

**UNFAITHFUL LESBIANS:
HISPANIC LESBIANS AND INFIDELITY**

**BY
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DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This dissertation submitted by Anagloria Mora has been read and approved by three committee members of the American Academy of Clinical Sexologists at Maimonides University.

The final copies have been examined by the Dissertation Committee and the signatures which appear here verify the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given the final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

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VITA

Anagloria Mora was born in Ecuador, South America. She immigrated to the United States during her teenage years. During her Undergraduate studies, she was nominated to The National Dean's List for school years 1994-95 and 1995-96. She received a Bachelor's of Science in Psychology with Magna Cum Laude and a Master's of Science in Psychology with Distinction from The Miami Institute of Psychology, Miami - Florida. She is doctoral candidate (PhD) in Sexology at Maimonides University, North Miami Beach, Florida.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation describes how Hispanic lesbians manage infidelity within their intimate relationships. Their perceptions, stories, and experiences are the focus of this study. This research is supported by a literature review on the following topics: the dynamics and characteristics of lesbian relationships including those of Hispanic lesbians; the myths and beliefs of Hispanics in general regarding gender roles, sexuality, and homosexuality; the historical perceptions of homosexuality and lesbianism; homosexual identity formation; lesbians' perception and response to sexual and emotional infidelity and its effects on the duration of the relationship. For further support and clarification of this study, the terms homosexual, lesbian, Hispanic, infidelity/affair/and cheating are defined as they are used within this dissertation.

Due to the difficulty in locating participants, the sample selection for this descriptive research design was obtained through a snowball sampling technique in Miami Dade County, Florida. The sample consisted of thirty-three foreign-born Hispanic lesbians, from the following countries: Cuba, Puerto Rico, Colombia, Spain, Peru, Nicaragua, and Uruguay. All the participants were twenty years old or older. Ages of the participants ranged from 20 to 46 years. Their income level ranged from \$20,000 to \$100,000. Their level of education ranged from High School Graduate to Post Graduate School. Women who participated in the study have self-identified as Hispanics and as lesbians. For simplicity purposes of this project, project, religious affiliation was omitted. All participants have, or had been, in a live-in romantic sexual

relationship for a minimum of one year, at the time their partners were unfaithful.

The researcher personally interviewed all participants. Participants were explained the purpose of the study and were assured their identities would be kept confidential. The participants were encouraged to answer the questions sincerely. The survey questionnaire was provided to the participants in English or in Spanish, as requested. The majority of the participants were fully bilingual and felt comfortable answering the questions in either language. However, some preferred to discuss and reveal emotional details in their mother tongue, Spanish.

The survey questionnaire included questions regarding demographics. In addition, the participants were asked questions regarding their definition of infidelity; their experience with infidelity; their initial reaction to the infidelity; the length of the relationship at the time infidelity occurred; if the primary relationship continued after the infidelity; and how being Hispanic influenced their managing of infidelity and their resulting decisions with regard to the relationship. Lastly, the participants were given the opportunity to openly share their experiences with the interviewer. This study presents descriptive data as provided. Data was gathered and a qualitative analysis was drawn from the responses as received and collected.

Due to the dearth of research and literature on the aforementioned topic, the purpose of this study is to extend research on Hispanic lesbians in further studies. Additionally, this study is aimed at providing more effective services within the mental health field in the practice of couples therapy with Hispanic lesbians.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Sexual orientation refers to the enduring emotional, romantic, sexual attraction to individuals of a particular gender (Rosario 1997; Frankowski 2004). We are socialized to relate sexually to our opposite sex (Loulan 1996). When this rule is broken, there are many questions and speculations. Ultimately, “the gender of the person you desire is a serious matter seemingly fundamental to the whole business of romance” (Schwartz and Rutter 2000, 1).

The term homophobia was first coined by George Weinberg in 1973 (Hogan and Hudson 1998) to describe “the irrational fear, hatred, and intolerance of homosexual men and women” (Margolies, Becker, and Jackson-Brewer 1987, 229). Societal homophobia presents an impediment to an open view of one’s own sexuality.

Heterosexism is defined as “the system by which heterosexuality is assumed to be the only acceptable and viable life option” (Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988, 244). Heterosexuality is broadly defined and it loosely implies female-to-male or male-to-female sexual desire and/or sexual behavior (Hogan and Hudson 1998). Some people prefer the term heterosexism to describe the negative attitudes and biases commonly associated with homophobia (Hogan and Hudson 1998). Our culture and socialization process compels us to see and interpret the world as heterosexual; a world in which emotional and sexual attraction are expected to be toward the opposite sex (Rubin 1993). Consequently, if a variant is perceived, we tend to ‘awfulize’ the choice and

the person based on their sex, sexual orientation, sexual identity, or sexual behavior (Rubin 1993). As Foucault states, “hetero/homo distinction is a tool of social control, a way of regimenting society by constructing normal and abnormal sexual categories and then force-fitting people into one or the other” (Hogan and Hudson 1998, 278).

Moraga and Hollibaugh comment that:

Heterosexuality is both an actual sexual interaction and a system. No matter how we play ourselves out sexually, we are all affected by the system inasmuch as our sexual values are filtered through a society where heterosexuality is considered the norm (Buccola 2003, 135).

There is a tendency to think and to believe that homosexuals are very different from heterosexuals in many aspects of their lives (Suter and Oswald 2003). One author explains that the lesbian experience is looked upon as abhorrent, deviant, and at times, invisible (Rich 1993). The traditional assumption has been that a woman is innately oriented toward a man, both emotionally and sexually. If a woman is emotionally and sexually attracted to another woman, she is simply acting out some frustration or bitterness toward a man (Rich 1993). Hoagland further argues, the concept of femininity is “a woman whose identity comes through her alliance with a man” (Hoagland 1988, 37). A woman who does not belong to a man, either does not exist, or is trying to be a man herself (Hoagland 1988).

“Once we are seen as lesbians, we’re viewed as purely sexual beings. Our genital contact with other women sets us apart and defines us” (Loulan 1984, 10). As such, one of the biggest assumptions and stereotypes about lesbians is that they are first and foremost highly sexual in their thoughts, desires, and actions, and that they spend all their time in bed engaged in the act of lovemaking (Loulan 1984). No one is capable

of doing this, whether homosexual or heterosexual. What society fails to realize is that being a lesbian is a way of life that encompasses many aspects, including sexuality (Loulan 1984; Martin and Lyon 1991).

In sharp contrast to this perception, is the fact that lesbians tend to be less experienced with sex than homosexual men. Furthermore, our culture discourages women from early sexual experimentation (Vargo 1987). This makes lesbianism less sexualized (Schwartz and Rutter 2000). Girls are usually brought up to believe that sex and sexuality are bad. “Not only are we taught that female sexuality is bad; it is absolutely defunct without the presence of a penis in a woman’s life” (Mendola 1980, 73). For most women, sexuality has been tainted by sexism and homophobia (Loulan 1984). In our society, women are thought of as asexual if they are not involved with men.

Another common, inaccurate assumption about lesbians is that to be sexually attracted to the same sex implies wishes to be of the opposite gender. That is, women who are sexually attracted to other women, wish to be men. Consequently, lesbians are regarded as ‘defective people’ (Greene 1997).

