopardy almost immediately
7. And that was really hard because I, I don't know, I was trying to put things together, you know, trying to understand it. So I -- it was quite confusing to me	Expresses deep confusion and difficulty over husband's disclosure; unable to make sense of or understand this new information	Husband's disclosure leaves her confused and struggling.
8. And it was him that chose to leave the marriage. He just felt that he needed space and there was no way that it could work if we stayed together. So it wasn't very long that he decided to move out	Husband chose to leave marriage shortly after disclosure citing no way of resolving the marriage and opportunity to give her space	Husband left shortly following disclosure

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| 9. | ... there was so much to deal with because I mean the children came home, and at that time we were still living together, you know, trying, they were quite small actually, they were only five and three when this happened. They really couldn't understand it | Difficult staying together with small children who did not understand | Living together as a family created difficulty following disclosure |
| 10. | It was quite confusing, like I don't know, he took the kids for a while, and I thought that would really help me but decided, no, we couldn't do that. So we had a house together and he was staying with the kids and then I decided okay, that I'd come back and I stayed in the house for a while, I couldn't stay there any more and that was really hard. | Experienced confusion and pain over fluctuating custody arrangement and attempts to reside together. | Adjustments and change in family living arrangements was difficult. |
| 11. | So, you know just discovering a bunch of things. Like he was active while we were married. And I found out later ... pretty devastating. He told me about it because I asked him. | Husband's honesty about extra-marital homosexual activity post-disclosure resulted in great anguish. | Awareness of husband's outside sexual contact caused great distress |
| 12. | Like, I don't know if that was a mistake for me. For me to know that (he'd be sexually active). But it was something that I needed to know and after that, like I had to go for the AIDS test. | Wonders if she would have been less troubled had she not known that her husband was sexually active yet the potential need for AIDS testing required it | Necessity for AIDS testing required knowledge of a husband's sexual activities which troubled her. |
| 13. | My doctor handled it (AIDS testing) really well. Like I just told him my situation and he just suggested that I take the test. And he was really good. He was really good with that. | Found physician helpful when explaining her situation and taking AIDS test | Doctor provided support and AIDS testing |
| 14. | So, at that time too it was really hard because it was so hard to find somebody that could help you. | Experienced difficulty identifying people who could assist and with whom she could share | Emotional support structures not evident |
| 15. | Like I remember going to my parish and asking the priest about, "Where can I go for help to talk to someone about this?" And he had no idea. He had no idea. He just was totally - he didn't know how to handle it, I think. Like he was trying very hard to comfort me and say there's got to be help somewhere. And he said he'd make a few calls and he'd try to get back to me. But, I never heard from him. So obviously he had no idea. | Parish priest appeared concerned yet did not follow up on locating or providing support for her | Local church representative concerned yet unequipped or unprepared to locate additional support |

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| 16. | And I don't have any family here either, so I couldn't talk to any of them. | Distance from family provided further isolation and made sharing difficult | Family support absent |
| 17. | So, that's when the group started, this support group for wives of gay men. It really helped a lot. I was really really glad. | Sharing in support group for wives of gay men was healing and positive | Support of others in a similar situation was important |
| 18. | Excellent (support from other women). Because it's so hard, I mean, have told some friends and to me they still didn't quite understand. And so the group really helped where the women were in the same situation. Knew where I was coming from. | Sharing with friends left her feeling misunderstood; support group provided deeper understanding of her situation | Felt misunderstood by friends; support group provided greater understanding |
| 19. | I think a lot of friends like just totally didn't understand homosexuality. Sure they knew it existed but they just couldn't believe it or didn't want to believe it and it didn't help that they weren't in that situation. So that's when I found that they couldn't really understand. I mean sure they tried to comfort me and whatnot, you know, but it still wasn't very helpful. They were coming out with their views about what they thought of it, they just couldn't believe that this was happening type thing, so. It was like negative opinions. | Friend's ignorance and negative opinions denied a deeper level of support despite their attempts to comfort | Homophobia and ignorance rendered friends of little support |
| 20. | It (friends' opinions) was hard, because then I was starting to believe those negative things about it. | Negative attitudes of friends influenced her perception | Friend's homophobia influenced her thinking |
| 21. | And that's when I decided, well, I've got to learn more about it and I just started reading and through the group we'd come up with a list of the books. A lot of them were hard, really hard to read. But then some of them we found were really good, that were quite helpful. Because you know, you're not only dealing with a separation or a divorce, you're dealing with another issue (homosexuality) that I wasn't very familiar with. | Readings in the support group were painful yet helpful in addressing both separation and homosexuality | Separation and homosexuality concerns began to heal through readings in the group |
| 22. | I didn't understand it (homosexuality). To this day I say I still don't understand it. | Continues to struggle with a clear understanding of homosexuality | Complete understanding of homosexuality seems illusive |

23. But I learned to cope with different things, trying to put things into perspective. Dealing with the separation and all the emotions that you go through, like your denial and your guilt and whatnot . . . For me I think it was the devastation of the marriage breaking up. And I mean I was working full-time so it wasn't really, I didn't think I could not handle it on my own.
- Marital dissolution caused greatest pain, denial, guilt and adjustment; experienced less fear of being alone as she had a job to support herself
- Loss of marriage more difficult than thought of supporting self
24. I think I was more angry with what he had done to the children. That they're not going to have a mom and a dad any more. So that was a big, big issue for me to deal with . . . and I thought well, you know, that was just my belief and the way that I was brought up, you know, and that was totally shattered.
- Angry with husband for creating a broken family for children; destroyed her socialized beliefs in a two parent family
- Struggled with her wish for a two parent family and angry about her new reality
25. So how do I go about doing it? It was a big struggle . . . (My beliefs in a two parent family) came from the upbringing, from my parents. From my brothers and sisters and what they thought. A dream you know.
- Her family of origin had provided her with a dream of a two parent family; she struggled with reconciling this with her own broken family
- Dreamed of a two parent family and uncertain about how to proceed
26. . . . to this day it never dawned on me talking about divorce was his way of telling me (that he was gay) sort of, kind of. And, like I said, I totally flipped out. He didn't come out – like it had been a couple of years before it, you know that had happened. So he still hadn't come out yet.
- Felt that husband's initial talk of divorce had been an attempt at disclosure yet divorce talk had upset her
- Now sees divorce talk as initial attempt at disclosure; a clue
27. So, like I mean, I found out now you know, that he's known all along, And it was just because the way that he was raised too and we were both Catholics, and he said he knew from when he was a teenager that something was different. And I don't know if it had anything to do with – I got pregnant before we got married. And I don't know like with the Catholic background and stuff. That we, you know, talked about it and it was like totally up to us, because his family is not here either. So I mean we made that choice to get married.
- Husband knew of homosexual attractions through puberty; questions whether Catholic background and pre-marital pregnancy affected their decision to marry, yet marriage as a mutual choice with little outside pressure
- Role that husband's orientation, Catholic background and pre-marital pregnancy played are unclear, sees original decision to marry as freely made

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| 28. | So I mean that was the only, only, only thing I could remember. I mean, I think now is -- the kids came along, we both worked different shifts and I took the early morning because he was not a morning person. And he worked the evenings. So I mean we hardly ever saw each other. But I mean that's when he started, you know, . . . (outside sexual contacts) | Husband's extra-marital homosexual contacts began when childrearing and staggered work shifts provided little contact with husband. | Inception of husband's homosexual encounters when marital communication was reduced and family demands were high |
| 29. | . . . knowing at that time when he did tell me that (he was sexually active) I think it made things worse for me . . . like now I would probably say well, I probably wouldn't have wanted to know. . . . I wouldn't have wanted to know. If I could change it now, because I found that was -- it was so hard for me to deal with. | Awareness of husband's outside sexual contacts caused pain; questions whether it would have been better not to know | Pain in awareness of husband's infidelity |
| 30. | Losing the trust and trusting again. That's where your beliefs go back, into your marriage. You've got to be faithful to your partner. | Husband's infidelity lead to difficulty with lost trust and re-establishing trust; her mistrust was linked to her belief in marital fidelity | Husband's infidelity shatters trust |
| 31. | It's tough, you know, going back and thinking about these things again because for me, I've more or less kind of put it on the back burner and said, you know, well it's in the past now. | Expresses difficulty at recalling and discussing these issues from the past; life has moved on | |
| 32. | . . . there's a lot of things, I can say now I'm glad this happened. Because it opened me up so much. As far as, you know, learning things about the marriage. . . | Appreciates the experience as it opened her up to learning more about the marriage | Values the experience as it provided an openness to new perspectives on the marriage |
| 33. | . . . like looking back at things, like for instance communication. It was not very good. And I don't know if the situation that we were in, I guess, worked different shifts, so we hardly saw one another. And we always thought well we were doing this because of the kids so we wouldn't have to, you know, fork out for a baby-sitter type of thing. . . . There's this belief, I didn't like putting them in daycare. I didn't think that was right. It had to be the parent. And I mean we couldn't afford not to both be working, you know. That was just a sacrifice that we were making at the time. | Communication was problematic in relationship due to parents' alternate work schedules as brought on by the desire to keep the children out of daycare | Work and child care commitments contributed to poor communication in the marriage |

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| 34. | But before we had gotten married, we used to communicate. I really found him to be a great friend. We talked about everything and anything. And then that changed. Really changed. The marriage came about and – it changed yeah. I think in a way that we didn't see much of each other. And it was frustrating. So I had suggested, "Well, maybe let's write letters . . . to one another." And let us know how the day went because I mean that was . . . a different way of communicating. | Bonds of deep communication and friendship deteriorated after marriage despite her efforts to increase contact | Strong and open communication declined after marriage despite attempts to enhance communication |
| 36. | But, I don't know, this whole experience it's taught me so much. Can remember telling him that and he wouldn't believe it, like he says how could you say that? . . . I mean there was a lot of guilt for him. | Experience has been an opportunity for a lot of learning; perceives guilt on husband's part | Experience has allowed her to learn; husband feels guilty |
| 37. | But I know that I really pushed him away and I had to deal with it myself. So I more or less blocked him out completely until I got my life together and whatnot. I needed my own space, definitely. | Needed and demanded her own space away from husband to reassemble her life | Time alone to rebuild was important |
| 38. | Certain things that I did, like I had kept my wedding dress and all the rings, the cards from the wedding and it like, totally went in the garbage. And I found that really helpful. To me that was the marriage was over. So that was a good way for me to deal with that. That's when things really got going for me. | To signify the end of the marriage, it was helpful to discard wedding paraphernalia; this also spurred on her "new" life | Discarding symbols of the marriage concretized the end of the relationship and the beginning of a new life |
| 39. | . . . I know that it (disclosure) was very emotional and that I cried a lot. I know that I didn't want to believe it, you know, said that, "This is not true!" "You're lying!" "How can you be? . . . and the issues came up well, "How can you be? Like you've been with me!" Biah, blah blah, you know. It wasn't – it took a long, long time to sink in, and I think it actually didn't sink in until he moved out. | Husband's disclosure was met with disbelief and strong emotions; she had difficulty believing that he was gay because they had had a heterosexual relationship; husband's homosexuality did not seem real until he left | Her own heterosexual relationship with husband left her in long lasting disbelief and pain at his disclosure |
| 40. | Took a long time, and I had to take time off work because I -- I was a transportation worker and I mean I'd be working and all of a sudden I'd start crying. And I know that was not right because I know I had a big responsibility. So I took time off work at that time because I just couldn't deal with it. | Disclosure lead to great emotional distress causing tearful outbursts at work and time off | Extreme pain at husband's disclosure made working difficult or impossible |

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| 41. | I had -- at work we had, what do you call it now, it's a counsellor in a way like, he's there for the employees like if they have any personal problems. You go see him. And that's who I went to. And he helped me a lot. He's gay too. But I didn't know that at the time and he helped a lot. I don't know why I trusted him . . . but he was professional and he knew how to handle it. I think it was good to talk to him and get things out . . . like how I felt. | Found trustworthy, knowledgeable support through a counsellor at work whom she later discovered was homosexual | Found needed support through a homosexual personnel counsellor |
| 42. | . . . like I say it's been put on the back burner, it's really hard to think of exactly your emotions at that time. | Expresses difficulty at remembering the emotions she experienced at that time | Exact emotions from the past are hard to recall |
| 43. | <i>. . . some husbands waffle back and forth on their homosexuality. How was that in your case?</i>

Exactly the way he was. He was confused, you know, and I thought that didn't help me any. Because we got to talking about our relationship. And I can remember saying, "Well how could it be if we have done this?" You know, like, "How can you say you are?" And he struggled with it for a good two years. | Husband's confusion over his own orientation gave her hope in their relationship and confused her about his ability to have had sex with her | Pain and roller coaster of dashed hope over husband's sexual orientation confusion |
| 44. | . . . if I had it my way I would have said, "Get out of my life, I don't want you." I was just ready to pass it on. But because we had children together, and I mean he just loves his boys, you know, so I think him coming over was because of that. And I think we sat down and talked some but not a whole lot. You know he would just come and take the boys or spend time with them and I'd do my own kind of thing. | Torn by her desire to disconnect from her husband and husband's desire to remain in contact with the children through her | Desire for disconnection not met because of commitment to children |
| 45. | It took me the longest time, like he . . . kept saying to me like, "When are you going to understand that we will always have a relationship?" And I says, "No, we won't!" And he says, "Yes, we will because we have children together." And I didn't want, like I was reading different things from him. Like, NO! to me it's like he wanted the best of both worlds here. But that wasn't for me. | Experienced conflict over husband's desire to remain in contact through the children and her demand to cut relationship ties and contact; saw husband attempting to be part of the family in an intrusive way she found unacceptable | Unwilling to accept husband's perceived indecision and relationship demands |

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| 46. | I felt that he wanted – he still wanted the marriage but not really . . . I guess until he came to terms with it himself, that he was still going back and forth. Because, I mean, things came up, I mean he still loved me, but in a different way, and I couldn't see that. | Period of relationship confusion; husband fluctuated in his desire to maintain ties to her - she misunderstood that changed nature of his affections | Confusion and change; husband struggled with leaving - she struggled with his affection |
| 47. | Like I noticed the gay issue was always on my mind and that was all . . . at that time. . . I think the biggest thing for me is that it still pops up, I can't understand the same sex having a relationship. That's always confused me . . . more a sexual relationship. So like I don't know if him telling me that he's been out experimenting that that just totally put me towards that. | Focus on gay sex was constant as she struggled with husband's disclosure of homosexual sex experimentation; it's still difficult to understand | Husband's homosexual involvement caused her thoughts to be focused on homosexual sex |
| 48. | Still to this day on my mind, that's the part that I don't understand. I tried talking to him about being gay and he says well it's just like heterosexuals and their relationship, that's what their relationship is. And that it's not always sex . . . It's not easy, no. I've been trying to block that part out. | Continues to struggle with homosexual sexuality; finds it hard to focus solely on other homosexual relationship factors | Attempts to remove her focus from homosexual sex as it continues to cause her pain |
| 49. | I think it still does. Because there's still certain things that have come up, like he's got a partner now. And they also asked me to take the messages on the answering machine. I said, "Okay, where's the answering machine?" Well I looked around the whole apartment and it was in their bedroom. And I felt really like weird. Like I don't want to go there. I mean that's where visions come in, you know. And I know that I'm still struggling with that. | Ex-husband's homosexual sex is still hurtful; evidence of ex-husband's current sexual relationship conjures sexual visual images that cause pain | Ex-husband's continuing homosexual sex relationship remains painful; struggles with sexual visions

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| 50. | . . . is because of the children that we, you know, remain in contact now. And I know that he sometimes go off and starts getting into talking about their relationship and I'd say, "Hold it. I don't want to hear about this." And I know that I had still been pushing him away, because I can't really talk to him any more. . . I don't want to hear anything that has to do with his partner. You know, like how we used to talk about our relationship. | Demands that contact be with respect to the children only; refuses to engage in his attempts to discuss his current relationship in terms that parallel her experience with him | Restricts contact with ex-husband to matters regarding the children; refuses to discuss his current partner |

51. I don't know if I've completely forgiven. And him just kind of saying, "Well, okay, he wants to keep in touch with the children, so I have to let him do that in his own way. I may not see it as keeping in contact but that's just the way he's doing it."
- Difficult to let go of feeling wronged; feels obliged to let him remain in contact with the children in his chosen manner
- Feels wronged; contact obligatory for the children's sake
52. See we had joint custody, we tried different things . . . So I decided to take full custody. And I never put a speculation on visitation rights – and it was probably just a couple of months ago he came and broke down because he felt that I was not letting him see the children. And I think I finally got through to him that it wasn't me stopping him from seeing the children, he says, "Well, you always keep telling me you don't want anything to do with me." And I says, "Well that's me, that's not with the kids." So – it was hard. It was very hard to make that decision, you know, that he finally got it through, like he kept saying when are you going to understand we'll always have a relationship. But I guess I didn't make things clear enough that I didn't want the relationship with him, but I wouldn't stop him from the children.
- Attempted a variety of custody arrangements; conflict resulted over his continued access to the children and her contention that their personal relationship was over but his relationship with the children could continue
- Conflict over the nature of the couple's relationship and access to the children
53. And I thought that (the official divorce) would really have an effect on me too. But it really didn't. . . Well, you know when it's final, I thought it was going to be really devastating to me. I mean that's just what you hear. I mean I was sad and cried a little bit that day, but the day just came. I don't know if that was another way of saying that yeah, it was over.
- Legal divorce day was met with less sadness than she expected; divorce reinforced the finality of the end of the relationship
- Sadness and recognition of an ending
54. . . . like I say the couple of years that he was still so confused that it wasn't a big deal to go for it (the divorce). . . I think when it finally came about was when the custody was finally settled. I thought, "Okay, well that's the way of making it legal."
- Once husband had settled his sexual orientation question and custody had been settled she wanted to make the divorce legal
- Divorce important only after sexual orientation and custody had both been settled

55. . . . like I mean we weren't managing financially. So the time had come where he thought –he moved back in. I just had a townhouse and three bedrooms. Like one for the boys, one for me and all I could offer him was the basement. And I think this was – he was still going through not knowing if he was for sure (gay). I mean I can remember so many times hearing him cry downstairs. I didn't know how to comfort him. Because I mean I was still dealing with my own things.
- Husband returned to live with the family platonically because of financial difficulty; she would see him in emotional pain but was unable to comfort him because of her own pain
- She witnessed her husband's pain but was unable to reach beyond her own pain to him
56. I think I was more distant. He, I think now, I think that he wanted to work those personal things out between us. But I wasn't ready yet. Yeah, I would say that I wasn't ready yet. Yeah, I would say that I wasn't really there for him.
- Recognizes that she became distant from husband; wanting her own space despite his attempts to finish old personal business
- Needed time away from husband; unable to resolve relationship together
57. . . . then I moved in with a girlfriend, and she had a basement suite. And I think that helped a lot just getting away from the situation. Getting away from the kids, just having that time. So I could deal with it, that's the way that I felt I dealt with it was in that time period. So then he, he stayed in the house and then I moved out and got my own place, and that's when we started with the back and forth with the kids . . . like we worked out all those nitty gritty things . . . I was out on my own then.
- Living alone away from the family helped; it provided the opportunity to make custody and household arrangements
- Time alone was healing and provided the opportunity to make separation arrangements
58. Being alone was actually a good experience, because I went from mom and dad's house into a marriage. So I never had that chance of having my own place, you know and being single. So I think that all – I really had no problems with that. I mean it was just, certain things, something breaks down, that's when you know, it would be nice to have someone there that could fix it. "What do I do?" But it was an adjustment I think for me, but I didn't mind it so much. It was a good adjustment. I would say it felt free.
- Being truly single for the first time was freeing though she had to adjust to coping with everything on her own
- Making adjustments to singleness and independence felt freeing

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| 60. | I mean that's just the way that I dealt with it, just like . . . me throwing out my wedding dress and getting rid of my rings, anything that had to do with the marriage. I found that was my way of coping with it. | Getting rid of wedding symbols was her way of coping | Coping meant action and freedom from wedding symbols |
| 61. | Then I mean I just decided, "Okay, well, I've got to get on." And I think the thing that kept me going was the kids. Just decided, well I've got to care for them and now just came up with this is what I'm going to do type thing, so. I mean there was times when I was still struggling with it, but it's kind of like, okay, you were knocked down. | Continued to struggle but felt her children needed her and she must push forward | Children were her main reason to continue after disclosure |
| 62. | And I think, like he's (Terry) always told me that I had – that I have the strength of 50 elephants. That I am so strong in that way. . . . I did see it quite differently because I thought I didn't have much confidence in myself. And now I realize that, yes, I did, but I just didn't believe it. Thinking back to our relationship and saying, yeah, I had confidence in myself, self-esteem, but at that time I didn't realize it. | Lacked confidence and self-esteem in the past yet somehow recognizes that they were a part of her all along | Now see strengths she did not acknowledge during the marriage |
| 63. | Like it all went down – I think that's where you know, trust and all your beliefs come back. It was a big blow. But you could build yourself up again . . . I think like that belief system had to be changed. And I had to look at it a different way. | Disclosure had been a blow to her trust and beliefs; found hope in rebuilding self and in changed life perspective | Trust and beliefs were shattered; reconstruction brought new way-of-being in the world |
| 64. | Like there was things that . . . like I'd say okay, maybe it's okay, you know, but to change your belief system, I think that really helped build it back up. | Changing her belief system was a struggle but helped her rebuild her life | Old beliefs did not shift without a struggle but was healthy |
| 65. | I think by, it helped a lot I guess by dating again. I mean that was difficult . . . like I thought, I don't want to go through this again. It was just like when I was a teenager. I mean I was all, how do say, not panicky but I spent all day in the bathroom. I was really nervous –nervous feeling that I got. But it was kind of neat. | Dating brought back excited, nervous feelings of adolescence and this was healing and fun | Dating helps to return to excitement in life and in others |

66. Which was –the relationship (boyfriend) didn't last very long. He moved away. And I've been on my own since. But I think that's just my choice. Because I don't know, I seem quite happy to be on my own. Being my own boss. Not having anyone to talk to.
- Remains single by choice and enjoys her independence and solitude
- Being single allows control and solitude she enjoys
67. A lot of my friends say, "You've got to meet someone because you'll get set in your ways." But I mean if I'm happy – I don't see nothing wrong with it. I just keep saying, "Well my soul mate's going to come along again."
- Expresses contentment with being single yet hopes for another intimate personal connection
- Content to remain single and wait for the right relationship for her
68. I don't know if I'll ever get married again.
- Uncertain about likelihood of remarriage
- Remarriage uncertain
69. *Do you feel your husband was your soul mate?*
- No. No. Not at all. I always thought that whatever happens to you in life, there's a reason for it. And I think that was just something that I had to learn from him was that homosexuality does exist. It is a hard way to learn it.
- Now feels husband was never the deep connection she seeks; the purpose for her suffering was to learn about homosexuality
- Sees her marriage as lacking deepest connection; need to know that her suffering had a reason
70. I mean I can remember saying, "Why was I attracted to him?" And I think it's because he's like very kind. And actually I see that in a lot – I mean I know a few more gay men, and they're so kind. And I think at that time in my life it's probably what I needed. You know, was that gentleness then, I can see that now.
- Questions her reasons for attraction to a homosexual man; his kindness and gentleness were attractive and filled a need for her
- Kindness and gentleness attracted her to her husband
71. That was really hard because his brother and my sister were also married and at their wedding he was the best man and I was the matron of honour and when I met him, like he was from out of town so he just came in. And I met him and I thought he was a stuck-up. He had that arrogance of him. And I don't even know when I decided to move away why I picked his city. Like I had no job, I didn't know anyone there and it was my brother-in-law said, "Well call up Terry and he'll put you up and find you a job." And that's exactly what he did.
- First thought husband arrogant yet found him helpful in finding both work and living accommodation
- Initial unfavourable impression of husband; changed to recognition of his helpfulness

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| 72. | And at the time that I came to this city he was going out with another girl. | Sandy knew husband had been in a relationship with another woman earlier | Husband's previous behaviour did not appear homosexual |
| 73. | ... we kept in contact and we came up with this bright idea, well okay, I'll move back together and you know, we'll save some money. Well things turned from there and that's when I got pregnant. And that's when it started. | Lived together for financial purposes; relationship changed and pregnancy led to marriage | Unplanned pregnancy led to marriage |
| 74. | I don't know, that's the only thing that I can think of why I was attracted to him. I know he helped – like when I first moved here, like I was overweight, I was very shy. He helped bring that out, I think for me. I mean I lost 50 pounds and he was so supportive there. Leave me notes, you're doing great, leave me a rose or something. I mean that felt good to have that support. | Remembers fondly husband's support as she struggled with shyness and weight loss early in their relationship | Recognition of good qualities of husband and the early relationship they had |
| 75. | But then I think we had a tendency to not think about good times. When we were going through this situation. To me, it was all negative. All the negative things, well how can you do this? | Husband's disclosure and its fallout made it difficult to remember any good in the relationship; blames husband for this | Blames husband for situation; finds good times hard to remember |
| 76. | But it's true like, it's you know, really really hard because at one point in the group, we had thought of everyone writing up their stories. But I find that I couldn't do it. Because I just find that it's my – my thoughts went all over the place. It just didn't feel right for me to write my story. | Expresses discomfort and inability organize her thoughts when writing her own story | Discomfort writing her experience |
| 77. | It's very very hard. He did tell the children. but, you know, I try so hard to keep in mind that I can't bring out my end of the stuff about this. | Husband disclosed to children; she finds it hard to withhold her own opinion from the children | Feels obliged to suppress her own opinions on disclosure from the children |
| 78. | I know we don't talk about it. And I know like Kyle's become a teenager and what he must be going through, you know, with his own sexuality and all, his hormone changes. I don't know how to go about it. I mean they never bring it up. If they're going to bring, they're going to want to talk about it. But that hasn't happened yet. | Uncertain how to discuss husband's homosexuality with children; concerned about teenage son's growing sexual awareness and the children's lack of discussion on the matter | Uncertain how to discuss father's homosexuality with children particularly adolescent son |

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| 79. | The youngest one is not so bad. Like, I mean, it's quite confusing for him because he's just say, "Why can't you and dad be together anymore?" or "Why don't you guys have another baby?" But the oldest one I know is not talking at all. He hardly ever goes to his dad's place. And I've talked to Terry about it, you know, I'd like to find out if he's uncomfortable, you know, what's going through his mind and why didn't he want to sleep overnight. | Youngest son expresses confusion over parent's relationship; oldest son is silent on the matter and refuses to stay with father; Sandy expresses concern over eldest's possible thinking | Concern over son's adjustment to father's homosexuality; eldest is of most concern because he does not share his thoughts |
| 80. | I think my biggest concern is they understand that there's . . . another way of life. I just wish they'd talk to me about it and how they feel. | Desires to discuss her children's feelings; hopes they see homosexuality as legitimate way-of-being | Desire to share children's feelings; bestow a sense of ease with homosexuality |
| 81. | But I'm aware that I can't put negative thoughts into their heads or the way that I feel, you know. I know that I've just got to be honest and say well, you know, Mom's still confused about it too, and I don't understand either. | Restrains self from disparaging father yet remains honest with sons about her own confusion | Attempts honesty about her own feelings about father and homosexuality |
| 82. | But I don't know. Do I wait until they bring it up or shall I bring it up, you know? That's my biggest concern because the oldest one is struggling with his own sexuality. | Concerned about raising sexuality issues with adolescent son | Should she raise homosexuality with adolescent? |
| 83. | And then having this in your mind too, you know, "Well, how come Dad's this way?" "Am I going to be this way?" I don't know maybe I should just reinforce them that they can come talk to me. But I mean I've tried bringing it up, you know, the subject about sex with the eldest one. It was like totally refused – "I don't want to talk about this mom." I mean you can't force them | Sandy fears her son struggles with fears of his own sexuality yet refuses to discuss it; recognition that she can't force discussion | Concerned that sons may fear their own potential homosexuality |
| 84. | I think for me the thought did come to mind, you know, was it me? Was it something that could have prevented if I'd done it this way? But it didn't stick with me, no. | Had a passing concern that she could have prevented husband's homosexuality | Self blame for husband's homosexuality passed |
| 85. | Where I thought that I trusted him. But yet I felt that he was hiding before I knew (he was gay). | Had trusted husband but felt he was not revealing something prior to disclosure | Trust prior to disclosure but sensed something was amiss |

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| 86. | . . . when I did ask him if he was out, you know, that word "experimenting," and I think that's – I don't know how many men would actually tell the truth. | Respect for husband's willingness to be honest about outside homosexual activities | Respect for husband's honesty about homosexual sex |
| 87. | – we were still together after he came out. I would go to the window and stare out the window, and be wondering what he was doing when he wasn't home. So I guess . . . that was my way of questioning well, did he tell me the truth? Or is he telling me the truth or is he still hiding? | Wondered if husband was honest about his outings and activities; shaken trust | Shaken trust led to concerns about husband's whereabouts |
| 88. | I don't trust him. Like I mean there's incidents where he may phone, to me he's all nice, you know, and I thought, "Well okay what does he want?" I find I'm still doing that. So I don't think the trust with him is complete but with other people it's fine. | Following divorce continues to mistrust husband's motives; able to trust others | Difficulty trusting ex-husband; able to trust others |
| 89. | A few – I'd say only two of my sisters actually that I could really relate – really talk to. I don't know if this has anything to do with it, but the sister that married his brother? He turned out to be too (gay). So she's the closest the one. Because we can talk about it and stuff like that. | Able to share with sisters, especially the one who married husband's gay brother | Found unique relationship and support from sisters |
| 90. | . . . when I told my mom and dad that, they just kind of, it was not really support there. I think they were more concerned about the boys and what's going to happen. It's funny, they used to come out and visit, they don't any more. Well they haven't for a long time. Now they ask about his, like, "How is Terry?" Actually my dad came up with a friendly nickname for him. But otherwise they don't talk about him. Just on the surface. | Lack of support from parents who expressed concern for grandchildren but no longer visit; discussions are only superficial | Parental contact is superficial with few visits |
| 91. | I had a chance, it's probably three summers ago to go up to where his parents are. And had a really good talk with them. They've always said that you will always be welcome to come any time. I think that helped quite a bit to be able to talk to them, and find out how they felt about it. | Supportive in-laws were open to sharing and a continued relationship with her | Understanding and resolution of relationship with in-laws |

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| 92. | Actually accepting that I was part native, it was just, you know, society had treated natives. I didn't want to admit that I was part native. I got over that. It didn't have anything to do with the situation. | Accepting her native heritage was difficult but had nothing to do with handling her husband's disclosure | No connection between native background and this experience |
| 93. | . . . when I meet someone new, I kind of get a feel on the subject (homosexuality) first, before I mention it. | Attempts to sense people's receptiveness to homosexuality before sharing her story | Tests for homophobic reactions before sharing her own life |
| 94. | I know for Terry it was a big issue about telling other people. And he thought that I wasn't telling anybody. When I told him that I was, he was really really surprised. | Husband concerned about telling others; he assumed that she was not sharing her story | Husband concerned about her disclosing their situation to others

Fears of homophobia |
| 95. | And I mean there's still, like I say, I get a feel for like -- mentioning homosexuality. And get their reaction, "Whoa! I can't tell them anything!" | Checks for homophobic reactions before sharing | Tests for homophobia and safety in sharing |
| 96. | What comes to mind is my oldest one's friend, I've gotten to know his parents really well. And I've thought about . . . mentioning it because, she's been asking . . . what happened between you and Terry. And I mean she knew both of us. The kids have played hockey for years. But the subject did come up and she was totally against it. She just didn't understand. So I thought, I don't know, I can't say anything because it might be that she won't even want them to associate anymore. | Protects family secret with long-standing friend who is homophobic. This prevents a risk to son's friendship | Homophobia means being careful even around friends; may lose them if they knew the truth |
| 97. | But actually, I know her daughter. Her daughter's quite older than her brother. And we had gone away for a hockey tournament, and her and her daughter and I got together and we went out to the bar and went back to her room and we started talking. I came out to her, and she just couldn't believe it. But I mean she was totally accepting. I knew that. But I don't think she'd ever tell her mom either. | Describes sharing life story as "coming out"; recognition that some people are safe to share with and others are not | Sharing as a release; homophobia requires great care in who to share with and implies risks |

98. From experience, friends saying you know, "Why did you guys break up?" Sometimes it's like, "None of your business." But it's just like they have to know. I don't know what satisfaction it gives them, but if they've seen you as the perfect couple. "Well how could this happen?" What do you say?
- Difficult to answer others inquisitions over failed marriage; invokes anger at other's curiosity
- Double bind; curiosity may turn to rejection due to homophobia
99. It makes me think when I hear people talk about homosexuality, and I know my ears perk up. Homosexuality, yeah. And I mean even for me it was so hard to say that word at one time.
- Listens carefully for others' reactions to homosexuality; concedes it has been a difficult concept for her too
- Grown in her knowledge of homosexuality; listens for others attitudes

Table 4**First Order Thematic Clusters of Sandy's Experience**

First Order Clusters	Cluster Description
<p>1. Conservative, religious background</p> <p>(1, 2, 3, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 30)</p>	<p>Sandy described her family of origin as having a Catholic background. She had ascribed to many traditional values within this structure including a two parent family and resistance to divorce. This cluster contains thematic statements which illuminate the belief structure that she was operating within at the time of disclosure and how this influenced her reaction to disclosure.</p>
<p>2. Personal/existential impact of disclosure; Self-blame, identity crisis, anger, rejection and loss</p> <p>(4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 39, 40, 43, 51, 53, 55, 75, 84, 85, 87, 88)</p>	<p>Sandy experienced strong emotions following disclosure including disbelief, pain, hope, anger, sadness. This cluster includes evidence of the existential struggle that Sandy experienced on the loss of her relationship and how her traditional belief structure was tested.</p>
<p>3. Rapidly growing inability to escape the gay issue cognitively, emotionally or physically</p> <p>(3, 11, 12, 29, 30, 47, 48, 49, 87, 88)</p>	<p>Sandy described the pain and mistrust that her husband's infidelity engendered in her. This cluster includes descriptions of the visualizations and thoughts that haunted her once she was aware of Terry's homosexual activities.</p>
<p>4. Homophobia and lack of support</p> <p>(14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 90, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99)</p>	<p>Sandy was very careful about sharing her story. Her experience in seeking support from homophobic friends, inadequate professionals and her fear of rejection if discovered is included in this cluster.</p>

5. **Sharing and support from others**
(13, 17, 21, 41, 65, 76, 89, 91)
- Sharing and support particularly with those familiar with the issue were helpful to Sandy. This cluster highlights themes which identify instances of support for Sandy. They include contact with physicians, some family members and a support group formed to address concerns of women married to gay men.
6. **Coping through independence, action and solitude**
- Awakening self**
- Increased individuality and independence**
- (8, 37, 38, 56, 57, 58, 60, 62, 63, 64, 66, 67, 68, 92)
- Taking action and regaining independence were important themes for Sandy. She appeared to rely less on introspection and more on action, rapid change and privacy for adjustment. This cluster delineates some of the themes that were important for Sandy in regaining independence as a facet of coping.
7. **Growth from experience**
(5, 22, 32, 36, 69, 99)
- Several times Sandy mentioned the need for this experience to have a meaning beyond mere pain. This cluster includes themes that reflect Sandy's desire for meaning in her experience through expanding her knowledge about homosexuality and growing from this experience.
8. **Limited communication during marriage and after divorce**
(28, 33, 34, 44, 45, 46, 50, 51, 52)
- Sandy described a distinct change in relationship communication patterns after marriage. Communication was limited in time, content and depth. This appears to have continued through to divorce, where she indicated that she preferred as little contact with Terry as possible.
9. **Concern over children's adjustment**
(61, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83)
- The impact that this experience had on Sandy's two sons was very important to her. Included in this cluster are themes which highlight how she struggled to handle the issue with her sons in a comfortable and healthy way.

10. Recognition of husband's positive qualities and his appearance as a good partner and father

(70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 86)

Despite Sandy's anger and blame with her ex-husband over much of their difficulty, she was able to recognize the reasons that they married and identified some positive qualities that she was able to see in Terry. This cluster contains themes related to Sandy's recognition of Terry's positive qualities.

11. Concern over clarity of recollection

(31,42)

Sandy expressed concern during the interview that she provide information that would be helpful. She was concerned that she was unable to remember, as clearly as she would like to, the details of the experience.