Research has shown that lesbians, go to work, pay taxes, and clean their houses just as their heterosexual counterparts do. They do not differ from heterosexuals in their need or ability to celebrate or to cry about life circumstances. There is nothing innately heterosexual about loving a person, loving a child, solving problems, mourning a loss, being intimate, being committed, being spiritual, or celebrating achievements. There is nothing innately heterosexual about purchasing homes, buying

clothing or buying food (Martin and Lyon 1991). These are all human feelings, qualities, and capacities that are not exclusive to heterosexuals. Nevertheless, false impressions or negative perceptions persist despite the best of intentions, and lesbians continue to be oppressed within the existing heterosexual social framework (Suter and Oswald 2003).

Another unfounded assumption about lesbians, is that their relationships are short-lived, and that they do not have long-term committed relationships (Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988; Eldridge and Gilbert 1990). Some researchers argue that homosexuals in general, are promiscuous and uncommitted (Caprio 1954). In reality, gays and lesbians start their romantic and sexual relationships with the same goals as heterosexuals. They want to develop and maintain long lasting, satisfying relationships. “The essence of a committed relationship is the same, whether the union is between two men, two women, or a man and a woman” (Mendola 1980, 1).

As in heterosexual relationships, infidelity and affairs occur. The consequences and outcomes are similar in both populations. Couples either work it through and save the relationship, or they break up. Furthermore, some studies suggest that many homosexuals endorse fidelity or sexual exclusivity as a core characteristic of their relationships (Peplau, Cochran, Rook, and Padesky 1978; Mendola 1980; Duffy and Rusbult 1985/86). Fidelity or sexual exclusivity is more valued and further endorsed more by lesbians than by gay men (Bell and Weinberg 1978; Mendola 1980; Kurdek 1988; Means-Christensen 2003).

A woman’s expectation to conform to society’s sexual norms places enormous

pressure on that woman's sexuality, regardless of her sexual orientation (Espin 1997). Moreover, the idea of women being sexual without the presence of a man, or the fantasy of a man, is inconceivable to the heterosexual society (Loulan 1984).

Despite how political and historical factors have changed and evolved regarding our understanding of gender and sexuality, our dominant heterosexual society continues to oppress lesbians. There is an abundance of literature on male homosexuality that is readily available, as compared to lesbians. The study of lesbians is of no less importance than the study of homosexuals. Lesbians have received far less scientific attention (Vargo 1987).

The scientific studies are scarce, especially in a society where both women and lesbianism are devalued (Vargo 1987). According to Mendola (1980) the devaluation of lesbians was evident when the Pope visited the United States in 1979 and condemned homosexuality, while not addressing lesbianism. As Mendola (1980) states: "Are lesbians, as women, so inconsequential as to not even rate condemnation?" (71).

Another explanation why the study of lesbianism is limited is due to the lack of attention to women's socialization throughout history (Vargo 1987; Blasco 1993; Kenen 1997), as well as the lack of attention to women's sexuality, in general (Blasco 1993). Society gives greater permission to women than to men to be emotionally intimate and physically demonstrative with one another, to the point that it can become unclear to distinguish a lesbian relationship from a very close friendship. Societal norms allow for women to hug and kiss one another in the context of a

friendship. Women's intimacy with one another is minimized, perceived as uninteresting and not sexual (Kenen 1997; Schwartz and Rutter 2000).

Few questions are asked, and few eyebrows are raised, when two women share a household (Bell and Weinberg 1978). An example of society's obliviousness to women's sexuality is the following story about Anna Freud. She is believed to have never married nor known to have had a romantic relationship with a man. In 1925, she became friends with a divorcee by the name of Dorothy Burlingham. Eventually, Anna and Dorothy worked and lived together for more than fifty years (Pillard 1997). In the literature, it is not suggested that she was a lesbian, nor are there any negative implications or accusations made about her sexual orientation.

This dissertation highlights the Hispanic culture, which clearly emphasizes and reinforces the characteristics and expectations associated with what is considered to be a 'proper man' or a 'proper woman'. In addition, the Catholic Church is the most common and most influential religious affiliation among Hispanic countries. The Church influences sexuality and its expression based on deeply embedded beliefs of decency, honor, and morality. The Catholic Church not only disapproves of lesbians, it considers lesbians as deviant and dangerous (Fuskova and Marek 1993). In many Hispanic countries, lesbianism is harshly condemned (Craske 2003). As a result, there is little research devoted to the study of Hispanic lesbians.

In conclusion, our culture endorses an absolutist dichotomy between heterosexuals and homosexuals. There is an imperious heterosexual viewpoint through which homosexuals are perceived (Hoagland 1988). As a result, assumptions about gays or

lesbians are often formulated based on fear of difference, lack of information, or false notions. There seems to be a conviction that lesbianism is embedded in physical and/or psychological dysfunction, afflicting all aspects of personality and behavior (Hersch 1991). “To be a lesbian means to be forever measuring the impact of our truth on other people. Being in love with women, a feeling that seems so natural to us, is not a feeling that is supported or celebrated”, (Romo-Carmona 1994, 14).

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine and describe Hispanic lesbians’ perceptions and experiences with infidelity in their intimate relationships. This dissertation considers the stories of thirty-three foreign born Hispanic lesbians who immigrated to the United States from Cuba, Colombia, Puerto Rico, Uruguay, Peru, Spain, and Nicaragua. The participants of this study ranged in age from 20 to 46. Their education level ranged from High School Graduate to Post Graduate School. Their income ranged from \$20,000 to \$100,000. For simplicity purposes of this study, religious affiliation was omitted.

This study will describe how Hispanic lesbians managed infidelity in their intimate/romantic relationships, and the influence their Hispanic culture had on the decisions they made when faced with their partner’s infidelity. This dissertation is supported by a literature review on the following topics: the historical background of homosexuality and lesbianism; homosexual identity formation; Hispanics’ myths and beliefs about gender roles, sexuality, and homosexuality; Hispanic lesbians; characteristics and dynamics of lesbian relationships; and infidelity in lesbian relationships.

As used in this research dissertation, the term homosexual implies “of, relating to, or characterized by, a tendency to direct sexual desire toward another of the same sex” (Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary 1997, 556). The term Hispanic indicates an individual “of, relating to, or being a person of, Latin American descent living in the United States” (Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary 1997, 549). The term lesbian refers to “a female homosexual” (Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary 1997, 667). The term infidelity refers to “unfaithfulness to a moral obligation; disloyalty” (Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary 1997, 598). For the purpose of this study, infidelity will refer to both sexual and / or emotional infidelity. In addition, the term affair indicates, “an illicit amorous relationship or liaison. The term cheating is defined as depriving someone of something expected” (Subotnik and Harris, 1999, 14).

This dissertation concludes with suggested areas of further study to better service Hispanic lesbians within the practice of couples’ therapy.

CHAPTER 2

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Arriving at an agreeable and concise definition for the terms homosexual and lesbian is virtually impossible and rather arbitrary, for these terms are tied to the historical and social context of certain cultures and of certain times. Similarly, the terms infidelity; affair; emotional affair; and cheating are also subject to debate and they invite different interpretations. Moreover, the term Hispanic also suggests various interpretations among individuals. Therefore, it seems appropriate and necessary to reach a common understanding of the meaning and usage of these terms for the purpose of this research study.

HOMOSEXUAL

The term homosexual derives from the Greek prefix homo meaning *same*. Homophile, a popular term of the 1950's and 1960's, derives from the Greek root meaning *love*; henceforth, same-sex-romance. However, the latter term fell into disuse during the late 1960's when the term homosexual became publicly accepted throughout the United States and Europe (Hogan and Hudson 1998). The literal definition of homosexual is "sexual relations in one form or another with one's own sex" (Caprio 1954, 3). Similarly, this term is defined in the Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary as: "of, relating to, or characterized by a tendency to direct sexual desire toward another of the same sex" (1997, 556). Malone (1998) writes that

clinicians and others usually define homosexuality in terms of how, and to what degree, individuals (gays and lesbians) self-identify themselves as homosexuals. In other words, if and how individuals accept their sexual orientation as that of being toward the same gender; and if they have a consistent history of same-sex sexual behavior after the age of eighteen, then they are homosexual. In addition, Malone (1988) argues that in order for these individuals to self-define as homosexuals, they must not have had psychological or psychiatric disorders caused by their sexual orientation. As he explains: “moderately, homosexuality in of itself is not considered pathological, like neurosis; instead, it is considered a neutral condition of natural humanity for as long as it is assumed and lived by the individual” (Malone 1998, 5). Homosexuality is further regarded by Margolies, Becker, and Jackson-Brewer (1987) as “a normal variation in sexual / affectional object choice” (229).

For the sake of common understanding of the meaning and usage of the term in this dissertation, homosexual will be used to describe a man who holds a romantic, intimate, and sexual relationship with a man.

LESBIAN

Although the term lesbian may appear clear in meaning and in concept, it is challenging to define and to conceptualize this term, given the historical suppression and marginalization of female sexuality in general. The term lesbian, as defined in the Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary is: “a female homosexual” (1997, 667). This is a plain and simple definition, yet very complex at the same time. What does

this term really mean, and what does it imply? According to Hoagland (1988), the general heterosexual public denies the existence of lesbians. What does exist is a sexual term and a derogative label used to describe an individual. Hence, a female homosexual is referred to as *a lesbian*. She asserts that this term may carry some stigma and an emotional connotation. However, there is not a common derogative term used to label heterosexual women in our culture (Hoagland 1988). In their study, Bell and Weinberg (1978) argue that most homosexual women prefer the term gay, lesbian, or homophile as opposed to the label of homosexual. The researchers claim that being referred to as a homosexual “exaggerates the sexual component of their lives” (115). And that the terms gay, lesbian or homophile “connote much more an entire life-style, a way of being in the world which only incidentally involves sexual activity with persons of the same sex” (Bell and Weinberg 1978, 115).

Mendola (1980); Hoagland (1988); Martin and Lyon (1991); Loulan (1996) also explain that society erroneously believes a lesbian is a heterosexual woman who hates men; a woman who cannot get a man; a woman trying to act as a man; or a man in a heterosexual woman’s body. Others may believe that a lesbian is some unfortunate woman who suffers from a hormonal imbalance, or a freak with some genital malformation (Martin and Lyon 1991). Many others believe that a lesbian is a “confused woman who has not met the right man” (Mendola 1980, 71). Thusly defined, lesbianism is believed to be a phase in some heterosexual women’s lives. Consequently, the idea of women loving women is impossible and inconceivable (Hoagland 1988; Vicinus 1993).

Contrary to this position, Rich (1993) suggests that lesbian existence indicates “both the fact of the historical presence of lesbians, and our continuing creation of the meaning of that existence” (1993, 239). She argues that lesbian existence not only breaks a taboo in an enforced heterosexual society, but that it also acts in direct or indirect opposition to a male’s assumed right to access and manipulation of women. As she quotes: “I perceive the lesbian experience as being like motherhood – a profoundly female experience” (Rich 1993, 239). Lauretis, as cited in Buccola (2003), agrees with Rich’s perception of lesbianism as being a profoundly female experience. Lauretis firmly states that the lesbian experience is a “sisterly or woman-identified mutual support; antihierarchical and egalitarian relationship; an ethic of compassion and connection; an ease with intragender affectionate behavior and emotional sharing” (Buccola 2003, 135).

In addition, Loulan (1984) posits that being a lesbian includes a self-identification with women as a group; having primary emotional attachment with women; choosing and preferring to be predominantly around other women; and essentially, being an active part of a woman-identified culture. Califia (1979) defines the term lesbian to refer to “a woman who prefers other women as: partners in physical sexual activity; partners in close relationships; or subjects of erotic fantasies” (255). Another researcher also posits that since the late 1970’s, lesbians have begun to redefine lesbianism. As she states: “it was not merely sexual attraction between women...it was living a woman-centered life, where women and girls could take themselves seriously apart from their relation to men” (Gianoulis 2002, 3).

Loulan (1984) further defends that female-to-female genital contact is not the primary definition or determinant for being a lesbian. As is quoted, “You may not be having genital contact with another woman, and still be a lesbian” (Loulan 1984, 127). Additionally, Golden (1987) mentions Rich’s work in her discussion. She explains that Rich prefers the term lesbian continuum as opposed to lesbianism, for the latter implies some degree of pathology and its primary focus is on sexual behavior. Hence, by stressing the term lesbian continuum, Rich maintains that a woman may or may not choose to have sexual contact with another woman and still self-identify as a lesbian. Rich also argues that this continuum accounts for the emotional bonding often perceived by two lesbians (Golden 1987; Diamond and Savin-Williams 2000).

Golden (1987) and Vicinus (1993) further cite in their work Cook’s definition of lesbians as “women who love women, who choose women to nurture and support and to create a living environment in which to work creatively and independently, whether or not her relations with these women are sexual” (Golden 1987, 21; Vicinus 1993, 435). Golden (1987) also mentions Ferguson’s definition, which not only includes sexual and emotional ties, but also emphasizes the importance of self-identity.

Ferguson’s definition states:

A lesbian is a woman who has sexual and erotic-emotional ties primarily with women or who sees herself as centrally involved with a community of self-identified lesbians whose sexual and erotic-emotional ties are primarily with women *and* who is herself a self-identified lesbian (Golden 1987, 21).

In summary, there has been some controversy regarding the usage and preference of a term applied to describe homosexual women. Although some women dislike the

term lesbian because it implies they belong to a cult, popular usage of this term became standard mostly during the 1970's. Thereafter, it became common to use phrases such as 'gay men and lesbians' or 'gay and lesbian' to refer to homosexual men and women respectively (Hogan and Hudson 1998).

For the sake of common understanding of the meaning and usage of the term in this dissertation, lesbian will be used to describe a woman who holds a romantic, intimate and sexual relationship with a woman.

HISPANIC

The Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines Hispanic as: "of, relating to, or being a person of Latin American descent living in the United States" (1997, 549). This term was created by the United States Federal Government in the early 1970's in an effort to provide communality among all those individuals of Spanish-speaking language and/or from Spanish-speaking countries (Clutter and Nieto 2000). By the same token, the term Latino usually refers to people of Hispanic background born and/or living in the United States (Stavans 2004). The term Hispanic is often used to attractively lump together the Latinos with people of Spaniard descent in an effort to whiten the race, while simultaneously erasing or disguising the African and Indian heritage of people of Latin America (Alonso and Koreck 1993; DeLaTierra 1996). The term Hispanism conveys "a movement to reassert the cultural unity of Spain and Latin America" (The Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary 1997, 549).

The term Hispanic is most commonly used to define those who are born, raised,

and educated in their native country, which they left for political and/or economic reasons, to reside in the United States. Preserving the Spanish language within the family is very common in Hispanic homes. Hispanics tend to have close ties to their native language and to their culture of origin (Clutter and Nieto 2000; Luis 2003). The term Latino is often used interchangeably with the term Hispanic. Latino has become more widely accepted among Hispanics over the last twenty years or so, as the term Latino reflects being from Latin American origin (Clutter and Nieto 2000).