Table 5

First Order Thematic Abstraction of Anne's Experience

Excerpts from Transcribed Interview	Paraphrases	Themes
1. . . . Gary came, I guess he finally decided he had to do something. Go to a counsellor and see what was going on because it wasn't that evident to me, but obviously he'd been going through a lot of struggles that I wasn't aware of and he hadn't shared with me.	Unaware of husband's sexual orientation crisis; no marital communication of on this matter	No awareness of husband's sexual orientation crisis
2. And he went to university and . . . one of the projects he did was on gay issues and gay men and all that. And I don't know if that brought it up or whatever, but it didn't really go anywhere then and I didn't really think much of it because it was a university project.	Husband's academic interest in homosexuality did not raise any suspicions in wife about his sexual orientation	Husband's academic interest in homosexuality not considered a hint
3. . . . what had happened is that he had been, I guess you call molested by a teacher in high school. And that's where most of his experiences had come from as a teenager. So he just discounted the whole – everything that had gone on then, and his thoughts and feelings and he just figured it was a bad thing that happened to him and he didn't think it was going to go anywhere.	Believes that husband originally discounted his homosexual orientation as a result of adolescent molestation experience.	Anne saw a reason for husband's original denial of his homosexuality
4. So when we got married I believe it was in good faith, and you know, the love was there and all that. So, but , I guess it did amount to something in his mind.	Believes that husband married out of love and commitment though homosexuality was present and important to husband	Believes that husband's decision to marry had been genuine despite homosexuality
5. So, he told me one night he was going to go to a counsellor. Well, I as I said there it was like a bomb. Like I had just no idea. Just like a bomb had fallen in the middle of our lives.	Husband's disclosure met with complete surprise and regarded as devastating to their lives	Shock and devastation at husband's disclosure

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| 6. | For me, it just came out of the blue. Looking back, when I looked at the university things, and the molestation experience and all that, I could sort of see little hints , or little things, but – but at that time it never – nothing ever got put together. | Though disclosure was a surprise now sees hints or evidence of husband’s homosexuality | Sees hints of husband’s homosexuality in retrospect |
| 7. | And he decided, “Yes, that these weren’t just idle thoughts and he was gay.” And we had to decide – he had to decide what to do about that. So he went to counselling for a while, and I went to counselling for a while. | Following disclosure, she felt husband must decide what to do next; both sought counselling | Felt husband responsible for decision making following disclosure; sought professional help |
| 8. | And so, you know, everything, we just had to relook at everything. And Ashley was five months or six months or something like that. So I was not in very good shape at that point , I don’t think. | Disclosure just months after birth of second child required a redefinition of family situation and left her feeling emotionally and physically weak | Overwhelmed by husband’s disclosure and resulting family changes following birth |
| 9. | I was furious with him and furious with everybody, and of course he was nervous about it all, about me talking about it with anybody because he’s in a conservative company and he just figured, you know, his job was in jeopardy and he didn’t want me to talk about it to anybody and I said, “Well, too bad!” | Experienced extreme anger, discussed husband’s orientation with other’s though he was afraid for his job | Anger at husband; desire to vent dispute husband’s fear of job loss due to homophobia |
| 10. | I was very angry. And I’m not usually a very, very angry person, or I’m not usually, I don’t yell and scream and I don’t – you know, harbour things up and blow and all that kind of thing. But I really found at this time that I could really do that if I wanted to. | Though generally able to handle anger quietly the magnitude of her anger left her feeling the desire for loud angry outbursts | Release of extreme and anger through loud outbursts though uncommon for her |
| 11. | I had it in me. And I went from highs to lows and – and anger and rage, you know, everything. And he stayed. | Recognition of her anger and husband’s willingness to remain | Her anger and husband remained |
| 12. | – I didn’t feel that at the time, but he really – it would be better for us to separate because he didn’t feel that it was fair to me to stay in a relationship that he was always looking for something . . . | Husband made decision to leave marital home; his discontent in remaining would be unfair to wife; she did not share this opinion | Husband’s decision to leave based on his dissatisfaction not shared by wife |

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| 13. | ... I was feeling, well abandoned, I didn't know how I'd support myself. We had two little kids. We – I wanted to work part-time, you know, I just thought well how, you know, how is this going to work? And all that kind of stuff. And I didn't want to be, it wasn't my agenda to be on my own right then. | Abandonment, fear of the future; lack of confidence in self-sufficiency, anger with lack of power and changed life plans | Existential issues of aloneness, lack of power and lack of self-confidence |
| 14. | I said, "Well, why can't we just stay together and see how it goes." Like I had all sorts of arguments and he said, "Well, we could but I don't think either of us would be very happy." And all that. | Wished to try having husband remain at home; husband unwilling | Desire to remain together not shared by husband |
| 15. | And I was going through my pain. He was going through his pain. But it was, from my point of view, his was more of an awakening kind of thing. Like he was getting more excited about his new life, and that really ticked me off. | Husband's pain mixed with new life opportunities; wife angry because her pain was more characterized by loss and endings | Anger that husband's pain appeared mixed with excitement |
| 16. | Because, see he'd gone through a lot of it already what I was going through then, the pain of separation and all that kind of stuff. He'd already gone through that kind of, not the actual separation but he going apart kind of thing. And for him he was becoming involved in the gay community and gay lines, and getting support in that area, and it really ticked me off because there was no place for me to go to get that kind of support and he was getting quite excited about it all now. | Husband had time to mourn the impending separation before disclosure and had found gay community support; wife angry over lack of corresponding support for her | Husband's pain mixed with support and new connections; wife angry over isolation |
| 17. | And that six months, before he moved out in July, were actually I think the best thing that happened, I mean the worst of the best, during that six months I think I got rid of all my anger because I let him have it for those six months. | Following disclosure able to vent anger and obtain emotional release before separation occurred | Emotional release through expression of anger with husband |
| 18. | ... being together to deal with the issues right there. So that I didn't have to do it on my own. Issues that I needed to talk with him about, he was there to do it. And we did it. I don't think he wanted to do it at that point. He's much more of a talker and much more of an open person than I am, but at that point he didn't want to do it with me because he knew also that it was hurting me so much. But, I made him do it. | She pressed for the opportunity to finish emotional business with husband though he found it difficult to see her pain | Dealing with emotions around relationship important for her though painful for him |

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| 19. | Looking back think that was the best thing that happened because when he left in July, when he moved out, a lot of that anger was gone. I mean there was still some left, and there was still the adjustment and all of that you know, it was much more – I felt much calmer by the time July came along. | Addressing emotional issues from marriage together helped in transition after separation; less anger and more calm | Expressing anger made adjustment easier |
| 20. | ... it (separation) was hard. I had had to go back to work in April. End of April I took a contract. I was working just 'cause I had said I was going to go back part-time working, but to make sure that I could get full-time work and I guess I needed the money at that point too, because he was moving out. I can't quite figure out why I did. I mean Karen was just still so little. But anyway, so I had gone again full-time. And it was, well it was basically survival, because with two little ones, we had a nanny, and the kids, we worked out joint custody. So that helped a lot, because he – well I wasn't on my own with the kids all the time. And he, you know, we shared it. | Transition to separation difficult, finances required full-time work outside the home; childcare and shared custody helped | Transition difficult with children and financial need; additional childcare helped |
| 21. | But a lot of it was survival. I mean going to work and coping with that and then coming home and being on your own and I realized that I had depended on him a lot. | Survival and coping daily alone illuminated her past dependence on husband | Separation as existential struggle to survive independently |
| 22. | He was the more social person of the two of us. And I learned that I needed to count on my friends. I realized that I needed to open up to my friends more and not that I hadn't before, but I used him more than friends. | Recognized the importance of friends; had relied mostly on husband for support in the past | Friendships gain in importance |
| 23. | So actually, again, looking back on it, it was certainly a growing experience for me and I think I've become a better or a stronger person because of it. It made me realize that I couldn't do everything on my own, and other people were, you know, your friends are there, use them and your family too. | Experience as positive – apparent paradox of increased inner strength while learning to rely on others for support | Growth of inner strength and support network |

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| 24. | During the six months when he was still at home, he said he didn't want me to talk . . . tell any people but in the end I had – I talked to my sister, and I talked to one or two friends, and then together we talked to a few friends, because we had a lot of couple-friends. And we needed to tell them that we were separating. We didn't tell everybody why. We didn't think that was, you know, we didn't really need to do that. | Husband afraid of wife sharing his orientation with others; eventually spoke with sister and friends about separation but not necessarily the reason | Husband initially reticent for wife to share story; shared separation with friends but not necessarily the reason; fear of homophobia |
| 25. | In some ways I wanted to tell them (friends about husband's homosexuality), because I wanted him to look like a bad guy, at that point. I still wanted him to look like a bad guy. But I did realize that what good is that, I mean that's just, I don't like vengeance or revenge or vengeful people . . . to me that's a power issue and it really bugs me when people use power over other people and stuff like that. So I did realize that no, we didn't have to tell everybody. | Tempted for revenge over husband's role in causing separation; wanted him to look guilty, identified this as distasteful and resisted | Resisted temptation to punish husband for his role in separation by revealing his orientation |
| 26. | But I mean we were the most unlikely couple to separate in the world. Like, as far as everybody else was concerned. You know, it seems to be that way. And, I mean they were just shocked, it was hard for them to accept not having a reason. | Friends found separation without explanation difficult – they were viewed as the ideal couple | Marriage looked successful – lack of explanation was difficult for others |
| 27. | So it worked out that some of the friends we had, I hardly see again. Like some couples when they found out why, that was it. They didn't want anything to do with him, and it sort of worked in some ways with me too. Just 'cause the homophobic kind of an attitude. | Lost friends due to their homophobic attitudes | Homophobia loses friends |
| 28. | Well I think it's too bad . . . but I think well that's their issue and what can I do about it? I mean I wasn't about to go and . . . convert them, and tell them all the wonderful things about gay people, because I didn't feel that myself at that point. So I wasn't going to do that. | Originally her own ambivalence made her unwilling to defend homosexuality to homophobic friends; accepted no responsibility for others homophobia | Initially ambivalent about homosexuality and unwilling to defending it |

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| 29. | On the whole, Gary really isn't that friendly with a lot of the people we were together, but I am friendly with most of them, and they were very, very supportive with me. Just in time, offering time to me . . . including me in things that was something that I had to learn to accept or to ask for, you know, if I wanted to go out and do something. | Anne found support and acceptance in old family friends though husband did not remain as close to them | Old family friends remain close to her |
| 30. | And a lot of the time I found with friends, I didn't deal with what I was going through necessarily. (I didn't want to talk what I was going through.) I just wanted some people to do things with . . . I mean you could wear somebody out. I mean that wasn't for me. I didn't use my friends necessarily to talk about the gay issue or the separation or that. I just used to do things with and be friends with and to be part of my life. And, you know, to talk about the kids or work or – and it went deeper than that, but I didn't feel I had to talk about me the whole time. | Saw friends as companions not counsellors; shared common concerns not always her unique issues which would have burdened a friendship | Sought companionship not counselling through friendships |
| 31. | But I knew that if I wanted to (share) . . . they (friends) were there to do that. And my sister lives in town so she was – it was the same with her. Just people to be there. And I did go to a counsellor. Well I started in January and I continued going until I think August or September. | Friends and family available if support needed; counsellor provided necessary professional support | Family, friends and professional support available |
| 32. | And then she told me that I shouldn't come anymore. She said, and I think – I was little scared at first when she said, because I said, "Well what do you mean? You, know. How am I going to survive here?" And she said, "Well you've got your friends, you've got your – you're doing, you know, you've come a long way in six months." And she sensed that the anger was gone. | Fear of independence from counsellor despite her progress and friendships | Afraid of losing support found in counselling |
| 33. | And it was more just me learning a new kind of a life that's all. So that's what I did. | Adjustment meant learning a new way of being | Adopted a new way of being |
| 34. | There were sure times when I'd be angry, but – I could sort of deal with it and get on with things. Didn't harbour there and build and everything like that. | Anger was manageable; immobilizing anger gone | Anger did not immobilize |

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| 35. | One thing that I found difficult was the kids. . . . but he was always very up front with why this was happening and they've grown up with that and – but she (Ashley) – the anger was directed at me, not at Gary. | Children's anger was directed toward mother, she found this difficult | Mother locus of children's anger |
| 36. | And you know I'd be – that's when I got most angry with him because I'd be faced with this kid who was having tantrums or screaming or yelling at me, being mad at me for something and I'd say to him, "What is she like at your place?" And he says, "Oh, you know, no problem." "Well how come, you know, all this is happening here?" And he, my impression was that he was thinking that I was doing something to cause this. | Felt husband blamed her for the children's angry outbursts in her home | Anger because felt blamed as the cause of the children's anger, |
| 37. | But it did come out, I think, as that first year progressed, and I think it's more that she was more comfortable with me. Like I was in the same home. And I don't know if there's more of a – I don't think there's that – there might be more of a mother/daughter bond or something, I don't know. But I was there in the same place. And she wasn't comfortable in his new place and all that, it wasn't so familiar. So it did come out as the year progressed that more and more of the her anger did come out with him, and towards him and all that. And he's going, oh , so this is what it was. | Later viewed outbursts as evidence of child's comfort in environment and feelings of personal safety in expressing anger | Later saw anger as proof of child's comfort |
| 38. | And that was hard for me. Because I thought maybe this is something I am doing, you know, maybe I'm not coping properly . . . so that was interesting. That was where most of my anger was actually at the kids at that point. | Self-doubt over ability to cope and self-blame over children's anger responses; anger directed towards her children | Uncertain of coping skills and anger with managing children |
| 39. | Well, I didn't like it. I thought it was upsetting to me that they (the children) had to go through with that (disclosure and separation) at this point. But I didn't see any way round it, and I thought well this is the way it is. | Pain at seeing her children's pain; recognition of its inevitability | Pain at inability to prevent her children's suffering |

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| 40. | And, you know, a few of my friends said, "Well, you know, why are you having joint custody? Why don't you keep the kids? I mean he shouldn't be taking care of the kids." . . . And I said, "Well, I know he's a wonderful father, and I know the kids need their father." And I just hoped it was – well I still, I mean, it's not over yet. But I just hoped this would work out for them. I saw no reason to deprive them of their father. And he is a very good father. | Friends suggested she take sole custody but she recognized Gary's skills as a father and her children's need for him | Recognized ex-husband's parenting skills and the children's need for a father |
| 41. | So I just hope that it will work out for them. There's been times, you know, kids at school say – like they've learned who to share it with and they don't share it with that many people. | Concern about the homophobic reaction her daughters may receive and the need to be careful | Concern over discrimination that daughters may encounter |
| 42. | My younger one is more impulsive and more open and she, I think, has learned that – the hard way, that you don't tell everybody that your father is gay and there's another man that lives at his house. I mean it just doesn't work. And she's learned that the hard way. And that hurts me to see them, you know, a friend not being able to play with her because of that. | Painful to see daughter's openness lead to loss of friendship and ensuing homophobic reaction | Difficult to witness the impact of homophobia on children |
| 43. | But I'm hoping, my goal, or my hope I guess is that in the long run they'll be stronger, more tolerant, more open, kind of people and these kind of issues will hopefully not be as prevalent, people won't be as afraid of gay people at time goes on. | Meaning of experience is hope that her daughters will become stronger, more open women and society will become less homophobic over time | Hope through her children and a changed society for more tolerance |
| 44. | That was hard to think about that at the beginning. It was hard for me to think this is the way I wanted them to be (more tolerant children). Because, you know, as I say, a lot of the anger was gone, but there was still . . . But I did realize that it in the long run, it would be worse for them to lose their father. | Her initial anger precluded any desire to involve her children in consciousness raising or increasing tolerance toward homosexuals but she didn't want them to lose their father | Her own anger initially prevented any desire to enhance the children's understanding of homosexuality |
| 45. | I guess because they (children) were so young, the gay issue wasn't really the thing. It was the separation that was the thing. And it was hard. I mean it's hard when you have to tell your children that you're not going to live together. | Homosexuality of less consequence to young children than resulting separation; difficult to tell children that their family will not remain intact | Disclosing decision to separate more difficult than disclosing homosexuality to young children |

46. And for Ashley that's what it's always been like. And when she was about four or five, she had a lot of questions when she began – when she went to school and realized that most people had, not most people, but a lot of people had mom and dad there and so she was always saying, you know, like typical kids, "Why don't you and papa, you know, move together." And all that kind of stuff. But I guess it's just been a matter of fact the way it is.
- Daughter questioned parents' separation only after discovering other family arrangements at school
- Separation became an issue for daughter only after discovering other possibilities
47. But it hurt to tell them. But again, I was thinking it was more the separation issues than the gay issue because they saw that we could talk to each other, we got along and they never saw us really being awful to each other and things which maybe made it harder for them to understand. I don't know. But considering the circumstances, that's the way it was. Like for some people they do hate each. But we don't hate each other. So I don't know if that made it easier or harder.
- Again difficult to inform children of separation; separation may have been more difficult for children to understand because parent were agreeable
- Separation possibly difficult to understand because it was amicable
48. *How must that have been for you when you don't hate each other and you find yourself alone?*
- Yeah. It wasn't, again it wasn't the way I wanted it to be. It was hard to understand. I know for a long time I didn't understand. Like I read a lot about gay – a lot of books about the gay issue just to try and understand it, because I didn't know anything about it. So all the same kind of emotions, anger, and hurt and denial and all that, I went through until I came to an understanding of what it was all about really.
- Difficult to truly understand husband's orientation; turned to reading yet understanding required emotional struggle including anger, pain and denial
- Understanding required not only cognitive work but also emotional struggle
49. *What were you denying at that time?*
- Well that he really – that this the way he really was. And that it was just all a big mistake. And you know then you begin to doubt, "Well then why did we get married?" and "Was he lying to me the whole time?"
- Denial of husband's orientation; doubt about his original intentions and feelings of being deceived
- Denial of husband's orientation and doubts about husband's intentions and honesty entering marriage

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| 50. | And I believe now that no he wasn't (being deceitful). I think in all sincerity that he thought this (homosexuality) was over. | Now sees husband as honest in his marital intentions | Now sees husband's attempt at marriage as genuine |
| 51. | And you begin to deny your own sexuality. And you think, "Well, what was this all about?" You know . . . "If men, if he's gay and --" So self-esteem I think definitely goes down the tubes as in any separation or divorce I think. | Questioned own sexuality and meaning of gay husband's attraction to her; loss of self-worth through separation | Husband's homosexuality raised questions about her sexuality; separation raised questions about self-worth |
| 52. | Well, I always thought of myself as never the most confident person. I was -- growing up -- I was shy and I never experienced myself as a very confident person. Like I would sort of sit back and didn't go barging into a situation. I sort of let things happen and I was more a watcher than a participator and so when I -- when I was separated, I began to think, hmmm, you know, "How am I going to do this?" "How am I going to go out and do what I sort of relied on him to do?" Organize social things, or buy the car, or whatever it might have been. And I began to think I wouldn't be able to do that. And that doesn't do -- then you doubt yourself, I mean that's sort of a cycle. "Can I do it?" "No, I can't . . ." | As a child she had been reserved and passive and remained this way with husband; on separation doubted her own capability to cope and interact | Lack of experience and confidence left her doubting her ability to cope on her own |
| 53. | I wasn't so sure I was capable, of dealing with the kids on my own. Like we really did very well together in sort of bouncing off each other. I thought, "How am I going to do this on my own?" | Recognized husband's past role in childcare; questioned her ability alone | Insecure about parenting alone |
| 54. | And what I discovered as the time went on is that I was much more capable and confident and much stronger than I ever thought I was, that I gave myself credit for. | Confidence in newly discovered abilities and strengths grew over time | Growth in self-confidence and competence grew over time |
| 55. | . . . my job is a demanding kind of a profession. And when I could go to work and be quite confident, competent, you know, my work wasn't falling apart when I came home and I could go manage day-to-day, and I wasn't falling apart. My kids were -- with their ups and downs, basically we were moseying along. And also then I thought, "Oh well, you know, maybe things are going all right here!" | Job competence and children's coping provided evidence of her skills and this boosted her confidence | Confidence grew through her success at work and with her children |

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| 56. | And then, when people would tell me, my friends, or my family would tell me that . . . they would give me pats on the back and tell me that things seemed to be looking well, we're doing well – I guess then I began to believe it. | Comments from friends encouraged confidence and verified her ability to cope | Support of friends important |
| 57. | And when I also found myself that I could stand up to Gary, not that he was trying to put me down, but that I wasn't just going along with what he said. I would say, "No, this is – I don't want to do it this way. This is the way, you know, we've got to talk about that." Because often I had just sort of taken a back seat. And when I found myself standing up to him, and saying, "No, I'm not going to do it that way," or what ever . . . | Asserting her perspective with ex-husband also increased self-confidence | Asserting self with ex-husband enhanced self-confidence |
| 58. | . . . when the counsellor said, "Just come back if you have a big crisis or something. I thought, " Oh, well I guess he must think I'm doing all right." | Counsellor's expression of confidence in her enhanced her own sense of confidence and well-being | Counsellor's belief in her enhanced her self-concept |
| 59. | . . . And it took me a very long time too, as far as men were concerned. Like to me, all men were just complete jerks, as far as I was concerned for a long time. | Following separation held negative opinion of all men | Separation brought negativity with men |
| 60. | And I'm not in any relationship now. I mean, I'm enjoying being on my own. Like I can do my own thing. I'm quite capable of doing whatever I want to do. And I don't feel the need to go out and find anyone else. | Expresses enjoyment in the independence and control of being single; feels no particular need for a partner | Enjoys being single |
| 61. | Now, I'm to the point, well have been for a while that if it happens (another relationship), that would be fine. But I don't feel a compelling need to go out and find somebody. Whereas the first few years, I just wouldn't even entertain any thought. . . | Renewed openness to a new intimate relationship; had been uninterested after separation | With changed attitude to men now open to new relationship |
| 62. | . . . I trusted someone and that quite shattered, so that I – it took me a long time to get over that . . . Especially men. You know, I thought forget it. And the first question I would want to ask any man is, "You know, are you gay?" You know, that was the way I was feeling, so. That was interesting. . . I don't think that would be the first thing I'd ask now. | Initially, trust had been so broken that new relationships were impossible; she feared that other men would be gay too | Broken trust resulted in fear of new relationships and other men's sexual orientation |