The presence of Hispanics in the United States is partly the result of the United States' acquisition of land from other countries. For instance, the state of Florida was acquired from Spain in 1821. Residents of Florida at the time included Cubans and Spaniards. Following the Mexican-American War in 1848, as a result of the Guadalupe-Hidalgo Treaty, the United States took over a large portion of Mexican territory, which later became most of the states of Texas, California, New Mexico, Colorado, and Arizona. As a result of the Spanish-Cuban-American War of 1898, the United States acquired the colony of Puerto Rico; and later, from 1916 to 1924, the United States' armed forces occupied the Dominican Republic (Luis 2003; Stavans 2004).

During the twentieth century, many Hispanic countries underwent significant political and economical changes which resulted in Hispanics leaving their countries of origin. Consequently, this migration was responsible for the large influx of Hispanics to the United States. As Beasley-Murray states: "Latinos are displacing African-Americans as the United States' largest minority group, and becoming a

majority in some areas” (2003, 224). “Hispanic people in the United States are no longer on the fringes of society” (Stavans 2004, 314). According to the 2000 census, there are approximately 35.5 million Hispanics in the United States; as opposed to 30 million African-Americans. Furthermore, it is estimated the Hispanic population will increase by more than 2% annually over the next ten years (Clutter and Nieto 2000; Podalsky 2003). Studies indicate that during the next decade or so, the number of Hispanics in the United States will reach nearly 50 million (Stavans 2004). The US Census Bureau estimates that by the year 2050, the Hispanic community will grow to approximately 97 million, representing a quarter of the total population of the United States (Williams 2002). It is also predicted that by the year 2025, one out of every four Americans will have Hispanic ancestry (Stavans 2004). Research also suggests that approximately 70% of the Hispanic population resides in four states: California, Texas, New York, and Florida (Clutter and Nieto 2000).

According to Linden (1991), there has been an increase in Spanish-language use in the United States since 1984. As per her study: in 1984, 68 % of Hispanic adults spoke Spanish as their primary language at home. This percentage increased to 72 % in 1987, and to 78 % by 1989. According to a survey in 2000, Spanish undergraduate enrolments accounted for 55% of the total language registrations in higher education (Davies 2002). After all, “Spanish is one of the great languages of the world. It offers access to a rich culture that spans several centuries, two continents, and more than twenty countries” (Williams 2002, 13). However, not everyone feels this way. The rapid growth of the Hispanic community in the United States and the usage of the

Spanish language appear to present a concern for many. This concern became apparent in 1983 when some Republicans founded the movement of ‘English Only’. Critics argue that this was implemented in efforts to encourage immigrants to learn English; others claim it was an act of discrimination and that it was unconstitutional. Another strike against Hispanics was in 1998 when the state of California voted to abolish bilingual education for Hispanic children (Williams 2002).

Spanglish (the mixture of Spanish and English languages) has become a phenomenon that depicts how most Hispanics/Latinos live in the United States today: caught between the Hispanic and Anglo-Saxon civilizations (Stavans 2004), Spanglish is a jargon that takes parts from Spanish, and parts from English. The user switches back and forth from one language to the other. It is usually spoken by Hispanic descendents in the United States. It requires great skills often found in competent bilinguals (Williams 2002). Interestingly, this broken language is widely used across socioeconomic lines – lower, middle, and upper classes speak Spanglish with all levels of education and intellectual polish. As she states; “they are no longer fluent in the language of Cervantes, but have also failed to master that of Shakespeare” (Stavans 2004, 328).

Hispanics have also changed their economic status over the years since their immigration to the United States. Accordingly, a recent study suggests that over the past six years, the number of Hispanic households earning \$35,000 or more a year, has increased about 81%. On the same note, the number of Hispanic men in white-collar jobs has increased 42 %; and the number of Hispanic women holding professional

positions has increased approximately 51 % over the past five years (Linden 1991).

Another interesting phenomenon for Hispanics living in the United States has been the boom of Spanish television stations such as Univision and Telemundo. These two media giants produce various famous talk shows like *Cristina* and *Laura en America*. In addition, these television stations offer a wide variety of *telenovelas* (soap operas) that are watched and followed by a wide spread audience. Interestingly, in recent years these television stations have moved toward gay and lesbian inclusiveness. There are many shows and sitcoms that include positive portrayals of Hispanic gays and lesbians for the general public (Graham 2001).

In sum, the Hispanics' arrival to the United States has caused many economical and social changes to occur. Alonso and Koreck (1993) tastefully conclude that the Hispanic culture brings about novelty, and that Hispanics are construed by the Anglo culture as "the cultural ingredient of a purportedly pluralist melting-pot cuisine; the salsa that adds color and spirit to good ol' American home cooking" (111).

For the sake of common understanding of the meaning and usage of the term in this dissertation, Hispanic will be used to describe those who are foreign born; from Latin American countries; and residing in the United States.

**INFIDELITY
AFFAIR
EMOTIONAL AFFAIR
CHEATING**

“Most of us know jealousy from experience as a deeply negative emotion that arises when an important relationship is threatened by a rival” (Harris 2004, 62).

Prior to the twentieth century, the most common endpoint to a marriage was death (Panati 1998). This dramatically changed during the turn of the century, when the most common endpoint of a marriage or a relationship became divorce. Extensive research studies such as that of Alfred Kinsey in the late 1940's and early 1950's, indicated that close to 50% of all married males before the age of forty, had been unfaithful to their wives; and that approximately 26% of the wives had been unfaithful to their husbands. This study was later supported by others during the 1980's, claiming even higher percentages (Scarf 2004). However, studies on attitudes toward nonmonogamy and affairs such as that of Leunman, Michael, and Gagnon in 1984, indicated that more than 85% of both men and women disapprove of it (Schwartz and Rutter 2000). Again, we need to consider that there is a gap between attitude/thought and actual practice.

Other research indicates that by the end of the twentieth century in Western society, divorce replaced death as the natural endpoint to most marriages (Panati 1998). Some argue that infidelity accounts for up to 65% of marriages ending (Neuman 2001; Scarf 2004). As one psychiatrist points out: “there may be as many acts of infidelity in our society as there are traffic accidents” (Pittman 1989, 132). Hence, it appears that Infidelity has not declined and rather, is a common practice in the twenty-first century.

As Panati argues “some anthropologists believe society is headed toward an era in which lifelong monogamy without fidelity may be the norm” (1998, 3).

An affair or an infidelity does not always refer exclusively to extra dyadic physical, sexual relationship. There are also emotional affairs. An emotional affair occurs “when one member of a relationship consistently turns to someone else for their core, primary emotional support in life” (www.relationship-institute.com). Experts on this area explain that this type of affair usually develops slowly and innocently, and it may begin with a very strong feeling of close friendship and bonding with someone outside the dyad. As so, when the primary relationship is facing hostility, difficulties, or distancing one of the partners consistently turns to this ‘close friend’ for comfort and emotional support. It is argued then, that an emotional affair has begun. Experts also posit that this type of affair can seriously compromise and threaten the primary relationship, as the degree of emotionality and intimacy is geared toward the extra dyadic relationship; and thus, leaving the primary weak of connection and intimacy (www.relationship-institute.com). As Zevy and Cavallaro (1987) state: “intimacy involves the ability to disclose the essential, most inward parts of oneself to another person and have them equally disclose themselves” (91).

Subotnik and Harris (1999) define infidelity as: “unfaithfulness or disloyalty; it is the breaking of a promise or vow” (14). Pittman (1989) defines infidelity as: “a breach of the trust, a betrayal of a relationship, a breaking of an agreement” (20). Similarly, the Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary (1997) defines infidelity as “unfaithfulness to a moral obligation; disloyalty” (598). Further, an affair is defined

as “an illicit amorous relationship or liaison” and cheating is defined as “depriving someone of something expected” (Subotnik and Harris 1999, 14).

In addition, Subotnik and Harris (1999) propose four (4) types of affairs which fall along a continuum depending on the unfaithful partner’s degree of emotional involvement with the third party. As such, they posit that the continuum can range from casual involvement, such as serial affairs and flings; to romantic love affairs and long-term affairs, which can last for years. They explain that serial affairs are the ones that can include multiple one-night stands, which lack the involvement or intimacy. These types of affairs usually are for the excitement of sex with someone new and are based of the ‘here-and-now’ (Subotnik and Harris 1999; Neuman 2001). Flings are also characterized by a lack of involvement and commitment toward the affair, although these can be longer lasting than the one-night-stands. Further along in the continuum are romantic love affairs. These types of affairs usually involve a high emotional component. There is a degree of importance placed on the affair, and the lovers make planned arrangements to meet and to build on the affair, as an integrated part of their lives. “The longer the affair continues, the more serious it becomes” (Subotnik and Harris 1999, 28). Finally, at the end of the continuum, there are the long-term affairs. There is a great deal of emotional involvement and commitment between the lovers. These affairs can last for years and it is not uncommon for family and friends to be aware of the affair. Essentially, the partner holding a long-term affair carries a ‘double-life’. Lastly, they also point out that affairs can change over time. Affairs may start off as been something causal with no emotional

connectedness, then develop and progress into a romantic love affair and even into a long-term affair (Subotnik and Harris 1999).

Further emphasizing the degree of emotional involvement in relation to affair type, Pittman (1989) contends that almost all affairs are a variation of the following themes:

1. Accidental Infidelity. This type of affair is unplanned, very short-lived, and may occur out of curiosity.
2. Philandering. He argues that this type of affair is most common among men, where they “they depersonalize both the woman at home and the woman in the bed at the moment” (Pittman 1989, 133). It is perceived as a ‘victory’ of another sexual partner.
3. Romantic Affair. This type of affair usually involves much emotional energy and lust toward the affairee.
4. Marital Arrangement. Interestingly enough, the emotional attachment and involvement remains toward the primary partner in this type of affair. This affair is an organized arrangement made by the primary dyad in an effort to maintain a distance between them, and yet... fulfill other needs. So, “the sex goes outside the marriage, but the emotion is still directed in” (Pittman 1989, 133).

Glass (1998) explains another view of this phenomenon of affairs. She posits that there are three elements to determine whether a relationship can be construed as an affair:

1. the secrecy – which implies lying about meeting with someone, even just for a cup of coffee. It implies hiding. “A secret is something known by one or more persons but purposely hidden from others” (Subotnik and Harris 1999, 60).
2. emotional intimacy – this entails sharing and confiding personal and intimate details about the marriage or about the relationship to someone else.
3. sexual chemistry –

the physical contact. Even, if there is no physical contact, she argues that verbalizing fantasies, dreams with each other, or communicating mutual attraction fall under this element. As she states: “affairs really aren’t about sex; they’re about betrayal” (Glass 1998, 38). Another author wisely comments: “affairs are about rejecting the commitment and abandoning the love we’ve offered our spouses” (Neuman 2001 63).

The aforementioned definitions and concepts of infidelity focus their attention and their research on heterosexual marriages and / or relationships. There is an evident lack of research involving lesbians and infidelity. For the sake of common understanding of the meaning and usage of the term in this dissertation, infidelity will be used to describe sexual infidelity and/or emotional infidelity in lesbian relationships. In addition, the terms affair and cheating are also used to describe extra dyadic involvement.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

HISTORICAL PERCEPTION OF HOMOSEXUALITY AND LESBIANISM

*“Homosexuality can be viewed as a positive attraction toward members of the same sex, rather than as a revulsion against members of the other sex”
(Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988, 75)*

According to the literature, same-gender sexual behavior, known today as homosexual behavior, can be traced as far back in time as the Before-Christian (B.C.) era (Berzon 1979; Hogan and Hudson 1998). The following are a few historical examples: During 2000 B.C. in the Sixth Dynasty Egypt, King Neferkare and General Sisene had a love affair. Further, a script in Egypt about women’s dreams, references two women having sexual activity with each other. During 1750 B.C., the Code of Hammurabi, in ancient Babylonia, references *girsequ*, in which male servants provided sexual services for men in the ruling class (Hogan and Hudson 1998). It is also in Babylon during the second century, where homosexuality is described as a ‘sin and scourge’, as in Sodom and Gomorrah (Montero 1997; Halwani 1998). In Greece, 570 B.C. homoeroticism becomes a popular theme for decorating vases and other pieces of pottery with scenes featuring men, youths, boys, lusty satyrs, and seductive behavior between women. In India C.400, the *Kama Sutra* describes harem lesbianism. Finally, in 1531, Martin Luther accuses Catholic clergy and monks of being sodomites (Hogan and Hudson 1998).

Since the beginning of modern time, religious authorities have believed that same-gender sexual activity would destroy our society. Further, these sexual acts were believed to be against nature and considered sinful, with the only remedy available being confession, penance, and many times even the sentence of death (Bell and Weinberg 1978; Hogan and Hudson 1998). The term homosexuality, as a condition to be diagnosed or as a term to be conceptualized, for many centuries did not exist (Halwani 1998). Such a term emerged in Western culture as a result of scientific movements during the late eighteenth century – beginning of the nineteenth century (Bell and Weinberg 1978; Montero 1997; Halwani 1998). In 1869 a Hungarian physician by the name of Benkert first applied the term homosexuality to refer to same-gender sexual activity (Caprio 1954). Between 1880 and 1900, same-gender sexual activity was medicalized and defined as a disease. Considered as a disease or as an illness, homosexuality became more humanized and its punishment was now supplanted by medical treatment (Bell and Weinberg 1978).

Homosexuality was first referred to as sexual inversion by J.A. Symonds in 1883. This term was later replaced by the term sexual perversion. The term was later replaced by sexual deviation; and again replaced by the term sexual variation, as both former terms were deemed as too derogatory (Allen 1997). Throughout the nineteenth century and until mid-twentieth century, many researchers were referring to same-gender activity as sexual preference. However, sexual preference implies that a choice may be involved. Consequently, in the 1980's, this term was replaced by sexual orientation (Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988). Sexual orientation implies same-gender

activity, that is not a choice (Bell, Weinberg, and Hammersmith 1981; Frankowski 2004); but rather a condition (Allen 1997), a “more of a deep-seated or innate direction to one’s sexual desires” (Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988, 75).

It is evident that throughout the years, there has been much debate on the choices of terms used to identify or to specify sexual activity other than heterosexual. Literature review suggests that many researchers generally believe the term homosexuality will also someday become obsolete, as it tends to convey and invite different connotations and much confusion (Caprio 1954; Hersh 1991; Allen 1997). To begin illustrating a chronological development of the study of homosexuality, Caprio (1954) cites some of the most famous researchers in this arena: *Ulrichs*, a German magistrate launched the first theory of homosexuality in 1868. He coined the terms ‘urning’ to refer to a male homosexual; and ‘urlind’ to refer to a female homosexual. Ulrichs postulated that homosexuality was congenital. Furthermore, he believed that “a homosexual had the body of one sex but the mind and soul of the opposite sex” (Caprio 1954, 105).