63. . . . it was a few years before I really, I could see the benefits of not being married to him, although we didn't get divorced for quite a while – but not being with him. Like a lot of the time the first year you'd, I'd regret that this had happened, or I wished it hadn't happened or, you know, I wanted – I didn't necessarily want him, I don't think, but I didn't want to be in the situation I was in.
- Eventually saw advantages to being single but this required time to mourn her loss and accept a new life circumstance
- Acceptance of separation required mourning and acknowledgment of loss
64. I finally said to myself, "You know, what a jerk, am I ever glad I don't have to live with this guy anymore." And then I finally thought, hmmm, that you know, that was a step for me, to see that I didn't want to have to put up with all his little foibles that you put up with when you're married to someone or living with someone. But that was something for me to see. "No, there's other things to do and I don't need this man in that way. I think it really is okay the way things are now. I wanted him, you know as a father for the kids."
- Awareness of her own acceptance and approval of her new relationship with ex-husband; no longer needed him as a husband but a their children's father
- Recognizes advantages of current relationship with ex-husband; no longer needs him intimately
65. Well I think guilt for my kids, for my children. That this is something that they were going to have to live with and that they would have parents that are not together. You don't – and so I took some of that guilt on as being, you know, their upbringing or what ever would not be as, "as perfect as it should be" . . . as you dream about when you have kids and which it never is anyway. I thought this is going to be harder than I had thought when I had children.
- Experienced guilt over inability to provide her children with the intact family she had expected; changed circumstances meant things would be harder
- Guilt over providing less than 'perfect' for her children; life got more challenging
66. . . . that was one of the things that was hardest for me at the beginning was that I had no control over what was happening. And, you know, just a parting of the ways, because you're both responsible. And you both have a part in it, or you both could try and change it. But I felt I had no, well, "What could I do?" I couldn't compete, I couldn't change what was happening. And I didn't like that. . . I mean, I couldn't become a man, so – I mean what can you do?
- Frustrated over lack of control; unable to compete as a woman to with gay husband's attractions
- Frustrated over lack of control to try to accommodate or save marriage

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| 67. | And that (lack of control) was hard, that was – I think that fueled a lot of anger, I couldn't control what was happening. Because I do like to have some control over what's happening in my life. I'm not a power nut, but – that was one of the hardest things that I found I had to deal with. . . | Lack of control over her life intensified her anger | Anger grew with lack of control |
| 68. | . . . and I don't think I got into poor me thing, which I could have done. You know, "Why did this happen to me?" And, I can't do anything about it." Which basically is the way it was. But I don't think I got into that in a big way. | Questioned the reason for her pain and recognized her powerlessness to stop the process; little self-pity | Existential issues of powerlessness and inevitable pain yet little self-pity |
| 69. | There was a lot of that (pain). You never know how much pain you can feel until you feel it. | Understanding the depth of pain only possible through experience | Recognition of the magnitude of her pain through the experience |
| 70. | . . . there was like a hole in your stomach (with the pain), like, I guess it was an emptiness that would be, but it was physical. | Physical experience of emotional pain; emptiness in centre of being | Physical manifestation of feelings of emptiness |
| 71. | And there was a – well grief. Like lots of, I cry quite easily, you know, if I went to a movie, or whatever. But as an adult, I don't think many people cry like kids do, you know, they howl and that kind of thing happened to me. Which I attributed to the pain . . . | Expression of loss and pain beyond words; childlike | Extreme grief brings powerful emotional response |
| 72. | I didn't get really rundown or anything like that. I felt like I could have for some reason. I think because of the children, like you really had to sort of keep some kind of control over yourself. And I was breastfeeding Karen so I needed to be healthy in some ways, so – I think that probably helped me cope with, or deal with things instead of letting them drag on. | Children's needs help maintain and drive her through a difficult time preventing her from allowing her physical deterioration | Being needed as a mother was important in coping |
| 73. | . . . it was later on and I began to think well what was the last 11 years of marriage. I mean what was I, you know, if he had – was gay, what did that mean about our sexual relations when we were married? And so I began to doubt whether they were real or whether he . . . was all fake or whatever, and so I just thought about that | Questioned the meaning of the marriage and sexual relationship; wondered if husband had been dishonest in his sexual response to her | Questioned honesty of husband's past sexual interest in her and the meaning of their marriage

Deception |

74. I read quite a bit about the gay issue. So I think I managed to intellectually realize that, "No, it really wasn't me." It was the fact that I wasn't male, and that what had happened was real and genuine at the time. But it took me a while to realize that and I thought, I just questioned you know, whether, "What does that mean about me?" you know, "Would I be desirable for anybody else?" or "Would I want to feel anything for anybody else?"
- Her gay reading material supported husband's claims of the marriage as genuine; yet she continued to question the marriage's reflection on her attractiveness and her desire for a new relationship
- Intellectually she saw husband's marital commitment as genuine; emotionally she wondered what this relationship meant about her (self-doubt)
75. *What that (the marriage) had said about you, or what that meant about you?*
- Yeah, about me, as a woman. So I'm not quite sure how I got over that. I don't remember. I don't remember how, I don't remember the whole process there, I just remember thinking about it and questioning my role as a woman. But, it's not an issues now, so – I don't know all the in-betweens really.
- Had questioned her value as a woman; her healing process is difficult to remember or define
- Concerns over her value as a woman healed over time
76. I wouldn't say that I went out actively and became involved in anything (gay subculture). The support group for wives of gay men was, you know, for women . . . There was a P-FLAG group that opened – I went to a few meetings there, but I wasn't at that point where I wanted to really become involved in that.
- Did not seek or maintain involvement in gay subculture aside from her own support group
- Maintaining contact with gay subculture was unimportant aside from maintaining her own support
77. There was a point, a time, when I was really afraid to talk openly about the issue. One for Gary's job, like if somebody were telling jokes in the staff room, I would usually keep quiet.
- Afraid to share her story because husband may lose his job.
- Possible repercussions of homophobia prevented sharing

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| 78. | Like I was sort of afraid to open my mouth. And I think that was for a number of reasons. One was protection. One was I didn't want to have to defend anybody because I didn't feel confident enough to defend anybody at that point. And I didn't want to become involved in an issues where I had to defend something that I really, oh, I just didn't feel confident enough to defend. And I think part of it too was not wanting to be thought that I was gay. I think I had that fear for a while. If I was defending, you know, some issues or something. And so I usually kept my mouth shut. | Afraid to address homosexuality publicly for many reasons: 1) self-protection 2) felt incompetent to defend homosexuality 3) fear of being perceived as gay herself | Fear of homophobic reactions stifle her story in many ways; shutting down opportunities to share |
| 79. | At this point, I'd be more willing to open my mouth and I wouldn't care. Like if they thought I was gay fine. And Gary is very open with himself. Like I hope he doesn't get himself in trouble one day with, where he opens his mouth. But it's not such an issue for him so why should it be for me? | Now more willing to defend or discuss homosexuality; husband is out and this helps her be open about homosexuality with others | No longer as concerned about others homophobic reactions; husband being out helps |
| 80. | Although, I don't tell people. Like I'd worked at this job, well this job and my last one, and I don't know that I really told anybody at work because, "Why?" you know, they don't tell me about their - - unless it was somebody that would come over to my house or it would just sort of come out in passing, but it wasn't something that I had to disclose. | Feels it unnecessary to disclose her personal situation; coworkers don't share personally at work | Unnecessary to share story at work |
| 81. | There was a time when I felt I had -- if I didn't disclose it, then I wasn't being honest with these people, but if I did disclose it then it could be a traumatic situation. and now I realize that you don't have to, I mean you can be -- there's certain areas of your life that are just not relevant in some situations. | Once felt that honesty meant disclosure; yet it often brought pain; no longer sees disclosure as required | No longer sees disclosure as necessary |
| 82. | But really now it's not -- it's not an issue (disclosure). Well, it's an issue with my kids. | Disclosure no longer an issue for her though it will remain so for her children | Disclosure concerns focus on her children's experiences |

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| 83. | So, I'm not with my husband, and you know, people have asked me . . . "Has your husband remarried?" And I say well, I have think about what I say to them. I say well, "No." Some I'll say he's in a relationship. But I won't say who it is and that's usually the way I do it, depending. You have to be careful how you talk about it. Like who, and how you put things. | Possibility of homophobic reaction requires vigilance in answering friends' questions about ex-husband | Mindful of homophobia and attempts to avoid provoking it |
| 84. | . . . if somebody told a joke or . . . was being particularly down on gays – the gay bashing. I would speak up at this point and not really care what or why people thought I was doing it. | Now willing to defend against homophobic reaction without concern for others perceptions of her | Defends homosexuality with less fear |
| 85. | Gary's parents . . . had an adjustment period, but they were very supportive of him and they've been great, really for him, and for me. Because they've considered me as always one of their daughters and they still do that. So I can go, they live the States, I can go and visit them and it's very nice. Like I really haven't been – lost touch with them or his sisters and brothers and stuff. | Her in-laws have adjusted, remain supportive and are open to communication; she values the connection | Appreciates being able to maintain support and connection with in-laws |
| 86. | And my parents found it much more difficult to deal with. My father was sick and he has subsequently died. But I think that might have been one of the reasons, you know, they were dealing with more than this. | Found her own parents' reaction problematic; a reaction complicated by father's fatal illness | Parents' reaction difficult complicated by father's illness |
| 87. | . . . my father, found it really difficult to deal with and they were very protective of me and all that kind of thing and very, very angry at him and I found that hard to deal with. Because I was trying to develop some kind of relationship with him that was positive and all that for the kids. . . | Her father's protective and angry reaction was difficult for her because it conflicted with her desire to establish a positive relationship with her ex-husband | Father's angry reaction created more difficulty for her |
| 88. | . . . it was difficult for me to see them harbour so much anger when I was trying to get rid of all the kind of stuff. | Hard to deal with her own angry parents when she was trying to work past her own anger | Parent anger was difficult for her |

89. . . . she's (mother) been trying. I can see her trying to be more tolerant and more friendly and all that. . . . But it's something I always have to think about. You now, if mom's here, you know, I can't – it's uncomfortable for her here. And it bugs me that I have to think about it. But I mean what can I do? She's 70 years old. You know she has tried . . .
- Mother's homophobia is aggravating yet, recognizes mother's attempts to understand
- Understanding yet bothered by mother's continuing homophobia
90. But the kids notice. Like Ashley, it was her birthday when mom was here and she said, "I want us all to be together for a birthday dinner . . ." My sister's been all right, but her husband had a little difficulty with it, too. And I said, "Well, we can try it." But it didn't work . . . And she (daughter) said, "How come I can't talk – I don't feel I can talk about poppa around granny very much?" And I said, "Well, you know, it's hard for her." I try and explain it's hard for her to see that, you know, we're not together, and I try and not concentrate on the gay issue, but just the fact that her daughter's been hurt, and it's hard for parents to see their kids – yeah, but she wishes that – and she notices, you know, she's only 10, but she notices.
- Maternal grandmother's reaction results in children feeling restricted in sharing about their father, mother chooses to ignore homophobic explanation in favour of explanation that focusses on grandmother's pain
- Children aware of relationship difficulty with grandmother caused by her own homophobia and pain
91. . . . he has always been a person that needs other people more than I do. And that's the way he is. Like he has a hard time being on his own. Which is neither good nor bad, that's just the way he is. And I think he wouldn't, I think it was something he had – he just needed someone else to be in his life. . . . And when he became involved in another relationship, it just made sense that this is what he had to do in order to be happy.
- Able to see husband's new relationship as filling a strong need for companionship for him
- Intellectually able to accept husband's new partnership

92. Whereas when I went through the time, I realized that I didn't have someone else. Like it wasn't a goal for me to have someone else there. And I quite enjoyed seeing how things went when I was on my own, because I'd never really been on my own. I went to university and then I got married. So I never really was on my own, so for me, it was really neat to see that I like it and that I could do it and I wanted to.
- Recognition of her own comfort in being single, independent and competent; an experience she had not had
- Satisfaction with being single
93. . . . it (husband's new relationship) hurt at the beginning I think. And yet I saw why it was happening. Like I could understand it, but intellectually and emotionally – two different things yeah. So it hurt but I could see why it was happening . . . [It hurt] that what he had said was really true. Like that really told me that yeah, this is the way it is. . . . Yeah this is it. And because I probably did think that maybe after a year or two, he didn't think this was really what he wanted to do.
- Emotionally ex-husband's new relationship hurt; it was proof of his sexual orientation; no longer hope that husband may change his mind or return home
- Pain at ex-husband's partnership; no longer a chance of reconciliation
94. Like at the beginning I thought, "Oh well, maybe he'll grow up and try this and he didn't like it and then maybe get back together. As the year, as time went on if he had decided that, I wouldn't have had him back. I realized that about a year or two after, I wouldn't have wanted him back. But it certainly was proof. So that was I guess an ending for me, that I had decided I didn't want him back, but this is proof that he didn't – he wouldn't have wanted to anyway.
- Initially had hoped for husband's return; gradually realized her own desire for separation; ex-husband's new partnership gave finality to the separation
- Hope for reconciliation turned to acceptance of separation

95. And then it was interesting for me. I guess I got beyond the emotional part because I – it was – I went through some hurt and some, I don't know what else, I don't think there was a lot of pain or anything involved in that. Because probably some, but it was interesting for me to watch him in another relationship and just seeing some of the kinds of things that I had experienced and to see that Keith is really a lot like me . . . and Gary deals with him the same way he dealt with me. You know, the same, lots and lots of the same things. And the same, you know, some of the same things that bug me, bug him, and –
96. It took Keith and I . . . well he is similar to me. You know, he's not a big talker, and he's not a big –he doesn't wear his heart on his sleeve or anything like that. And I'm – you know, so we're friends but – and I know that I could ask him for anything that I wanted to or whatever, but – you know, we get along pretty well. We're not bosom buddies or anything like that, which I don't really expect. I really wouldn't want it that way.
97. And he's been – it's been somewhat difficult with the kids because he's an only child and never had much time with kids. And it's been hard for me sometimes too –he's had to learn a lot about kids and I've heard some things from the kids that bug grandma about Keith and that kind of thing, I've been very careful not to get involved in that, because I don't want to become the middle person. So they've learned that they have to talk with Gary about that, if there's something that's happening that's not my affair.
98. I don't know that (difficulty with kids and Keith) has always been dealt with satisfactorily, but I don't think that there's much else I can do about it.
- With intense pain of separation and loss over, able to observe ex-husband's behaviour and choices in new relationship with interest
- Maintains an agreeable relationship with ex-husband's new partner, no desire to be very close
- Some misgivings about ex-husband's partner's ability to parent but does not feel responsible to become involved
- Recognition of her limited power to solve problems between children and ex-husband's partner
- With much of the pain healed came a curiosity about ex-husband's relationship behaviour
- Congenial relationship with ex-husband's new partner
- Uninvolved in ex-husband's relationship and his family's parenting problems
- Limits of influence in ex-husband's home

99. And I think the children have --because there's two people there obviously, and only one person here, they get more of my time and I think that has become evident in, well I think one reason why Karen has wanted to spend more time here, is because I have more time here, is because I have more time for them, that's the way it is. I think it would be hard if I were involved with somebody else. I think the kids would have a really hard time with that at this point in time.
100. I think I mentioned I just hope that, you know, what with the path we're taking, that there's no model for us to follow. And I just hope, well I believe, I shouldn't say I hope, because you've got to believe it or it won't happen. That the path we're taking will make our kids better people than if we take another path. And sometimes I have doubts about whether this is the very best way for them to be going. But then as I say I have to believe that, you know, it's trial and error and do what we feel is best.
101. And to me more tolerance is what we need, so I can't think that it's going to hurt, although there are going to be some hurts along the way for them (her daughters) particularly. I think I'm beyond the hurting unless just to feel their hurt. But personally I'm beyond the hurting part. I can see that I might feel some. But I'm just hoping that they'll be able to cope with it. And I -- this has made me think about that.
102. But we used a nanny to go back and forth and I think that helped. There was some consistency there.
- Feels children receive more attention at her place than their father's; children would find her in a relationship very difficult
- Concerns and doubts about decision on how to handle situation with children; feels the lack of examples to follow; hopes experience will positively influence children's moral and social development
- Sees a need for societal acceptance of homosexuality; concern for the pain her children will face and the strength they will need to cope
- Employed nanny between ex-husband's house and hers to provide consistency for children
- More attention for children in her home; single is easier for the children
- Concerns and doubts with lack of role models for parenting; hopes result is stronger, morals for children
- Need for more tolerant society; concern about homophobic reactions daughters will face
- Nanny provided consistency for children

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| 103. | Yeah, you have to find some -- that something in there. Or else you fall apart. But it's certainly been a growing experience for me. And I don't regret it really. I mean if I hadn't married him, I wouldn't have had my two children and it's certainly not what I had planned, but when I look back there's certainly some very positive things that have happened. And who knows what will continue to happen | Recognition of her growth through the experience and the importance of her children; hope for the future | Positive experience of coping and growth and her children; hopes for future |
| 104. | And I think that's one thing I had to tell my parents. You know, they kept harping on me and I kept telling them well, you know, it hasn't, well I told them, you know, I don't have regrets. I think I've grown in many ways. So, you don't have to hold that as your issue. . . I think that helped them | Able to help her own parents by modeling her own acceptance | Able to model acceptance for her parents |
| 105. | Like I've found I've just become more tolerant of any different kind of situation. So, I guess that's the way it works, right. That's what education does. | Her situation has increased her awareness and tolerance; an education | Experience as education increasing tolerance |
| 106. | This (research) would be helpful I think, because a lot of counsellors -- well millions of people, they just dismiss the issue as well, you know, what's the big deal -- They're bunch of -- we should shoot them in the street or -- they don't know how to talk about it or they don't know how to deal with it. Yeah, it would be helpful. | Impression of pervasive, violent homophobic attitude in society and lack of ability to converse or construe homosexuality effectively; anticipates the value of this study in educating counsellors and others | Homophobia as pervasive and deadly; need for education and clarification |

Table 6**First Order Thematic Clusters of Anne's Experience**

First Order Clusters	Cluster Description
<p>1. Growth in knowledge of husband's homosexuality and understanding of husband's disclosure</p> <p>(1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 50)</p>	<p>Anne had no knowledge of Gary's homosexual attractions before marriage. This cluster demonstrates her growing awareness of Gary's homosexuality, recognition of early hints of his sexual orientation struggle and her current understanding of his attempt at marriage.</p>
<p>2. Husband's disclosure evokes feelings of loss, abandonment, and powerlessness in her personal struggle to survival</p> <p>(5, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 16, 48, 66, 68, 69, 71, 93)</p>	<p>Gary's disclosure dissolved many of the foundations on which Anne had based her life and her family. This unexpected loss resulted in an existential struggle for Anne as her world shattered around her. Included in this cluster are Anne's emotional reactions of anger and grief over her loss. In addition, themes addressing her feelings of powerlessness to restore her family and her fears that she would not be able to cope independently are included.</p>
<p>3. Anger reaction to husband's disclosure lead to healing</p> <p>(9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 25, 34, 36, 44, 59, 67)</p>	<p>Gary's disclosure and pervasive and life altering loss which Anne experienced provided her with many reasons for anger. This cluster highlights some of those reasons in addition to the healing role that expressing her anger held for Anne.</p>
<p>4. Self-doubt about her ability to cope and question about her worth as a woman</p> <p>(13, 32, 38, 51, 52, 53, 65, 74)</p>	<p>Gary's disclosure caused Anne to question herself. This took form in at least two ways and this cluster highlights these. First, she questioned whether she could cope independently following Gary's departure from the family. Second, Gary's disclosure of homosexuality seemed to be a rejection of her personally and this caused her to question the value of her own sexuality and personhood.</p>

5. **Marriage as a deception and shaken trust**
(49, 62, 73)
- Because Gary's disclosure had been unexpected, Anne's trust was shaken and she experienced difficulty believing both Gary's disclosure as well and the past honesty of his intentions at the outset of marriage. This cluster delineates the ways in which Anne found the meaning of their marriage thrown into question and the fear she experienced when considering potential subsequent relationships.
6. **Concern over children's adjustment**
(20, 35, 37, 39, 40, 41, 42, 45, 46, 53, 65, 82, 90, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102)
- Anne's children were young at the time of Gary's disclosure and the couple's divorce. This cluster focusses on the many concerns which Anne expressed over the children's adjustment. Addressing issues with the children such as divorce, custody, and homosexuality represented her primary concerns.
7. **Parent's homophobic reaction and difficulty with acceptance**
(86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 104)
- Rather than providing a source of support for Anne, her parent's anger and homophobic reactions increased the difficulty of her adjustment. This cluster contains examples of her parents' angry reactions to Gary's disclosure and Anne's attempts to cope with this.
8. **Recognition of homophobia and its personal impact**
(9, 27, 41, 42, 77, 78, 79, 83, 101, 106)
- This cluster contains the ways in which Anne perceived and experienced homophobia in her surroundings. The ways in which homophobia reduced her willingness to share the homophobic reactions of friends are included here. In addition, themes addressing Anne's conviction about the need for openness and education regarding homosexuality are also encompassed.