Westphal, a professor of psychiatry in Berlin, concluded that homosexuality was a disease of inversion and referred to it as a “moral insanity”. He further agreed that homosexuality was a “sexual anomaly, a morbid type of congenital inversion” (Caprio 1954, 106). In 1875, *Mantegazza*, an Italian researcher, concluded that homosexuality represented an “error of nature”. He further postulated that sexual inversion can be attributed to two possible causes: “1. Difficulty in practicing normal coitus; 2. Desire for pleasure” (Caprio 1954, 106).

In 1882, French hypnotists *Charcot* and *Magnan*, regarded homosexuality as a

“morbid entity. As being caused by hereditary degeneration of some kind” (Caprio 1954, 106). During the same period, another French scientist by the name of *Chevalier*, attributed homosexuality to “organic hermaphroditism” and that homosexuals “possess hereditary elements of both sexes” (Caprio 1954, 106). In 1886, after his publication of *Psychopathia Sexualis*, *Richard von Krafft-Ebing*, professor of psychiatry at Vienna University, postulated that homosexuality could be divided into “1. Acquired homosexuality; and 2. Congenital homosexuality” (Caprio 1954, 107). He first claimed that it was a “manifestation or sign of degeneration – a neuropathic and psychopathic state which is hereditary” (107). Further, he argued that this degeneration was an inherited nervous instability rooted in parental traits such as alcoholism and eccentricity (Caprio 1954; Gibson 1997). However, von Krafft-Ebing later redefined homosexuality as a harmless variation of human sexual behavior, and he became an active advocate for homosexual civil rights in Germany (Caprio 1954; Rosario 1997).

In addition, *Dr. Albert Moll* of Berlin considered homosexuality as an “inversion; as an innate anomaly and emphasized heredity as the important factor” (Caprio 1954, 107). Further, he felt that “because homosexuality is contrary to the procreative instinct, it belonged to the realm of pathology – sickness or disease” (Caprio 1954, 107). *Iwan Bloch*, from Germany, agreed that homosexuality was a “sickness of some kind” (107). A famous homosexual German psychiatrist and sexologist by the name of *Magnus Hirschfeld* made a significant contribution to the study of homosexuality through the publication of his work which included a psychobiological questionnaire

answered by over ten thousand men and women during the 1900's. Hirschfeld agreed with the theory that homosexuality is congenital, as he stated: "it is therefore conclusive that the homosexual urge is independent of the wish and will, and that its phenomenon lies in the individual constitution itself" (Caprio 1954, 108). Hirschfeld was the first to coin the term 'third sex', which implied a sexual intermediary stage between man and woman. He began the first gay and lesbian library and archive in 1897, and was also the founder of the Institute of Sexual Science in Berlin and of the Journal of Sexual Science (Caprio 1954; Hogan and Hudson 1998). He fought to defend the social rights of gay and lesbians who he called 'the congenital invert'. Later, the Nazis set fire to his collection in 1933 (Vicinus 1993; Rosario 1997).

In 1897, English sexologist *Havelock Ellis* (whose wife Edith was a lesbian) published *Sexual Inversion*, a comprehensive study of sexual manifestation (Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988). Although Ellis disagreed with some of the viewpoints of the aforementioned researchers, he also corroborated at times with the theory of congenital homosexuality. His work emphasized some environmental or psychological factors as possible causes of homosexuality (Caprio 1954; Socarides 1978). In 1905, Sigmund Freud wrote about homosexuality in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, claiming that homosexuality is caused by arrested psychosexual development (Hogan and Hudson 1998; Kelly 2001).

The term lesbian, which is the core of this study, evolved from the Golden Age of Greece about 590 B.C. During this period, Sappho the poetess, maintained an all-girl school of poetry, art, music, and dance in the Island of Lesbos in the Aegean Sea.

Sappho wrote poetry to include that of glorifying love between women, for she engaged in sexual acts with other women, as well as many of her disciples (Caprio 1954; Vicinus 1993; Hogan and Hudson 1998; Malone 1998; Andre 2003). Hence, the term lesbianism referred to these erotic relationships between women; and the name Sappho has been associated through the ages with traditional sex practices among women as *sapphism* (Caprio 1954; Vicinus 1993; Andre 2003). These erotic sexual practices between women later spread to Rome. It was in the famous Roman baths where female homosexuals engaged in sexual acts with other women who were slaves. These sexual practices were not limited to a particular social status, as aristocratic women of ancient Rome also engaged in lesbianism. Agrippina and Livia were two notorious lesbians of those times (Caprio 1954).

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, women were free to love each other without legal or social sanctions. In fact, the concept of *Platonism* emphasized that the love women felt for one another was based on the soul; not based on gender or the genitals (Andre 2003). Later, the Greek word *tribade* appeared during the late sixteenth century in France and in England. This term referred to women who rubbed their genitals against other women, and was used to describe women who enjoyed each other sexually. Perhaps one of the most famous examples of tribadism during the eighteenth century was the romantic friendship of the 'Ladies of Llangollen'. Accordingly, Irish cousins Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby ran away from marriage and from the convent to live with one another in Vale of Llangollen, which is in the north of Wales (Martin and Lyon 1991; Hogan and Hudson 1998). Early

writings report that Lady Eleanor “wore men’s clothes, that her journal spoke of ‘our bed’, and that neither left their cottage for a single night throughout the fifty years they lived together” (Martin and Lyon 1991, 21).

Other early terms used to refer to same-sex female eroticism included *fricatrices*, *rubsters*, *donna con donna*, and in Spanish, *amiga particular* (Vicinus 1993). Then, during early nineteenth century, cross-dressed masculine women, ‘the mannish lesbians’, began to appear. During these times, women who engaged in such practice were considered to be emotionally, and likely sexually, committed to other women. In fact, it was Havelock Ellis who drew his conclusions on identifying lesbians based on their ‘masculine’ behaviors such as those who smoked; spoke loudly; and wore comfortable clothes not consistent with the fashion of those times (Vicinus 1993; Gibson 1997).

During the second half the nineteenth century, lesbians or female introverts, evolved as part of the vocabulary among sexologists and within the medical community in efforts to define, codify, and to control sexuality in general. Sex between women was considered abnormal and, to some degree, evil. The term lesbian denoted decadence, inversion, and vice (Dunker 1987). Just as homosexuality became medicalized and was deemed as an abnormality and as congenital (Faderman 1991), during the last few decades or so of the nineteenth century, medical doctors began to claim that lesbianism was an abnormality closely linked to an enlarged clitoris. Thomas Bartholin’s revision of *Institutiones Anatomicae*, provided much authority to support the theory of an enlarged clitoris as the cause of lesbian desire (Hogan and

Hudson 1998). Furthermore, masturbators were considered degenerative and were thought to be the main cause of clitoral hypertrophy. Hence, there was a strong association between masturbatory behavior and homosexuality, as both were deemed degenerate. In addition, female homosexuality was seen as a subset of masturbation being that masturbation was defined as “veneral orgasm by means of the hand, the tongue, or any kind of body by one’s self or another person” (Gibson 1997, 116).

The assumption of clitoral hypertrophy took on a cultural meaning by which it highlighted and associated female inverts with members of other stigmatized groups, such as those of race and class (Gibson 1997). This association served as a tool to promote the marginalization of female inverts or homosexuals. This notion also served to minimize the potential threat these individuals posed to men, to profound beliefs of sexuality, to gender; and to intimate relationships. According to this view, female inverts or female homosexuals were construed as being masculine. First, they were thought to take on the active sexual role with another woman; hence, they were excluded from ‘normal asexual’ women. Second, their enlarged clitoris represented a threat to be used as a penis. This, in turn, excluded them from being classified as true females. Overall, the goal for doctors and physicians was to maintain the image of ‘true or real’ women as asexual beings. Lastly, clitoral hypertrophy served to further propagate the belief that this anomaly referred to both body and behavior. Thus, lesbians’ relationships and their bodies represented a pathological stance which threatened the physical and the social body (Gibson 1997).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, society associated feminism with

lesbianism; and lesbianism with something terrible (Andre 2003). An influential figure during the early twentieth century was Emma Goldman, who was the first public supporter of homosexual rights in the United States (Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988). Nevertheless, lesbianism continued to be perceived as a mental illness, and whatever research was conducted at this time, focused essentially on the causes of such sexual orientation and its psychological abnormality (Andre 2003).

As the twentieth century progressed, writings about female homosexuality began to surface in the United States and in Europe. This public disclosure occurred due to the influence of changes perceived in gender norms and sexuality following World War I. A new generation of women emerged. Women began entering universities. Later, throughout the 1930's, American physicians perceived lesbianism as a threat to a normative heterosexual ideal. Books and manuals were published offering information and advice about the proper and correct ways to have sexual relations, emphasizing and cementing heterosexual norms (Carlston 1997).

By the end of the twentieth century, endocrinological testing had begun and other medical advances were taking place; hence, granting permission for physicians to 'treat' homosexuality (Carlston 1997; Kenen 1997). Along with this progression, physicians argued at the time that there was a relationship between homosexuality and a reversal proportion of sex hormones. Thus, with adequate treatment, a possible reverse back or cure was possible (Kenen 1997). Throughout the following years, society continued to perceive homosexuals (gays and lesbians) as psychopaths; obsessive-compulsives; full of castration anxieties and father fixations; overly

dependent; suicidal; hysterical; emotionally unstable...to mention just a few characteristics (Bell and Weinberg 1978). There were many scientific questions as to the efficacy of the direct correlation between lesbians/gays and these various pathologies. These questions opened the door for further scientific developments during the decades to follow (Bell and Weinberg 1978; Gibson 1997).

Homosexuality, to include lesbianism, took a major turn in the 1940's and the 1950's. This period marked the onset of a series of general scientific studies on male and female sexuality. Findings from these studies profoundly impacted the beliefs about homosexuality and strongly challenged its nature (Bell and Weinberg 1978). Dr. Alfred Kinsey's famous research on thousands of American men and women's sexual behavior shocked the world with its startling revelation that non-heterosexual behavior was surprisingly more common than what people actually cared to admit or discuss (Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, and Gebhard 1953; Bell and Weinberg 1978; Kenen 1997; Rosario 1997; Carlston 1997; Cass 1979; Kelly 2001; Cochran, Sullivan, and Mays 2003).

During the 1930's and 1940's, it was widely believed that a single sexual encounter with someone of the same sex was sufficient to define the person as 'homosexual'. Kinsey realized early in his study that a great number of individuals had experienced both same-sex and opposite-sex sexual behavior. Kinsey wanted to challenge the use of the term homosexual. He claimed that even though someone's *behavior* could be homosexual, it does not necessarily mean that someone *is* a homosexual (Kinsey et al. 1948; Kinsey et al. 1953; Kenen 1997). Kinsey regarded homosexuality as

“something people *do*, not something they *are*” (Pillard 1997, 230). Further, he posited a continuum of sexual behavior by developing an arbitrary seven-category sexual behavior rating scale. On the said scale, he applied numbers 0 to 6: with 0 representing exclusively heterosexual with no homosexual behavior; and 6 representing exclusively homosexual with no heterosexual behavior. Those individuals reporting some combination of both, same-sex and opposite-sex sexual behavior, were classified somewhere between these two extremes, in categories 1 to 5. Being that: 1 were those predominantly heterosexual, only incidentally homosexual; 2 those predominantly heterosexual, but more than incidentally homosexual; 3 those equally heterosexual and homosexual; 4 those predominantly homosexual, but more than incidentally heterosexual; 5 those predominantly homosexual, but incidentally heterosexual. Surprisingly enough, Kinsey found that most people fell somewhere in between 1 and 5: 50% of men admitted to being aroused by other men; and 37% reported having had at least one homosexual experience (Kinsey et al. 1948). Women: 28% of the women interviewed responded erotically to other women; and 13% reported having experienced orgasm with another woman (Kinsey et al. 1953).

Kinsey’s findings also revealed that few people fell on either extreme of the continuum - 0 and 6: Men: 4% claimed to be exclusively homosexual (Kinsey et al. 1948). Women: approximately 3% claimed to be exclusively homosexual (Kinsey et al. 1953). Hence, committed to the belief that all sexual behavior was natural and therefore normal, Kinsey effectively and intentionally blurred the traditional boundaries between the categories of sexual practice (Kenen 1997). Furthermore,

Kinsey believed that individuals with homosexual histories could be found across all socioeconomic statuses, age groups, and in all geographical locales from cities to remote farms. This scale did not only conform to those who perceived themselves as gays, lesbians, or bisexuals, it also conformed to those individuals considering themselves as heterosexual; and yet, had experienced some same-sex sexual activity at some point in their lives (Kelly 2001). In fact, ever since Kinsey's work, there have been difficulties when trying to neatly assign a category for people in terms of their gender, their orientation, and their sexuality (Rosario 1997).

World War II also set the grounds for further changes in gender roles, homosexual identities, and homosexual communities (Carlston 1997). The subsequent decades of the 1940's and 1950's became important for gays and lesbians. In the early 50's, Harry Hay founded the Mattachine Society which was the first active group of gay and lesbians to publicly protest against police harassment. Harry Hay is considered the father of the gay and lesbian rights movement in the United States (Hogan and Hudson 1998). In addition, gay bars in the larger cities such as in San Francisco were appearing, and publications about lesbians such as *The Ladder* in 1956, and lesbian membership organizations such as *The Daughters of Bilitis* in 1955 founded by Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon (after Bilitis, a lesbian poet who lived in ancient Greece on the isle of Lesbos with Sappho), began to make lesbians more easily identifiable (Dunker 1987; Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988; Martin and Lyon 1991; Hogan and Hudson 1998). As a result, along with this identification also came much despair and loneliness. If their sexual preference was exposed and became public, lesbians were

outlawed. Furthermore, gay and lesbians were expelled from the military and from any government jobs (Vicinus 1993; Hogan and Hudson 1998).