9. **Importance of support**
(7, 22, 23, 24, 26, 29, 30, 31, 32, 56, 58, 76, 80, 85)
- For Anne the support of professionals, friends and family were important. This cluster highlights the various support resources that Anne accessed and the ways in which they were important in rebuilding her sense of self, establishing her confidence, and developing a network for connection with others.
10. **Personal healing, acceptance of loss, and growing independence**
(23, 33, 54, 55, 57, 60, 61, 63, 64, 72, 75, 81, 91, 92, 94, 95, 96, 103)
- Over time, Anne's confidence and coping skills increased. This cluster contains themes which reflect Anne's growing sense of independence, personal success, satisfaction with being single, and healing of concerns about her own value as a woman. Coinciding with her own personal growth appeared to be a mourning and acceptance of the death of the marriage. This allowed an acceptance of Gary's new relationship.
11. **Growth in understanding of homosexuality and expanded tolerance**
(28, 43, 48, 84, 105)
- Anne's experience led her to a new understanding of homosexuality. This cluster highlights her transition from a limited understanding and acceptance of homosexuality to a greater willingness to defend the rights of gays. In addition, Anne's desire for a more tolerant society is expressed through her efforts to educate her own children about homosexuality..

Table 7

First Order Thematic Abstraction of Nicole's Experience

Excerpts from Transcribed Interview	Paraphrases	Themes
1. . . . when you asked me if it was an intimate relationship, I said "Yes" . . . We had been friends for quite a while . . . We'd been seeing each other as in romantic . . . for three months or something like that. But it had been the whole, I mean we'd been close for a couple of years. And then we decided to move into a different relationship.	Identified relationship as close for a lengthy period but had chosen to define the relationship as more intimate for a relatively short period of time.	Intimacy as a growth process. Decision to define the relationship as romantic
2. And that was a few months later. He had said it (the relationship) wasn't working out for him.	Following romantic initiation, he shared his discontent with the relationship.	Romantic relationship lead to partner's discontent
3. And I guess at the beginning is when we had decided to go into this relationship – he had talked a little bit about having – wondering about whether he might be gay or not.	As they decided to define the relationship as romantic he briefly shared confusion regarding his sexual orientation.	Closer relationship included orientation confusion
4. . . . we had been getting closer and closer. And when – then he said that the reason he was scared to move into this relationship that he was worried about the fact that he was gay. But that was something he thought – well he didn't think seriously enough about at the time, like he thought this is just something I'm a little bit worried about, it's just something that's going to make the relationship more difficult for me and you just need to know about that. Before we go into it. So that's why he was telling me that.	As intensity of relationship grew, partner expressed confusion regarding his sexual orientation. Disclosure appeared important and perceived to add increased difficulty to relationship but gay orientation was downplayed.	Increased relationship intensity brought partner's orientation concerns and disclosure.
5. . . . it would never have entered his mind at the time that he would be gay, like it wasn't concrete, it was just he just felt it was a difficulty for him.	Partner saw his sexual orientation struggle as problematic but not evidence of homosexuality.	Recognition of orientation confusion - his denial of homosexuality.
6. . . . at that time it was kind of like, he was telling me so I would understand so I could be in this relationship with him and he could be there too.	Relationship required his honesty and her understanding	Honesty necessary for understanding relationship

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| 7. | And also it was to him – I mean – the last in he wanted was to be gay at the time. It was so important to him that it wasn't true. | He desperately wanted to be heterosexual | His aversion to homosexual orientation |
| 8. | I guess, I think at that time and later he did tell me he was gay I was so focussed on him. I was so focussed on him. Like going into that relationship, hearing that that was what he needed. And I was so like okay, "If that's what you need, then that's what I'll be." That's all I felt and that's all I could think about was what he needed me to be in that relationship. | Concern for her partner led Nicole to focus singularly on his orientation crisis and his need for her, a singular desire to fill his needs and uncertainty | Orientation crisis gave her a singular focus in attempting to fulfill his needs |
| 9. | ... at that time... when he was telling me I felt very close to him because he was telling me that (disclosure). And he was asking me to help him. And so I just became whatever he needed me to be. That was so important to me that I just be what he needed to be in the relationship. I didn't really think about what I needed. I don't know. | His disclosure increased feelings of intimacy yet his pain brought an other directed focus that prevented focussing on her own needs and allowed a loss of self knowledge | Disclosure brought Nicole a heightened sense of intimacy - caring -loss self |
| 10. | It (disclosure) just made me feel very close to him. Because that was so important to him. | Deep sharing enhanced intimacy | Disclosure increased intimacy |
| 11. | -- I mean up to that point we'd been very close friends. For maybe a year and a half. And nothing changed in terms of physical intimacy up to that point and so it was almost like, "Well, what was the change?" But there was a change because suddenly what changed was what I could call this relationship -- now we were seeing each other and he was my partner and in everybody else's eyes we were together whereas before we had just been friends. So it was just calling the relationship something different. I mean that was a big difference. | The decision to change the definition of their relationship to a partnership gave permission for Nicole and others to perceive a deeper relationship with Mark; this was despite a lack of physical intimacy between them | Identifying relationship as a partnership increased feelings of intimacy despite a lack of physical contact |
| 12. | And the feeling that now we were together whereas before we were friends. Now we were in my family and his family - around friends - we were together. | Recognition of partnership by friends and both families enhanced the sense of belonging together as a couple | Recognition by others enhanced a sense of unity as a couple |

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| 13. | <p>... now we were together that was important that's how it was for me then. And for him as well. Like – I saw the potential for us to stay together for a long time. So that was an important change for me. A very important relationship. I mean it was a very, very, very close relationship. So close.</p> | <p>Being together as a couple long-term was an important shift for Nicole that symbolized the deep commitment and intimacy of the relationship</p> | <p>Deep connection through partnership and prospects for the future</p> |
| 14. | <p>I think it was three months later – after the beginning of that change where he had talked about feeling uneasy or just scared, I think scared that there would be expectations with this change that he wouldn't feel comfortable with. That he needed to let me know that there would be expectations in terms of physical contact and so after we talked at that point, it was after that, it was so – it was very, very good, it was so good for those few days. I mean it was a very enjoyable time – very close – very much like we were together and I was so happy with that.</p> | <p>Following their decision to become partners, Mark discussed his discomfort with physical intimacy. This served to enhance the couple's sense of connection and her contentment</p> | <p>Paradoxically, openness about his discomfort with physical intimacy resulted in increased closeness</p> |
| 15. | <p>I felt comfortable in that I felt – what I felt comfortable with was knowing that he was committed to this relationship and so was I. I was there and it was okay for me to be there in a way that he needed me to be, because I knew he was committed to this. That it was so so important to him as well. I was so sure – that was so – I was very comfortable with that, it was such a strong feeling.</p> | <p>Partners' commitment brought comfort and willingness to meet his needs</p> | <p>His commitment enhanced her security and willingness to help</p> |
| 16. | <p>It was knowing that even though there were things he ... was not feeling completely comfortable with in the relationship, but that more than anything he wanted to be in the relationship. That it was so important for him: to have that relationship. That he really wanted the relationship. And when I think back on it I now can understand why that was so important to him. But at the time it felt so strong that this is what he wanted was to be with me.</p> | <p>Mark's strong desire for the relationship felt affirming despite his discomfort with some aspects; now understandings an alternate reason for his relationship focus</p> | <p>His desire for relationship felt like a desire for her</p> |

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| 17. | That if this relationship could work out, that would mean he wasn't gay. It was so important to him that that happen. At all costs that this would work. You know that's why it was so important to him that I was there with him in that and helping him with that. That I could accept however he could be in that relationship. | Importance of her role and the relationship to prove his heterosexual orientation was acceptable to her | Accepted her role in proving his heterosexuality |
| 18. | I mean his family was a big factor that it would be the end of the world if he was gay to his family. | Expectation of serious family difficulty if homosexual | Family sanctions against homosexuality |
| 19. | And he was with me and we were together and . . . it would be just so, not easy for him, but it would be what he wanted. So at a time when was really struggling with feeling like he might be gay, it was constantly, constantly, constantly saying this is so important to me, this relationship. And hearing that, me hearing that made me feel like I was the one who was so important, right. | Mark's sexual orientation crisis was coupled with an overwhelming desire for their relationship; she felt like she was very important for him | Sexual orientation crisis coupled with his relationship desire felt like she was important

Hearing the parts that made her feel important |
| 20. | I still feel that I was important to him at that time. That I'm the one who ended up getting hurt. That I wasn't the intensity of that being so important for him, that it wasn't about what he was feeling. . . . I just don't let myself think about it. I feel sad. Like think, think of me in that situation. I just think I got hurt. | Recognition that Mark's primary focus had been on his process rather than on her, the result was pain for her | Orientation crisis was focussed on Mark resulting in her pain |
| 21. | . . . it was the time when he said to me. . . this was kind of a crisis point for him, "I think I'm gay". And so then again there was a change in the relationship at that point. And there was a change starting at that point, I mean it was gradual. Probably around a year, that it actually happened. | Mark's full disclosure represented a crisis for him and signaled a slow evolution in the relationship | Partner's full disclosure crisis slowly changed relationship |
| 22. | Before the crisis point, we'd only talked a couple of times (about his sexual orientation confusion) and they were usually discussions about well it was kind of childhood, like it was a history thing . . . he'd been abused by one of his uncles when he was younger and all his feelings around that, guilt and that kind of stuff. | The few partial disclosures of Mark's orientation crisis included past memories of abuse and his guilt | Partial disclosures included childhood abuse memories |

23. . . . he had given me a kind of a history of how he'd felt attracted to men at different points in his life, what it was like to be in a relationship with men at this point and different types of things. I guess it was just kind of – I think it was him introducing to me this idea that this could be a possibility and he has an uncle who's gay, who was quite close with him so he was seeing more and more the possibilities or what it would mean for a person to be gay. What might be typical of a gay person kind of thing and seeing that in his own life. So they were just a few discussions, probably three. With him kind of exploring what that would mean.
- Partial disclosures included Mark's history of past male relationships, verbally testing homosexual lifestyle for himself and introducing this possibility to Nicole.
- Partial disclosures were a means of homosexual introduction and exploration for both
24. He never said it like that. It was never he might be gay. It was always kind of like, "Well, I think it's normal for people who have had experiences like me to feel attracted to men. And I'm not gay. So I'm explaining it this way." So okay, I mean the more you explain about this is normal, the more comfortable it is because you're not gay, it's just normal for you to feel like this. And all you need to do is get past it. And again it was something that was important to him, and it made it difficult for him and he just needed to be accepting of that with himself. All the time for both of us was not that he was gay. "It's just something in my past that needs to be understood."
- Rationalization of homosexual impulses allowed denial of homosexuality and normalized orientation struggle. This encouraged acceptance and understanding.
- Rationalization of homosexual attraction eased sexual orientation concerns and permitted both partners' acceptance
25. You mean 'gay night'? . . . I didn't feel like anything was leading up to it. It was really quite a shock because I mean it was kind of – At that point where the relationship changed the first time, is when he started talking about, "Well, I'm having these feelings – not that I might be gay, but there's these feelings that are making this relationship difficult. I'm not gay. I need to get past this – So that discussion happened at the beginning. And then it was left, I mean it was like okay were past that, don't talk about it again at all for a couple of months. It's completely gone from the picture.
- Following partial disclosure on the eve of defining their relationship as intimate, Mark's sexual orientation struggle was not articulated. Full homosexual disclosure came unexpectedly.
- Partial disclosure did not serve as a warning of partner's homosexual orientation

26. It just -- it (partial disclosure) explained the nature of our relationship in that we weren't physically intimate. So I could understand or explain to myself how can I be comfortable with that. And then it really was quite a shock the night that he said, "I think it's true, I think I'm gay." It really -- It was such a different way of talking about it. Because before it was, "It was these things I'm feeling. It's not because I'm gay, it's just normal because of my experiences."
- Partial disclosure served as an adequate explanation for lack of physical intimacy. Full disclosure was unexpected and shifted her perspective and understanding
- Full disclosure provided an unexpected shift in understanding the relationship
27. And he just started (full disclosure), he was so vague he was scared to tell me I think, he was so vague. Right away when he said that I was there a hundred percent to care about him, right? Because we're going back to this thing which is hard for him and here I am. I'm going to care about you right now. So right away I was listening and, "How are you feeling?" and "What's going on?"
- Mark's anxiety prior to full disclosure elicited Nicole's nurturing, supporting and accepting approach as partial disclosure had in the past
- His anxiety prior to disclosure elicited deep caring
28. I can remember feeling the next day I was so angry at what he had told me because it hurts me, because he knew from the start of the conversation where it was going, but he made me -- I don't know tricked or something. Because I had started the conversation like this is the same as before, and here I'm caring about you. You're committed to this, I'm committed to this. And at the end of it it's like I'm left. Like alone . . . And I was there for him.
- Following homosexual disclosure Nicole felt she had been manipulated into supporting only to learn that his disclosure would distance them
- Felt cheated into encouraging him to abandon her
29. Because I do remember the conversation took so long. Hours and hours and hours. Because it was so difficult for him to talk about, so I'm trying to make it easy for him. . . at the end of the conversation, "I think I'm gay", you know bawling, bawling bawling, he didn't want to accept it himself and so I was there for him, I was hugging him . . . I needed to really accept him and make him feel that. Just being there with him and make him -- needing him to feel that he could accept that about himself. But this was a crisis for him, so I had to be the one who made it okay.
- Disclosure of homosexual orientation represented his crisis which appeared to demand her unwavering support and acceptance
- Crisis of full disclosure demanded her focus on his needs

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| 30. | <p>... the whole night I was there for him, and I was focussed, focussed, focussed on what he was feeling the whole time. Yet it – a year later I said, “Did I even feel anything that night?” ... I hadn’t even thought that there might be something going on for me that night.</p> | <p>Her exclusive focus on Mark during full disclosure precluded any awareness of her own feelings</p> | <p>Focus on partner</p> <p>Immediate impact of full disclosure on her was unrecognized</p> |
| 31. | <p>“Well you’d better tell me what this means for me. You know, I need to know this before you leave.” Because he was okay and he was ready to leave. “Before you go, what are you saying about us? You know this does have implications.”</p> | <p>Recognition that partner’s full disclosure could affect their relationship; needed to know her status with respect to him</p> | <p>Full disclosure as threat to the relationship</p> <p>Disclosure implications for her</p> |
| 32. | <p>... he didn’t want it (disclosure) to have implications for us. . . He didn’t want anyone to know that things were changed, didn’t want things between us to change, like he was so scared of losing that closeness. . . And that was even more scary to him than saying, “I might be gay.” It was scary to him and so that felt good to me. That it’s not that he wanted to be out of the relationship, it was almost more important to him to have that closeness afterwards.</p> | <p>Fear of losing or changing the relationship was more intense for Mark than fear of his homosexuality. This comforted Nicole and reinforced their closeness.</p> | <p>His fear of losing the relationship reassured her.</p> |
| 33. | <p>Like he said, “I don’t want you to change. Because I know this isn’t fair to you. I know it really isn’t fair to ask this of you. I mean the last thing I want is for you not to be in this anymore.” And then he cried and he says, “I realize that maybe that’s what this means but it’s not what I want it to mean. I don’t want things to change.” And so it was like okay, we’re being idealistic but things won’t change, maybe we will just continue the same relationship that we had.</p> | <p>His desire for the relationship yet recognition that his sexual orientation short changed her and likely indicated an end to the relationship. Mutual attempt to deny negative implications on their relationship.</p> | <p>Injustice of her position in the relationship and a mutual denial of disclosure impact</p> |
| 34. | <p>That’s what I wanted more than anything. That’s what I wanted to hear, was that he was still in this. . . I needed to know that he was still willing to be in this relationship. Because that was -- I mean as I was listening to him saying, “I’m gay”, that was my fear -- was like what does this mean? This relationship is over so suddenly -- right? So then it was like, okay, all right everything is the same. It’s all OK. It’s all right.</p> | <p>Mark’s disclosure threatened the relationship instantly, relief and safety in knowing he remained committed to the status quo</p> | <p>Security in mutual denial of disclosure implications</p> |

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| 35. | I can still remember feeling very upset – I could remember the next day (following disclosure) I was working on my own and I was just crying all day, crying and crying because – I knew in my head that things weren't the same even though maybe we're saying right now that we want things to be the same, things aren't the same. It's impossible for them to be the same, because the future's gone . . . | Denial of implications of disclosure a thin veneer for Nicole's knowledge that the relationship was ending; intense grief | Complete denial impossible

Initiation of grieving and loss |
| 36. | In my head it was going – You're not gay – There is a future to this. And that's gone –POOF –if you're saying you're gay. | Hope entirely lost if Mark was definitely homosexual | Loss of hope |
| 37. | I was crying, crying, crying, crying, crying all morning and I think that it was about him that I was crying, – I wasn't crying about me. . . So I wasn't thinking I'm sad about me – that part was in my head too, but mostly it was being pushed out. . . I changed that sadness into sadness for him. And after that I was so focussed on him that I couldn't feel anything, | Denial and numb to her own pain--redirected extreme pain to Mark's orientation crisis | Denial, numb --
Redirected her pain to focus on partner |
| 38. | I even felt like relieved at the same time (following disclosure) because I felt like, "If you're gay, then our relationship makes more sense. Because we're not physically intimate and the whole time we've been going out I've been questioning that. And now it kind of makes sense, we're just friends and we're really close friends, that makes our relationship better. So maybe it all makes more sense and it maybe is kind of relief." | Disclosure brought a means of explaining questions about their non-physical relationship; relief at understanding the relationship in terms of deep friendship | Disclosure brought understanding and relieving explanations |
| 39. | That's the scary part, "What does this mean for the future?" | Disclosure raised fears for the future | Fear for her future
Existential |
| 40. | And also the whole discussion – I mean I felt so close to him at the end of it that that felt good – that it wasn't like he was gone that there was a loss, I almost felt closer to him because we shared this. It was like I'm the one person in the world who's ever seen as much of you – and been through as much with you. So more connected in that way. | Disclosure as a means of deepest, imitate sharing brought connection and value to Nicole's role in the relationship rather than immediate loss | Disclosure as a means of deepest connection not loss |

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| 41. | I could think of it in all different ways – I could feel good about that. I could feel relieved. I could feel sad for him. So sad for me. | Disclosure brought mixed emotions relief and sadness | Disclosure confusion |
| 42. | I tried not to think about what it would mean or what it did mean for the future. I think I just decided that I never wanted, I never wanted a future. I didn't really think about it any more. It was just like I'm happy with what it is now and I'm happy with being your close friend. And that's all we've ever been – completely deny what it had ever been for me – that's all it's ever been anyway – “What was I thinking anyway?” | Denial of past hopes, dreams and depth of the relationship; statement of satisfaction with relationship as less than romantic; sarcasm and anger with self | Denial of relationship aspirations and dreams

Self-deprecating |
| 43. | Totally cutting off everything that was vulnerable and saying, “OK, I'm strong and I'm in this relationship and I'm happy with it – always turning to the closet and cutting off the pain. “I'm not going to worry about this.” | Denial and avoidance as protection against her pain and lost position in the relationship | Denial as protection from pain |
| 44. | Like it's only now, looking back, that I realize how much pain there was - that there even was pain. Because I think at that time, I felt very strong. I felt very good – like everything was just positive. It's only now I can say that I was feeling a lot of pain. | Feelings of strength/euphoria masked pain following disclosure; only now recognizes the pain | High following disclosure masked pain |
| 45. | After disclosure, our relationship just did continue like it had always been, in fact, we were closer for a while. Or even for a long while because everything was so comfortable for him and I felt like that we had been so close because we really were together in this and so I felt really good about our relationship for a long time. | Mark's ease in the relationship following disclosure enhanced Nicole's sense of connection and contentment together | Disclosure eased his concerns and brought connection |

46. We stopped talking to other people about us being together, but we never said we're not together. We'd just let people assume that we were still together. I mean it was so silly because nothing had changed! but everything had changed. People had assumed that before what our relationship meant was that we were physically together and we weren't – so nothing had changed and they still didn't know what was going on. I wouldn't call him my boyfriend. But people could assume that and that was okay. We wouldn't correct people.
- Recognition that the nature of their relationship had changed despite the continuing lack of physical contact; awkward and chose not to correct others' ongoing misunderstandings about the relationship
- Awkward
- Not address others' misunderstandings about the past or present nature of the relationship
47. I can remember one time there was a big family reunion at his place and when we went together and people just assumed that we were a couple. . . I can remember driving there and it being difficult for him, and him saying that he didn't want to have to correct people. He didn't want to say that we weren't together. What he wanted was this whole thing. "This is so unfair to you but I want everyone to think that we're together." And me saying, "It's not fair to me, that's what I want, is for people to think – I want us to be together. I don't want you to tell people we're not right. So let's just let people assume that, it feels good for people to think that."
- Mutual decision to allow others to misunderstand the distance between them following disclosure; Mark's recognition that this may be unfair to Nicole
- Mutual avoidance of addressing relationship changes publicly
48. I mean it was both of us who wanted a relationship that wasn't fair. I mean it felt good to both of us. It's so strange because what other people thought was important, was so important to us. Because we wanted that nice relationship that looked nice to everybody else and that's what we had and it didn't matter to us that we weren't physically –because we were so close. So it was nice for everyone to see the relationship in this ideal way – believing what they did and neither of us wanted that broken. Just feeling very, very close to him.
- Decision to maintain appearance of the "perfect couple" was important to both; accompanied by feelings of connection despite the lack of a physical relationship
- Appearances important
Hiding the truth together
Connection

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| 49. | I can remember thinking like he had said, "Well, this isn't very fair to you. I don't want to hurt you." And me feeling like, "Well, what's going to hurt me is if you tell people that we're not together." But also me feeling like –he's thinking I might be hurt here. Why would I be hurt? My concern –should I be hurt? Am I going to be hurt? Wondering . . . him saying that we are together when we're not would be hurtful to me and me wondering why would that be hurtful to me. Wondering if I just wasn't realizing that I was going to be hurt? | Her need to maintain their public impression as a couple yet nagging concern and confusion that this may harm her as Mark suggested | Public impressions important

Fear and confusion that the deceptive representation may harm her |
| 50. | It feels really good to talk about this now. | Felt positive to share her story | Sharing through interview now feels positive |
| 51. | It feels like it was really gradual that it came out that we were no longer saying that we're together to people. That was the first change. So it got to a point where people didn't really know if we were together or not. After a while, I mean they wondered so long that they just thought that we're not. There was no point of it when can't really say well we've broken up because we're still doing everything together, we're still really good friends. | Difficulties in overtly defining their changed relationship because behaviours had not changed; public recognition of their separation was gradual with no distinct announcement | Separation difficult to define; others left to make their own conclusions |
| 52. | It was kind of confusing because you never really explained it to other people. They don't really understand the nature of it and I'm still feeling close to him and it's changed but it hasn't changed really. | Confusion and difficulty in identifying and defining relationship changes because close personal connection remained | Confusion over relationship definition |
| 53. | I mean I'm living with him, he's my roommate. But yeah there definitely was a gradual change in how we were together. And that was painful in different places. I think the way I felt it the most was when he, now he's gay, he was growing into that identity – and meeting the whole gay community, and came out and there was a whole part of that and at the beginning I was there for him in that. And then I worked very, very hard to be there with him to hear all about it, to understand it, to be part of it with him. | Remains close and aware of Mark's journey. Growing apart brought emotional pain for Nicole as she supported and joined his exploration of his homosexual orientation and public disclosure. | Though painful, remaining close and supportive throughout coming out process |

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| 54. | I would meet a lot of his friends. I went to some of the things he went to but it was more him discovering and then sharing it with me or me meeting his first boyfriend kind of thing. It was so hard for me to do that but I worked hard at it because I wanted to be there with him. I wanted to be close. I didn't want this to be the thing that came between us but even though he was making all these changes we could still be close. I could still understand who he was kind of thing. Worked really hard at that even though it was hard for me. | Chose to share in Mark's sexual discovery process, though painful, because it allowed her a continued connection and understanding of him. | Need for connection required painful awareness and understanding of partner's gay exploration |
| 55. | I mean I'd never known anyone who was gay so just being exposed to the whole gay relationships – the gay community and all that kind of thing. My feelings towards gay people in general – that was the focus and what was hard. | Her ignorance of homosexuality, gay subculture and preconceived notions regarding homosexuality were a struggle | Her ignorance of homosexuality a difficulty |
| 56. | Though when I think about it – he was becoming more and more comfortable with who he was. He was becoming, feeling like he belonged there. Feeling happy. Because as he became happy, he didn't need me any more. I was okay at the beginning. You can be gay as long as you need me – that we're still close – that you still need this relationship with me. Whereas, when he started to accept and to feel comfortable with what was happening in this other relationships, he didn't need me to be there accepting him – to be the one who affirmed him. | Mark's growing comfort and embeddedness in gay lifestyle reduced his need for Nicole's support and acceptance and this shook her. | With self acceptance Mark no longer needed Nicole's support |

57. It was all about his needs. But his needs weren't there any more. Because it wasn't about what I needed. That wasn't even the question. So if he didn't need me anymore then there was no relationship. There was no basis for it. No basis for closeness. But we were so close because he needed us to be so close. And so okay, I'm there because you need me to be, and you're here because you need to be. And that's why I feel safe because I know you need me to be here. And I know you need me to be like this - so - I'm here for you. As soon as you don't need that anymore, then I'm not safe. Because I don't know that you even care what I need.
- Her security and role in the relationship was jeopardized as Mark became self-assured and less needy of her support. She had been willing to predicate this relationship on addressing his insecurities though there was little sign that he was concerned with her needs.
- Relationship based exclusively on his needs and her willingness
- Exposed and alone when he became less insecure
58. So then I was alone. I was focussed on other friendships and this doesn't matter as much to me anymore. That's what I was pretending – this doesn't matter to me any more. Because I was getting hurt.
- Denial of grief and pain over being alone; attended to other friendships
- Isolation
Denial of pain
Friendship
59. I was scared that he didn't need me anymore and I felt angry that I'd been the one who was there, and he didn't need to be. Like it was so much, now that you're okay –Where am I?
- Fear of no longer being needed and anger with his lack of support for her. Her way of being was predicated on his need. Without his need – Who was she?
- Anger at lack of reciprocal support
- Fear with loss of her role - Identity crisis
60. There's so many new things that sometimes he was, "Shall I share this with you or not?" – wondering how I would feel. And it was always important to me that he share with me. I want to be able to understand and if you stop sharing this with me – I mean that's distance between us. Right then you've moved away and it was so important to me he continue to share.
- Nicole was committed to knowing about Mark's new life as a way of remaining connected with him; Mark expressed fear that this may harm Nicole
- Nicole sought Mark's disclosures as a means of maintaining the relationship
- Mark expressed concern on the impact on Nicole
61. I can remember feeling kind of hurt once in a while because it was hard for me to understand all the things that he was doing – being – becoming part of. And I'm like, "Why do I always have to do so much work to try to understand you? Like that's so unfair that if I want this closeness I have to work so hard to understand where you are right now. It's always me working. Anger. Like he was so demanding of me.
- Pain at trying to understand Mark's actions; anger at the imbalance in the relationship with her near exclusive focus on him
- Pain in understanding and anger at injustice of relationship imbalance

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| 62. | If both of us wanted this closeness, which is what it was all about – to remain that close – If both of us wanted that, then why was it always me who had to understand? That he would always, “Okay, I’ll tell you this and I want you to understand it. So we’ll work through this or whatever.” But if I was unable to understand or unable to be fully with it right away, and that was my fault, that I wasn’t will to do that work. And it became so tiring, because there was so many changes in his life, he became such a different person. | Anger at the sense that Mark expected her to completely understand and accommodate him in the relationship despite the notion that both wanted the relationship; fatigue with accommodating Mark’s rapidly changing lifestyle | Fatigue and anger at rapid change and his expectation that she be completely understanding |
| 63. | That it gradually ended over a year, or over two. It came to a point where I thought I don’t even know you anymore. I don’t even really like you anymore. You’re so different. I don’t respect you the same way I did. And it got to the point where I thought I don’t even know if I’d choose you as a friend right now. You’re so different from the person I used to know. | Gradually Mark was no longer recognizable to her as the man she had once known; found his new identity unappealing | Gradually recognized Mark’s new identity and was unimpressed and unattracted |
| 64. | I mean gradually, gradually I began saying, “Well, I can’t, can’t pretend that this stuff is important to me and I can’t pretend that – I have to start recognizing that we really were different.” Just because things were important for him didn’t mean they had to be important for me. So giving up trying to be whatever it was that I was trying to be all along. | Nicole abandoned past role in caring and supporting Mark’s concerns; she recognized themselves as disparate individuals | No longer focussed on his concerns

Recognition of disparate priorities |
| 65. | I didn’t usually feel like I needed support. I felt strong, throughout. I mean I don’t even think until recently, in the past six months that I thought I needed support about this whole thing. So yeah, at the time, there might have been – my sister is very close to me. And she’s the only one I did talk to about anything I wasn’t able to talk to him about. But mostly I was talking to him and mostly it wasn’t about me when I think about it. | Nicole saw little need for outside support; discussions with partner were primarily focussed on his needs; occasionally sought support from close sister | Little recognition of her own need for support

Shared with sister

Shared little of her process with partner |
| 66. | She knew the changes in our relationship. Yeah, she basically knew what I was going through. So she was really the only one in the beginning who knew – not really any of my friends. | Shared only with her sister the nature of her relationship with Mark | Solicited only sister for outside support |

67. A year afterwards. I was talking with my counsellor. I was going to see a counsellor and I mean it was just not about that, that I just briefly mentioned that night for a different reason. And then we talked about our relationship and she had asked me what it was that I was feeling that night. What was it that I needed in this relationship? That totally floored me the question before because it was so absent from my thinking. I hadn't even thought of the question before. What, it was just like. I mean it was just shocking to me to even think that. And then it was like - wow - There's all these feelings there.
- Counsellor facilitated a retrospective discovery of Nicole's emotions and needs regarding the relationship and disclosure that surprised her
- Help gaining insight into her own process in retrospect
- Surprise in self-exploration
68. I guess I mean the struggle for me over that year was to feel okay, really okay about what has happened to me or my feelings about this relationship. For me to continually say to myself, "Well, I don't want to make him more than a friendship." That was always the thing that was going through my head - pound, pound, pound, pound. So, "How am I feeling?" "Well, I'm fine because I've got to the point where it's okay with me. That it's nothing to do with me. That it's nothing more than friendship - it's like I was forcing myself to believe that.
- Struggle to denial of her continuing hopes for a relationship with Mark; difficulty in letting go of her dreams with him and accept a mere friendship
- Denial of her true relationship aspirations
- Difficulty seeing Mark as only a friend
69. And it had been a year (following disclosure) and we had gone on holidays, he and I. So we had been together 24 hours a day for two weeks. I thought it was so hard for me. And I didn't know. I couldn't understand where all these feelings were coming from again. So it's like, this was over a long time ago. I said, "That night you told me, I thought this was over for me." So where is this coming from? So, I was feeling hurt. And that's why I brought it up to the counsellor because it was so hard for me.
- Chose to holiday with Mark months after disclosure; confused and hurt by her continuing attraction to Mark; assumed that she had addressed this the night of the disclosure.
- Maintained very close contact
- Pain and confusion over her continuing attraction to him
- Denial of her own process

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| 70. And she (counsellor) had just encouraged me to quit labeling things and feel whatever it was that was there. It felt so good to be able to do that. To let go with this need to be okay with this not being more than a friendship. Because it was so important to be able to label this friendship, friendship, friendship. | Appreciated professional guidance in giving herself permission to acknowledge her desire for more than a friendship with Mark. It had been important to deny this previously. | Professional assistance in acknowledging the depth of her connection to Mark. |
| 71. And that my feelings that that was friendship - to let go of that. So that really felt good to do that at that point. And I guess, I never really thought of it as something like a struggle for me - that this was important for me to go through this. It was only ever difficult for him. I was a friend who went through it with him and this wasn't ever anything that was hard for me. It was an awakening point. Something relaxed in a point too. Just let go with it. | Eventually recognition of her feelings and process about the relationship brought a sense of understanding and peace after focussing on Mark process | Examining her own process and feelings brought understanding and peace |
| 72. She (counsellor) had said at that this is something we need to talk about in the future but I never brought it up and she wouldn't make me go back there so it was just something. I thought well it felt good to bring that home and to think about it a few times and what she had done for me which was to relax and let go about it. To give myself permission, too. Because to that point there was no room for me. | Short encounter with therapist provided the guidance necessary for Nicole feel acceptance and begin to acknowledge herself in this process | Therapist role in encouraging Nicole to acknowledge her needs |
| 73. Our relationship has changed, changed, changed continually, changed to the point where I don't feel close to him at all any more. I don't know it's so confusing, but I'm fed up. I'm not interested in putting anything more into it because I feel like he could never understand who I am. I could never care. | Different relationship; Nicole's confusion, anger and loss of connection based on Mark's apparent lack of understanding and caring for her | Anger and confusion over Mark's inability to connect with her |
| 74. That he's very very focussed on him and I'm not anymore. I can't be. I'm not. We're still close. I mean no. We're not close - but we became roommates a few months ago. -- Up to that point we were still quite close as friends. It was kind of we almost stayed close even though there was a lot of distance. | Ambivalence about the depth of her current connection with Mark; less focussed on him than in the past though maintaining a relationship was important | Ambivalent connection

Less focus in him |

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| 75. | <p>It's just going -- you're not my friend any more. You're just my room mate -- we also -- we own a business together -- so there's -- we have that relationship, too. So now we fight a lot when we're working on business stuff because we communicate so much less than we used to. But I mean there's just a lot more tension in our relationship than there was. A lot more tension and even just last week he's saying he was all angry about all these things to do with the business, being roommates, whatever. At the very end of it, it was like well what I miss is being close to you. Now we don't talk any more and that's really what this is all about and I know that.</p> | <p>Distancing personal relationship; maintain roommate and business relationship with animosity and less communication; recognition that anger is related lost connection</p> | <p>Lost personal connection impacts business relationship negatively</p> |
| 76. | <p>And I miss it too. Because if I let myself think about it, I feel very sad. I feel like I lost a friend that at one point I was very close to and I had this person who I thought understood me. And who I understood and I don't even know who that person is any more. That's lost. I can't see it any more. I mean it feels like he's so different. He's changed so much and I wonder. I can't see it -- because it feels now that there's just no -- that whoever was there before who made an effort to understand me isn't there anymore.</p> | <p>Recognition of lost intimacy and being understood; no longer recognizes Mark as the same person</p> | <p>Loss of significant other and intimacy</p> |
| 77. | <p>I think he's worked so hard at being comfortable with who he is, he's gotten to the point where he is comfortable with who he is and screw anyone else who isn't comfortable with who he is. That he's so focussed on being comfortable with himself. It's this relationship of him to himself. That's all there is.</p> | <p>Mark's inward focus, self acceptance and self protection leaves no room for a relationship with her</p> | <p>Mark's self-relationship prevent a relationship with her</p> |
| 78. | <p>Now I feel a friend that's lost. It's changed. It's different. It's all gone. It's like I can't invest myself in that anymore. I can't make the investment in that friendship because it takes so much work at this point. There's nothing coming from his side and as long as there's nothing coming from his side.</p> | <p>Loss of friendship; relationship too demanding with no reciprocity</p> | <p>Lost friendship
Demanding with no reciprocity</p> |

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| 79. | We both grew up in a strict conservative church where it (homosexuality) is totally a sin and I hadn't been exposed to it at all –except that it's a sin and it's freaky. So it was a whole – big shift to come to accept that choice. It was a big shift. | Socialization denied legitimacy of homosexuality and disclosure encouraged a shift in understanding | Dramatic shift in understanding and acceptance of homosexuality |
| 80. | I mean that was part of his struggles, too. His parents, when he actually came out to them, he was a sinner. | Parental disclosure met with religious judgment | Religious judgment |
| 81. | I can remember his dad saying – which was really hurtful, too. "Well, if you were with a different woman, it would be different!" | Pain at being blamed for Mark's homosexuality | Others blame her for Mark's homosexuality |
| 82. | Their (Mark's parents) whole perception of it was that this is just your choice here. A wrong choice. You need to change your mind. We'll do everything we can to help change your mind. | Mark's parents' lack of acceptance and understanding of his orientation | Lack of acceptance by significant others |
| 83. | My family never made comments like that (negative regarding homosexuality). I didn't tell them. I didn't want to go through this. I don't think they'd accept it. Some of it would be just too much for them. Too much work for them. I still don't think that they would. They'd probably think that it's wrong. It's sinful. They wouldn't accept him in the same way afterwards. It seemed that it was just easier not to. | Chose not to share her experience with parents; unwilling to deal with parents' expected negative reaction to Mark's orientation | No disclosure to her parents based on expected lack of parental support |

84. *How does it feel for you to have been attracted or in a relationship with someone who discloses that they're gay?*
- That was another thing that I completely cut myself off from – was feeling so unattractive to my new partner. That it was such a big hurtful feeling that it would come up so that I completely cut myself off from that as well. But what I was feeling was unattractive. I don't even know what the feeling is for it, but when you have the feeling that – even though this person (Mark) wants so badly to feel comfortable in this relationship physically with you that they can't. It makes you feel almost disgusting to him. There must be something unattractive about me – something that makes them so uncomfortable. It affected my whole body image and how I felt about my body while I was with him –it was just repulsive almost.
- Mark's rejection of a physical relationship with Nicole damaged her own body image and created feelings of disgust and repulsion of her own body. A new relationship elicited her denied feelings of unattractiveness.
- Rejection of physical relationship profoundly damaged her body image
- Denial until new relationship
85. It's interesting because I have never talked to anyone who has had a similar experience. I've never allowed myself to think that this might have been something important. . . The whole relationship was about him becoming gay. You're looking at the experience of gay men but this was an experience for me, you know. Well the whole thing has been – even when I hear my experience is being studied. It feels so good. It was almost like I responded right away. I thought I would like to talk to her. Here, I'm helping you out, but it's like wow, I can talk about this. Nobody I know understands that this even could be difficult. It never – it just takes time to keep thinking this is two years later. But looking back I realize how much is there.
- Recognition of the magnitude and importance of her own experience through the interview process; appreciation for the opportunity
- Interview as an exciting opportunity to explore her experience
86. Homophobia . . . There was a huge dramatic shift as soon as there was somebody I knew. The man I was very close to was homosexual and there wasn't any question about accepting that.
- Homophobia not an issue once it affected someone she loved
- Personifying homosexuality destroyed her homophobia

Table 8**First Order Thematic Clusters of Nicole's Experience**

First Order Clusters	Cluster Description
<p>1. Conservative family background, sanctions against homosexuality and lack of support</p> <p>(5, 7, 18, 55, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 86)</p>	<p>Both Nicole's and Mark's family backgrounds are Christian fundamentalist. This cluster highlights the influence of their conservative church and family values as a backdrop to Mark's disclosure and Nicole's response. In addition, family members reactions to Mark's disclosure are included.</p>
<p>2. Intimacy requires disclosure and disclosure brings intimacy</p> <p>(1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 40, 45, 54, 60)</p>	<p>With the increasing closeness of their relationship, Nicole witnessed Mark struggle with his sexual orientation. This cluster focusses on the way in which increased intimacy between the couple encouraged Mark's disclosure. In addition, because of Mark's disclosure, Nicole found that she experienced a deeper sense of connection with Mark.</p>
<p>3. Disclosure a slow process eliciting a confusing mixture of relief, fear, uncertainty and exploration.</p> <p>(21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 31, 38, 41, 52)</p>	<p>Mark's disclosure reflected more of a process with Nicole rather than a discrete event. In this cluster, themes related to Mark's sexual orientation confusion, his sharing with Nicole, and her growing understanding of the impact of Mark's homosexuality are included.</p>
<p>4. Search for signs of connection and the importance of a public image as a couple</p> <p>(12, 13, 16, 19, 32, 48)</p>	<p>For Nicole public formalization of her relationship with Mark was important -- as was Mark stated desire for her. This cluster identifies themes which highlight Nicole's desire to be recognized as a couple both before and after disclosure. Specific thematic statements address her wish to remain publicly linked with Mark despite private changes in the relationship.</p>

5. **Maintain connection following disclosure by helping him**
(8, 15, 17, 27, 29, 30, 37, 53)
- Nicole perceived a potential threat to their relationship following Mark's disclosure yet also perceived his desire for her support. This cluster highlights the ways in which Nicole maintained her connection with Mark by helping him to address his sexual orientation crisis. This often included fulfilling his needs while remaining alien to her own pain.
6. **Denial of pain and disclosure implications**
(33, 34, 43, 44, 46, 46, 47, 49, 51, 58, 68, 69)
- For Nicole the pain of losing her relationship with Mark was often masked by denial. This cluster includes themes which address Nicole's denial of the implications of disclosure, her denial of the meaning the relationship held for her, her denial of loss, and an unwillingness to correct others ongoing misconceptions about the couple's changed relationship.
7. **Loss of connection with her own process and feelings**
(9, 30, 37, 49, 68, 84)
- With Nicole's strong focus on Mark following disclosure and her denial of the meaning of their relationship came a loss of connection with herself and with her own emotions. This cluster identifies themes which highlight this issue.
8. **Imbalance in the relationship - not reciprocal focus**
(20, 28, 33, 56, 57, 59, 61, 62, 63, 64, 73, 74, 77, 78)
- Over time, Mark appeared to become more comfortable with his homosexual identity and required less support from Nicole. Contained within this cluster are thematic statements which reflect Nicole's growing awareness that their relationship had become based on Mark's need for her with little reciprocal concern for her emotional needs. As Mark's need for her decreased, Nicole felt cheated and angry that Mark remained primarily self-absorbed and unconcerned with her needs.

9. **Fear of separation evokes feelings of loss and fear of her future**

(35, 36, 39, 42, 57, 58, 59, 68, 69, 75, 76, 78)

As Nicole began to realize that Mark no longer needed her support, she was unable to deny the loss of their once close relationship. As a result, denial of her pain began to subside and a deep fear for her future took hold. Without her role as Mark's support, her connection with him was in question. She could no longer see herself as Mark's helper and her self-definition was jeopardized. This cluster highlights the above issues.

10. **Awakening self-awareness and relief through sharing**

(50, 65, 66, 67, 70, 71, 72, 85)

Initially, Nicole shared her experience with very few individuals as she saw little need for others' support. This cluster contains themes that highlight the ways in which Nicole began to seek others' confidence and experienced healing through sharing her story. Resources which Nicole utilized for sharing included the support of her sister, a therapist, a new partner, and validation as a co-researcher on this project.

Table 9

First Order Thematic Abstraction of Justine's Experience

Excerpts from Transcribed Interview	Paraphrases	Themes
1. – my husband first mentioned to me before we were married that he felt that he had gay tendencies. And that he had always been very open and forthright about that.	Open premarital disclosure of husband's homosexual inclinations	Premarital disclosure and awareness
2. It (husband's homosexuality) hadn't been discussed a lot. It was probably from my aspect one of those things that I felt would go away, I mean, it's sort of like if you have a headache, you're gay, you have a headache – I was totally unprepared for the . . . total impact of the whole situation.	Husband's homosexuality as transitory and superficial to her life and relationship	Lacked awareness of meaning of disclosure
3. But we've been married 27 years now. And it was a year and a half ago that the issues really came up again. Although, periodically during the marriage, my husband might have said that he was having difficulty with his "gay side". But those were just circumstances that would arise periodically and I didn't give anymore thought to them.	Husband's periodic homosexual crises not seen as major concern until recently in lengthy marriage	Unaware of meaning of husband's ongoing orientation crises until recently
4. About a year and a half ago, when my husband was on a trip he experienced the fact that he really had to get in touch with his gay half. And he told me that he was having difficulty with this aspect and that he felt that we had to do a lot of talking and make some decisions . . . I didn't really understand all the ramifications. I didn't know a lot of the ramifications of what that would be and I still don't know a lot of the ramifications of that.	Husband's orientation crisis intensified and he requested her increased involvement and awareness though the implications were unclear to her	Greater awareness of husband's intensified orientation crisis Unknown implications
5. It (thoughts following intensified crisis) was initially fear that – my initial fear was that he was going to leave me and I would be deserted. I would be – and I was terrified of being left.	Initial reaction to awareness of husband's crisis was fear of abandonment and aloneness	Fear of abandonment

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| 6. | He came forward and said that he felt that now was the time for him to address his gay aspect of his life. And so I said, "Fine, how does that involve us?" And he said that as far as he was concerned he didn't think that it would have any real impact upon how things were, although we were aware of it, and that things primarily wouldn't change. He was committed to our marriage and our relationship. | Husband's stated need for gay exploration; her concern for the impact on their relationship; his statement of ongoing commitment to the stability of the relationship | Need for gay exploration

Her concern for relationship

His ongoing marital commitment |
| 7. | I was in a state of, like a shock. Not knowing – well I was just totally unaware of what the ramifications were and whether or not – and my first thought was, "Can we stay together in order that –?" And "Do we want to stay together?" And, "What are the ramifications?" | Impact of husband's latest disclosure powerful and unsettling calling to question the foundations of their relationship and future | Full disclosure and her realization traumatic experience

Future of relationship is question |
| 8. | Both of us together. We went and saw the psychiatrist and agreed that this would be helpful and we'd be comfortable working with this individual. And so we had been doing that. | Sought professional help together | Professional help together |
| 9. | Disbelief. Feeling of disbelief, feeling of sort of – you can turn your back on it, it will go away. Feeling of unreality. "Why is this happening to me?" "What have I done wrong?" | Full disclosure had an air of unreality

Questioning– somehow must deserve this situation | Surreal
Existential questioning
Self-blame |
| 10. | Well, I didn't feel totally responsible. I mean this was something I had an understanding that no one is at fault. But you still think, "If perhaps I had been a better sex partner—" "If I had been more understanding, perhaps this might not have occurred." "Perhaps if I had been able to better understand what he was going through –" I took a lot of blame on myself, that I was responsible for this occurrence, this 'coming out' on his part. | Torn – some understanding that husband's homosexual orientation was not her fault, yet questioned whether her sexual behaviour or lack of understanding contributed husband's crisis. | Knowing husband's orientation beyond her control yet believing that she may be responsible; self-blame |
| 11. | And there seems to be a need for self-blame because the– Why has it happened now when it hasn't happened all along? And yet, I had known but hadn't accepted the fact that my husband was gay. | Blames self for denial or blindness to husband's homosexual disclosures; questions her role in disclosure at this point in time | Self-blame - responsibility

Denial/blindness to previous disclosures |

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| 12. | Only because he didn't go out and frequent bars. He didn't go out and go out with other men. He had men friends, but just as I have women friends. But he has never had a relationship with another man. And so for him to say that he was gay didn't make sense to me. Because if he was gay, why was he living the lifestyle that he was leading. | Husband's previous verbal disclosures did not match with his straight behaviour confusing Justine | Confusion over what husband had been saying for years and what he had been doing |
| 13 | So yes, there was a lot of blame. The marriage wasn't successful therefore, this has happened. He's decided to take this train of thought at this point in time, when up to now it hasn't been important. | Self-blame - If relationship had been more satisfying, husband would not have decided to look elsewhere for satisfaction. In the past, it must have been more satisfying because he wasn't looking outside at that time. | Husband's sexual orientation crisis seen as negative reflection on his satisfaction in the relationship

Self-blame |
| 14. | Disbelief in just the whole process in not accepting, although I could say, "Fine, you are gay". It's one thing to say it, it's another thing to accept it and I had a lot of difficulty accepting it and in a sense looking at him and deciding if I could be accepting it of him because he was insistent upon the fact that he look at this 'gay half' as he said it. | Difficulty truly accepting husband's homosexuality or even accepting him at all with his determination to explore his homosexuality | Difficulty accepting husband and his 'new' sexuality |
| 15. | I didn't understand and appreciate why he would have a need for the relationship with another man. If he wanted intimacy and we had intimacy, why would he need intimacy with another person? What was the difference between having sex with a male and having sex with a female, or a female having with a male? One is out of love, one is out of sexual desire. | Questioning the sexual act of homosexuality and its attraction for her husband

Questioning the role of intimacy vs. raw desire and the couple's proven ability to be sexually intimate | Troubled by husband's desire for homosexual sex

Their intimacy vs. his desire for gay sex |
| 16. | I couldn't understand why there would be a sexual attraction. Because I can understand that it's easy for women to be friends and be intimate and close and certainly men can be friends and be intimate and close, but why would they want the sexual experience between each other? And wasn't that – why would that be important? I had a lot of difficulty accepting that. | Can understand deep same gender friendships but not the need for homosexual experience | Difficulty understanding a need for homosexual sex |

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| 17. | I still have some difficulty with the aspect of sexuality with if he was to have an affair with another male. And he doesn't understand why I would have a difficulty with that. It's sort of a question of his having his cake and eating it too. And I'm not having any cake and I'm not eating anything. I'm not getting anything. | Feelings of inequity if husband were to have a gay affair he would be enjoying a sexual affair while she got none at all; lack of understanding of this on husband's part | Inequity and unfair to her if husband had an affair

Husband's lack of understanding |
| 18. | I was very fortunate because Steve was very upfront about the – his feelings and his situation. And we have always communicated quite openly. But, I had said that I didn't know how I would handle it, but I couldn't accept how he could have a relationship with another person and then still have a relationship with myself. | Open communication; concerned about her reaction to an affair on Steve's part; unwilling to accept this as a part of her relationship with him | Open communication

Unwilling to accept an affair on Steve's part |
| 19. | And so then I felt because I wasn't providing something in our relationship that he needed to have and so therefore, I wasn't the good wife. I wasn't the good mate . . . I took on the blame on myself and said I was responsible and I should be able to allow this to happen. I do want him to be fulfilled in himself so that our marriage can be fulfilled. | Blamed herself as a deficient spouse because she could not provide for her husband's need. Felt she should permit her husband an affair to provide fulfillment she couldn't –this would fulfill the marriage. | Self-blame

Meeting all of husband's needs seems to require permission for homosexual affair |
| 20. | I felt as though I was totally out of control of the situation. I had no control. I had no ability in anything I did. It was his decision-making and I was really torn because I was feeling, starting to feel desperate and starting to feel very angry. I very rapidly became depressed and I'm on medication for depression. And I'm still depressed. | Profound powerlessness over her situation led quickly to depression; saw husband as ultimate control over her and the relationship; anger at her weakened power over her destiny | Feelings of powerlessness and anger over lack of control of her future led to depression |
| 21. | I felt that why should I interfere if this is what he is needing and this is beneficial to him. We've had a very good life up to this point and I thought, "Why is it going to be so difficult or so hard to live with this?" | Questioned her right to pit her needs against his when the marriage had been positive for her so far; questioned her difficulty with this process | Questioned her needs vs. his needs |

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| 22. | One thing we did was we wrote up a contract. First of all we decided that we wanted to be in the marriage relationship. That we did love each other and that we wanted to grow together and as well as within ourselves and work on things in ourselves that we thought we needed to work on. Then as a result of that, it was suggested that I write up a contract of things that I felt I could live with. And actions that I felt that I could live with that he took and that would put some limits on his behaviour. | Mutual decision to remain committed to relationship work and self work; Justine devised a contract limiting Steve's behaviour to actions she felt she could accept | Commitment to relationship and self

Contract an attempt to satisfy Justine's needs |
| 23. | We haven't implemented all the aspects of it (contract) because of other circumstances of the depression that had gone on and because of – we just wanted things to settle down a little bit. It's like being able to close a dragon in a closet – or behind a door – you know you have to go through the door at some point in time. but at least you can hold it in abeyance for a little while. | Aspects of contract not in effect due to depression; afraid to face the effects of the contract –wants to keep the ramifications at bay; recognizes the inevitability of facing the frightening full impact of her husband's homosexuality | Depression prevents implementation of contract and inevitable frightening ramifications |
| 24. | I had to learn to do a lot of trusting. Had to learn to accept the fact that there was a lot of anger and learn to express. And decide – Did I want to be in the marriage or not? And I have decided that I am committed to being in the marriage. | Both trusting and anger were important required work.

Chose to accepted an ongoing commitment to the marriage this new information | Necessity of trust and anger

Recognized her own decision to remain in the marriage |
| 25. | And we have told our sons. They have been very accepting. We haven't talked in any great detail, but Steve has talked with them about his sexuality and about his gayness. And they have been very open and accepting and comforting and loving. One of our sons said he has always believed there is a male and a female aspect of everybody and so – what difference does it make? So they have been very supportive, very helpful. | Husband has shared his homosexual orientation with sons and his disclosure was received with acceptance, support and understanding | Sons' positive response to Steve's homosexual disclosure |
| 26. | Its (sons' positive response to disclosure) made it a lot easier. Although as I say we haven't talked about it and we haven't had a situation where he might be out in an evening or his weekend away and one of the boys wanted to get hold of him or something like that, that hasn't occurred. | Sons' positive response to disclosure has eased her concerns; she anticipates possible difficulties in the future when Steve's potential gay behaviour may interfere with their sons' accessibility to Steve | Appreciated sons' positive response

Anticipates future difficulties based on Steve's potential gay behaviour |

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| <p>27. The other thing is in addition to the contract agreement, I have the right with the contract agreement, to put a halt to Steve's sexuality. Should it be occurring or should I feel that the marriage relationship was at risk, so that was helpful because I felt less threatened. Not really in control, just that there was -- it was less threatening.</p> | <p>Agreement that she limit Steve's sexual contact based on her perceived threat to the marriage eased fears but still felt powerless</p> | <p>Able to limit Steve's sexual contact; some relief yet feels powerless</p> |
| <p>28. I don't know if it will work. But that is what we were thinking. That a halt could be called at any point if we felt that the marriage and our relationship, as we outlined it in our contract, was at risk. And we would also make use of psychotherapy sessions to assist us in understanding and working through the situation.</p> | <p>Misgivings about contract's success; intend to limit outside threats to agreed upon marital relationship and access professional help</p> | <p>Misgivings about contract

Plans for outside threats through limiting contract and professional help</p> |
| <p>29. <i>You talked a little bit about holding the dragon in abeyance . . . I wondered what that dragon would be for you . . . and what might be behind that door. . . ?</i></p> <p>That's a difficult one to answer because I've got the dragon in abeyance at the moment. And to have to look at the dragon is very painful and anxiety producing and I don't know what it's going to be, but it's very threatening. And I don't know if I will have the inner resources to come through the painful period. I'm sure I will.</p> | <p>Uses metaphor to describe fear of the future and unknowns she may have to face; feels threatened and unsure of her ability to cope with impending pain</p> | <p>Fear of the future, unknowns, impending pain

Unsure of her abilities to cope</p> |
| <p>But it's -- I don't know why it should be so difficult to look at and this is in rationalizing it. It is any different being married to a gay man than being married to a Jewish person? Is there any difference being married to a gay man than being married to a Chinese person? Do people need to know what the sexual orientation is? Can we not still have a loving relationship? And so there's a lot of unanswered questions.</p> | <p>Grapples unsatisfactorily for an analogy to provide answers

Questions the bottom line impact of homosexuality on their relationship and the role of society to know Steve's orientation</p> | <p>No role models

Question impact of homosexuality on them and society's need to know</p> |

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| 31. | And the ramifications of those questions that need to be answered and a lot of those things I'm just not ready to look at because I'm having difficulty handling the anger and the open communication and depression and that that seems to be thrown into it and a lot of the extra stressful situations. So I can't say exactly what the dragon is. It's an unknown. | Overwhelmed struggling with her anger, depression and openness with Steve; feels unready to face other fears and the unknown | Overwhelmed and too stressed to face inevitable unknowns |
| 32. | It would be nice if you could put your toe in the water and test it and pull it out and then gradually ease our foot into the water, but I don't think it is quite that way. And I get the fear that my whole world is going to explode and become disastrous. | Uses metaphor to describe the volatility and instantaneous way she feels her future may unfold | Fear of volatile and instantaneous threat to her way-of-being in the world |
| 33. | But it will also be very painful. Very painful. And wanting to escape that pain. Not have that pain – certainly not looking at it is one way, but on the other hand, it's there and has to be addressed. | Inevitability of pain and desire to avoid it | Inevitable pain
Avoidance |
| 34. | So in a sense really although I'm not looking at the dragon, I'm not addressing the dragon, in a sense just because of everyday living, I'm addressing it. Because by communicating better and starting to feel more secure in myself, I'm better able to relate and experience those things. | Recognition that her capability to go on and her communication is a coping mechanism enhancing her self-concept | Limited recognition of her own power through coping |
| 35. | Although that extra stress is the straw that breaks the camel's back. Of looking at the dragon. I guess of facing all the implications of actually saying, of actually accepting of the fact that we won't live under a new contract, that we will exist differently than we have. This is very difficult. | Fear that she is at her limit to handle stress; fear of losing her know way-of-being; fear of unknown | Unsure of her ability to cope

Loss of relationship as known to her

Fear of unknown |
| 36. | Steve brought it up (disclosure before marriage) and I knew because he had been in counselling and I was aware of that. And he had shared with me that he was either bisexual or gay, yes. Although, it just didn't mean anything at that time, it was just sort of like, well I've got a headache, that's the same type of thing. It meant the same type of thing. You're gay, well, but you're not living that way. | Husband's disclosure prior to marriage held little meaning because his actions did not reflect the disclosure | Initial disclosure held little meaning for her |

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| 37. | So why should it impact on his life? Why should it change his life? And why was it having that effect on him that it was interfering with our life? Didn't understand that. I still don't to a certain extent. | Initial fundamental difficulty understanding the necessity for his homosexuality to impact them; still problematic for her | Difficulty understanding apparent homosexual need |
| 38. | <i>What did you know about homosexuality?</i>

At that time (initial disclosure), very little. I was quite naive about things. About the whole thing. And the aspect of homosexuality was that there were gays who lived together. There was a cult. It never --hardly ever the fact that there was a culture of gay people or group of gay people who were just like straight people. and were -- you always saw the extremes. But no, I had no knowledge of the gay culture. | Her knowledge of gay culture at the time of initial disclosure was limited to social perception as a freakish aberration | Initial knowledge of homosexuality based on society's negative perception

(not like her husband so he must not really be one) |
| 39. | And not a lot available on the topic (homosexuality) and not discussed. | Few opportunities to learn or share | Limited information; no sharing |
| 40. | There was a lot of prejudice against homosexuals. They were considered -- the combination of weird and ugly and unclean by -- Through our marriage I have met a couple of gay people, not through my husband, but just through acquaintances and found that they were very very, nice people. But the general consensus of opinion, when we were first married, was otherwise. | Society's stigmatization and negative perception of homosexuals; contrary to her personal contacts with homosexuals | Social perception of homosexuality contrary to her experience |
| 41. | And we have also made a point of going out and seeing some of the different movies. We haven't gone and frequented bars or anything like that. But we were aware of the fact that there is a culture. Living in the artistic community, there's a very high proportion of homosexuals. So because of our contact with homosexuals and also looking at --because of the AIDS issue, because of sexually transmitted diseases and difficult things like this, what is going on in the world and so much more aware, we were more comfortable with homosexuality. | Multiple contacts with the gay community and increased social awareness of homosexuality and AIDS increased the couple's ease with homosexuality | Contact with homosexual community and acceptance |

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| 42. | Also, because both of us had a very limiting adolescence, we felt that it was important that our children have a broader aspect and a broader understanding of things so that we -- so that they have been given information. We haven't -- we tried not to give opinions so that they have to think on things a certain way. So that they can make decisions themselves. | Saw own past as narrow and attempt to provide information and options to their children | Provide children with broad social perspective and choice; unlike their experience |
| 43. | Because of the fact that we have always gone to the theater and some kinds of symphony and ballet, we have always been aware of the fact that there are homosexuals. And have come to realize, just through our own experience, that a lot of homosexuals are very fine people. | Awareness of artistic homosexual population and experienced respect for many | Awareness of homosexuals and respect |
| 44. | It was a bias our parents had. And we grew up with. But it's not one that we have had. It's just like you've had your ears pierced and I haven't and so what's the difference? Without looking at all the ramifications. | Parents held homosexual prejudice but not an issue for Justine and Steve; implications for marriage different issue | Parents prejudice not couple |
| 45. | So over the years, certainly we have become more aware of individuals and on occasion my husband has said, "That person is attractive to me." And I would often look at them and say, "Why is that person attractive to you?" And yes, I could see why he would be, or no, I don't think he is. That was a little unnerving. Not so much when we talked, but when he was saying that's attractive to me, and then why it is attractive. And the talking about it like that was unnerving and unsettling. But I felt it was something he had to talk about and if we talk about it then it would go away. Until more recently. | Husband's shared feelings of homosexual attraction with Justine created unease and discomfort, yet saw her role to share this way to exorcise his homosexuality

No longer hold this opinion | Chose to share husband' homosexual attractions in an attempt to eradicate homosexuality, despite her discomfort

Balancing needs |
| 46. | Whether it was age, whether it was looks, whether it -- whatever. And I couldn't understand why he would be attracted to that. When there was still obviously -- we were sharing sexually together. I couldn't understand why. How was it possible he could be attracted to others? And at the same time, I can understand how men can be attracted to other women, but not other men. | Confusion; difficulty understanding husband's homosexual attractions and his continued sexual intimacy with her though she understands similar heterosexual attractions | Difficulty understanding homosexual attractions |

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| 47. | <p>One thing I found, which I didn't mention, was the fact that I became very scared. Scared to make decisions. Scared that my making decisions weren't correct. Scared of being alone. Scared of the future. Everything just seemed to some tumbling on itself.</p> | <p>Overwhelming fear, unsure of self, fear of aloneness, fear of the future</p> | <p>Existential struggle-
fear of aloneness, fear of future, lack of self-confidence</p> |
| 48. | <p>That went with the depression. It's about the fact that Steve was gay, a lot of it. If he wasn't that way, this wouldn't be happening, this wouldn't be encroaching on our lives. So I'm angry with the fact that he's gay.</p> | <p>Depression corresponded with Steve's homosexuality, its advancement on their lives and her struggle with anger over this</p> | <p>Depression

Anger that Steve's homosexuality encroached on the marriage</p> |
| 49. | <p>That's because it wasn't acceptable to be angry as a child – to have violent outbursts, to express feelings. So, therefore, I'm in the process of learning that feelings are okay. That the expression of anger is all right.</p> | <p>Learning to accept and feelings including anger which were unacceptable as a child</p> | <p>Learning to deal with her feelings including anger</p> |
| 50. | <p>The expression of anger was there, but I didn't necessarily express it the correct way. I internalized it – so that I was at fault. For a while, I threw dishes and plates. But that wasn't acceptable and I was told that that wasn't acceptable, so I stopped doing that because I wanted to be acceptable. But I'm learning or trying to learn different ways of handling the anger so that I'm realizing it is acceptable to be angry and it is good to feel.</p> | <p>Learning to express anger rather than internalize it as in the past, at one time suppressed her physical response to anger over concern that it was unacceptable; recognizes anger as healthy now</p> | <p>Anger work as healthy; had internalized and suppressed it</p> |
| 51. | <p><i>You said that you were learning some ways to express anger and I'm wondering, maybe you can tell me about that and the focus of your anger?</i></p> <p>Maybe we're getting into an area this a little bit too touchy.</p> | <p>Discussion of her anger response does not feel safe</p> | <p>Anger discussion threatening</p> |

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| <p>52. I grew up not identifying a lot of feelings, or expressing feelings didn't occur, wasn't acceptable. You think you do but, you don't feel. To do as you are told to do, to behave and act in the manner that you were told to act in a manner, because you weren't capable of making decisions. So, if someone else thought differently than you did, obviously they probably knew more about it or were smarter about it than you were. And so, in the case of your husband saying something that was contrary to you, you would change and go along with or feel that that was probably the best solution. Because you didn't have the confidence to make those decisions yourself.</p> | <p>Raised alienated from her feelings and desires; prevailed upon to behave as directed with a sense of personal incompetence and inability; followed husband's lead despite her notions to the contrary based on low self-confidence</p> | <p>History of self-alienation; acquiescence based on lack of self-confidence and perceived lack of ability</p> |
| <p>53. Feel closer to him than say a year and a half ago when we first talked about the fact that he was going to become more at one with himself. More caring. More loving. More concern and trust for the other person. It's fascinating because you know, to find such a wonderful person and then say it's not going to work because of his sexual orientation seems like a waste. When you have so many good things going for you, why throw the baby out with the bath water?</p> | <p>Recent disclosure and Steve's personal exploration drew couple closer; loss of loving relationship based on sexual orientation feels unnecessary and squanderous</p> | <p>Disclosure increased connection

Termination of loving relationship seems squanderous</p> |
| <p>54. We're trusting. We're loving of each other. Care. We share. We allow each other to be who we are and encourage each other in our growth. We're supportive of each other in professional accomplishments and in life-fulfilling activities which we wish to do. Supportive of and encouraging each other in our growth and we're more committed to our marriage. More aware of what's going on inside ourselves and within the marriage. And what it is that we want in the marriage. And willing to work for that.</p> | <p>Recent disclosure experience renewed marital commitment, trust, communication, mutual support for personal growth, increased personal awareness and common marital goals.</p> | <p>Disclosure increased connection</p> |

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| 55. | That we share. That we communicate. That we give each other time to have your own space and your own freedom. That we have some goals and objectives that we wish to achieve. That they're common goals and they may be individual goals. That we share with each other individually so that they know where we're coming from, that we express our feelings and our concerns. And communicating openly. | Goals of the relationship include open communication regarding feelings, marital goals, personal goals and autonomy | Importance of communication, mutual goals, personal goals and autonomy |
| 56. | We've had support because of going to the psychotherapy. | Professional help supportive | Professional support |
| 57. | I have not shared with my sister, who I am quite close to. Steve has shared with his brother and got some support . . . [but] his brother is biased and prejudiced and cuts us both with little comments that are rather hurtful. | Chosen not to share with sister, Steve's brother mixed support and pain | Limited sharing with family and limited support |
| 58. | We have not shared with a number of our close friends – partially because we were still together and we were still friends. | Chose not to share with friends because relationship is intact | Not share with friends |
| 59. | Because I was having difficulty and Steve, also I think, in addressing the fact of what you go through and what others have gone through in realizing that you're not alone. We were told in one of our psychotherapy sessions with a family counsellor who has had a lot of experience with working with gay people. And he brought up the wives support group. And mentioned about Joel and Bev, and the fact that they had been very involved in the gay movement and sort of equal opportunities and things like that. Perhaps it might be advantageous to contact them and see if there was a group going. | Referral to support group through therapy because both sensed that they were alone in this experience | Referral for support group to lessen isolation of the experience |
| 60. | So we did. And we were welcome to come over and talk and share with them about our feelings on the situation and our feelings on the situation and our experience and concerns and just to find that they had an open ear for talking and listening. | Support group as opportunity for receptive sharing regarding their experience | Support group as receptive listeners |

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| 51. | Because of groups that they had been involved with, there was an opportunity to meet some other people who had had similar circumstances. Although none of them are the same and all the people I have met so far are divorced from their husbands, so that it isn't the same but it certainly is similar. It was important to express the feelings and the questioning that you go through and see how other people have managed. | Support group as an opportunity to compare her experience, share her feelings and uncertainty, and learn about others' coping though sees her situation as somewhat different based on others' divorced status | Support group opportunity to learn and share though not a complete fit |
| 62. | So, because I was naive I didn't have understanding about the situation. I had heard about gay support groups but I didn't understand you could access that group or there might be this type of support group. Because, I mean, why would I need it? | Lacked knowledge about homosexuality; previous ignorance of gay support resources availability based on perceived lack of need | Previously no knowledge of homosexual support resources |
| 63. | But I have found that the people there are very warm and accepting. Accepting of you as you are, as opposed to being judgmental of who you are and who you are with and what the circumstance is. | Support group a safe environment, fully accepting of self and personal choice | Support group safe and accepting |
| 64. | I've also become very good friends with Bev and as a result of that, and her acceptance and our friendship, that along with the psychotherapy, I haven't sought out any other support. | Friendship and acceptance of sister-in-experience as well as professional help only support sought | Sought only support of friend and professional |
| 65. | Oh, exceptionally important, yes. Exceptionally. I don't think I would have managed to would have — I know I wouldn't have managed as well and I wouldn't be where I am today without the therapy sessions and the support that we get as a couple working through issues and as a third person or in some cases with the fourth person giving input as to what they see as going on for correcting the vision that one of us — not judgmental perspectives. Informational. They're very helpful. | Professional help important for personal coping and nonjudgmental feedback as a couple | Professional support important both personally and as a couple |
| 66. | It's not something that you just pick up the phone to your sister and say, "Hi, guess what?" And it may be an excuse, but when you're on the ski hill, it's not the appropriate thing to talk about. It hasn't quite come up. | Has not shared with sister, difficult broaching the subject | Difficult to raise issues with sister |

67. Also, I'm not in a situation of saying, "Woe is me." Why would I say woe is me? I mean there are things that could be a lot worse in life than being a man who feels he's either bisexual or gay. And that again is rationalizing of the fact that there are a lot of things that are a lot worse.
- Does not pity herself and her situation; downplays the difficulty of husbands' situation compared to some others
- No self-pity, feels husbands' struggle diminishes compared to some others
68. I haven't felt that I have been strong enough in myself to handle talking with my sister. Or the fact that I have needed that at this point in time. It's something that I will do in the future. And I guess because initially I might have done it out of anger to say 'woe is me,' as opposed to saying my husband has a cold, my husband is gay. I think they would probably both my sister and her husband would be very open and accepting.
- Feels that sharing story with sister requires inner strength which she hasn't found and no need right now; anticipates sharing with sister in the future and receiving support; had she shared in the past it may have been based in anger and self-pity rather than less judgmental
- Sharing requires strength
- Sharing could have been judgmental and anger based
69. Support from my psychiatrist was most helpful. Knowing that I'm okay although I might not feel okay. Knowing that I'm acceptable. Knowing that, starting to find out that I can be all one even when I might feel that I'm alone. I can be all or part of myself, and I can set some limits based on what my expectations are. Not having to be the strongest person in the world. Knowing that I can be weak and I can -- that I don't have to necessarily be right. That there isn't necessarily a right or a wrong, but it's a question of acceptance and working out what we want to work out. So it's a lot of it is accepting of myself, that that has come through with the support of other people.
- Professional support, acceptance and validation important; growing sense of individual self; permission to be weak, permission not to self-judge, self-acceptance and negotiation with partner; others support has given her courage to accept herself
- Increased permission to experience self through others acceptance and support
- (Know self through others -- accept self alone through others)
70. And my husband Steve is very supportive.
- Experienced husband as supportive
- Husband's support
71. We haven't shared with a lot of people. So I can't say, but I do know that the stigma, there's a big stigma and a big prejudice against homosexuals. And a lot of it is misunderstanding of homosexuals.
- Recognition of society as often aversive to homosexual based on lack of knowledge
- Pervasive homophobia based on lack of knowledge
72. In our particular circumstance Steve lost his job within five months of our deciding that we were going to work on our relationship. So that in a sense was not helpful. Because we've had that in addition to the stress and strain.
- Husband's job loss an additional stressor on the relationship
- Additional relationship stressor

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|-----|---|--|---|
| 73. | I guess it's the social stigma of and misunderstanding of what a gay person is opposed to any particular groups or individuals. | Society's lack of fundamental understanding of homosexuality rather than focussing on one person or one groups' manifestation of this. | Society fundamental ignorance of homosexuality |
| 74. | Certainly, it's been harder for Steve that his brother is not accepting of the fact, he feels that it's something he can be cured of. And he sort of says to me, "Well, how could you live with it?" Sort of like it's something you put on the shelf. But a lot of it is the assumption or presumed social stigma. | Steve's brother's lack of acceptance difficult for both and seems to be based on negative social attitudes | Lack of family acceptance based on homophobia difficult |

Table 10**First Order Thematic Clusters of Justine's Experience**

First Order Clusters	Cluster Description
<p>1. Homophobic family and social background</p> <p>(38, 40, 44, 57, 71, 73, 74)</p>	<p>Justine described her parents as holding bias against homosexuality. In addition, she reflected on the pervasive nature of homophobia in society. This cluster contains thematic statements which reflect these issues as they relate to the social context in which Justine experienced Steve's disclosure.</p>
<p>2. Difficulty understanding the meaning and impact of husband's disclosure</p> <p>(1, 2, 3, 4, 11, 12, 14, 16, 36, 37, 46)</p>	<p>Steve's disclosure of homosexuality initially meant little to Justine. After years, the urgency and intensity of his disclosure grew, as did his desire to act on his homosexual attractions. This cluster contains several thematic references which Justine made regarding her confusion over Steve's homosexuality. The themes include Justine's difficulty with understanding the nature of homosexual attractions, and her difficulty understanding potential implications of Steve's disclosure.</p>
<p>3. Fear of separation evokes feelings of abandonment, depression and powerlessness in an existential identity crisis</p> <p>(5, 7, 20, 23, 26, 29, 31, 32, 33, 35, 47, 48, 49, 50, 52, 67)</p>	<p>Justine experienced strong feelings of depression when faced with the possibility that Steve's disclosure may lead her to living life alone. Her way of being and self-definition were in jeopardy. This cluster delineates her existential struggle against the loss of her marriage, the loss of her power to maintain her marriage as it had been, and the loss of her self definition with that marriage. Mark's extramarital gay interests evoked feelings of anger, abandonment, rejection. This called her value and definition as a person into question.</p>

4. **Self-blame**
(9, 10, 11, 13)
Feeling that Steve was not responsible for his homosexual attractions, Justine began to blame herself for Steve's extramarital sexual interests. This cluster highlights the responsibility she took for his gay interests. She felt as though she had failed both him and the marriage.
5. **Growing knowledge of and acceptance of homosexuality**
(38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 49, 50, 62)
Justine described her knowledge, understanding and acceptance of homosexuality as having grown with experience. This cluster contains themes which describe the progression Justine made from initial ignorance of and negativity toward homosexuality to her final acceptance and respect for homosexual individuals.
6. **Awakening self-awareness and contact with feelings especially anger**
(24, 34, 49, 50, 51, 52, 55, 69)
Working through the implications of Steve's disclosure led Justine to gradually become more aware of her needs and emotions. Included in this cluster are references that she made to earlier experiences where she was encouraged to suppress her anger and her current experiences in learning to addressing her anger now.
7. **Need for safe sharing though support not always apparent**
(8, 25, 26, 30, 51, 55, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 68, 69)
Justine identified the valuable role that supportive individual's had played in her adjustment. This cluster focusses on the various individuals in whom Justine found support and how they were helpful to her. In addition, difficulties which Justine identified with sharing are also highlighted.

8. Disclosure and open communication

(6, 18, 53, 54, 70)

In an apparent paradox, not only did Steve's disclosure shatter the foundation of their marriage, but it also provided Justine with a deeper feeling of connection with Steve. This cluster describes the importance that increased communication between the couple held for Justine and the importance of Steve's ongoing support and commitment to the marriage.

9. Struggle to balance needs within the relationship

(15, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 26, 27, 28, 45)

While Justine and Steve renewed their commitment to the marriage following his disclosure, there appeared to be difficulty balancing his homosexual needs with Justine's need for fidelity within their relationship. This cluster contains themes related to this struggle and her feelings of fear about Steve's potential homosexual activities.