Lesbianism underwent another significant change due to the women's liberation movements of the 1960's and early 1970's. The slow, but increasing social tolerance of homosexuality evolved through multiple social service organizations formed throughout the United States. The appearance of more gay and lesbian communities in larger cities enabled gay men and lesbians to achieve a level of visibility (Dunker 1987; Hogan and Hudson 1998). To mention a few of the positive changes, a major gay and lesbian newsmagazine, *The Advocate*, was first published in August 1967 (Hogan and Hudson 1998). In 1969, The American Sociological Association condemned "oppressive actions against any persons for reasons of sexual preference" (Hogan and Hudson 1998, 640). They were the first organization to voice support of gay and lesbian civil rights. New York City's first gay community center opened in 1970; and during that same year in Los Angeles, Gay Liberation Front demonstrators persuaded bar owners to allow gay and lesbian customers to freely hold hands. In 1972 a committee of the American Bar Association recommended the decriminalization of consensual same-sex acts. In 1974, AT&T was the first American corporation to adopt equal opportunity policies for gays and lesbians; followed by Santa Cruz County, California which was the first to make job discrimination against homosexuals illegal. Later, in 1977, the U.S. State Department announced they would begin considering employment applications of gays and lesbians (Hogan and Hudson 1998).

Changes in legislation that benefited gays and lesbians occurred during the 1980's and 1990's. In 1982, Wisconsin became the first state to approve civil rights protection for gays and lesbians. In 1983, the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco ruled that immigration authorities cannot obstruct gays' and lesbians' entrance to the United States based on their sexual orientation. In 1989, the United States Postal Service extended official recognition of the gay and lesbian rights movement by issuing a 'Lesbian and Gay Pride' stamp in commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising. In 1990, President Bush signed 'The Hate Crime Statistics Act', which requires the Department of Justice to collect and publish statistics for five years on hate crimes motivated by prejudice based on race, religion, sexual orientation, or ethnic origin. This was the first law to extend federal recognition to gays and lesbians. In 1993, The World Health Organization officially deleted homosexuality from its list of diseases (Hogan and Hudson 1998).

As the years have passed, there have been an endless array of theories with regard to the origins and the causality of homosexuality including lesbianism. The origins of sexual orientation have been, and probably will continue, to be subject to much conjecture, research, and mostly – debate (Kelly 2001). To date, most researchers and experts in the field agree that there is not a scientific, concise factual theory that explains the causes of homosexuality (Malone 1998). What exists, are theories or models on the probable causes of homosexuality, which have included those of genetic predisposition, hormonal influences, learned behaviors, and environmental factors (Berzon 1979; Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988; Kelly 2001).

Allen (1997) discusses that, through the 1980's, numerous studies on the causes of homosexuality have been the focus of our attention. Some of these studies supporting the genetic predisposition hypothesis include a study by Pillard and Weinrich in 1986. They found that brothers of gay men had a 22% chance of being gay themselves, in contrast to the brothers of straight men who only had a 4% chance of being gay themselves (Allen 1997). Burr 1993, as cited in Rosario (1997) suggests that "homosexuals have long maintained that sexual orientation, far from being a personal choice or life style, is something neither chosen nor changeable" (8). Hersch (1991) agrees by arguing that homosexuality is not a choice. She strongly claims that if it were, it would mean that gays and lesbians are voluntarily and consciously choosing to "fulfill all society's stereotypes of what a homosexual is, and accept the consequences, including risk for AIDS, legal discrimination, exclusion from 'normal' society, denial of family and children, and general harassment" (Hersch 1991, 40).

Additional research on the probable causes of homosexuality during the 1990's appear to suggest some degree of genetic heritability. In 1995, Bailey and Pillard compared fifty-six identical male twins; fifty-four fraternal male twins; and fifty-seven genetically unrelated adopted brothers. They concluded that, out of the adopted brothers, only 11% were both gay; out of the fraternal twins, 22% were gay; and 52% of the identical twins were gay. This study suggests that same-gender sexual orientation is at least partly genetic in origin (Kelly 2001). Also, Whitam, Diamond, and Martin, 1993 found that, out of thirty-eight pairs of identical twins (thirty-four male and four female), twins in almost two-thirds of the pairs, were gay or lesbian.

Another study by Bailey and Pillard in 1995 with 147 lesbians and their sisters, found that out of the seventy-one lesbians who had identical twins, 48% of them were also lesbians. Researchers point out that gay males posit a higher likelihood of having a relative who is gay, as opposed to lesbians (Kelly 2001).

Research also suggests that prenatal hormonal factors may have some influence over later gender identity and sexual orientation. It is postulated that a few weeks after conception, fetal hormones cause certain brain structures to masculinize and consequently, be defeminized by male hormones produced in the fetal testes. These influences on the brain pathways may lead to masculine-identified behavior after birth. Conversely, if there are no male hormones, the brain pathways are not masculinized, resulting in feminine-identified behavior after birth; either way changing an individual's sexual orientation later in life. This speculation continues to be studied and presently remains rather inconclusive (Fisher 1992; Kelly 2001).

Researchers have explored environmental factors as potential causes for homosexuality, particularly lesbianism. Going back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, women used to organize and gather in salons, religious groups, artistic coteries, and in other groups of this nature. Hence, although not consciously under a lesbian framework per se, these gatherings provided ample opportunity for female bonding and for the development of intense friendships (Vicus 1993). Moving into the early twentieth century, Deutsch 1925, as cited in Socarides (1978), argued that women are constantly undergoing physical and psychological changes at the beginning of a new sexual function. During puberty, intercourse, pregnancy, or

childbirth, women need to redirect their sexual drive. Thus, if this process is not appropriately accomplished, female homosexuality may be activated and acted upon (Socarides 1978). Toward the end of the twentieth century, during the mid 1960's, early 1970's, explanations of homosexualism largely focused on psychological causes such as family dynamics and dysfunctions (Allen 1997; Kelly 2001).

To support the learned behavior theory, Caprio (1954) claims that much of the incompatibility between men and women constitutes an important factor in marital dissatisfaction leading to divorce, and may perhaps, be closely related to lesbianism (Caprio 1954). Caprio reports that due to women's anger at men, or dissatisfaction with marriage, divorced women may choose to be lesbian. In this light, lesbianism is capable of influencing and questioning our social stability (Caprio 1954). In contrast to this view, Hidalgo and Christensen (1976-77) concluded in their study that negative experiences with men bear no correlation to determining a lesbian identity. As they state: "lesbians do not express negative attitudes toward heterosexual sex; they just recognize that this is not how they want to express their sexuality" (Hidalgo and Christensen 1976-77, 114). Bell, Weinberg, and Hammersmith (1981) further agree with this position, as they found that homosexuality cannot be empirically attributed to differential dating experiences. Furthermore, Castillo (1991) contends that it is erroneous to assume that lesbianism is the end result of sexual and / or physical abuse by men. As she states: "if lesbianism was solely a reaction to male dominance or 'machismo', the vast majority of women in this world would inevitably have become lesbians" (Castillo 1991, 35).

Caprio (1954) also cites the work of the late Dr. Beran Wolfe, a well-known Psychoanalytic psychiatrist of his time. Dr. Wolfe argued that women have a tendency to turn to other women for consolation after they have suffered some love disillusion or have felt humiliated or ridiculed by a man. In addition, Wolfe believed that lesbianism is an expression of an underlying neurosis in women (Caprio 1954). By acknowledging the learned behavior theory, Wolfe also felt that in some cases, homosexual attachment among women may arise out of schoolgirl crushes during adolescence. Adolescent girls tend to identify themselves with other female role models (i.e. teachers, actresses) and so, girls idealize and worship these role models and wish to imitate them. This admiration may turn into a false assumption that women are inferior and therefore, must develop masculine aggressiveness and power to compensate for these feelings of inferiority (Caprio 1954).

Caprio (1954) also cites another theorist favoring the learned behavior position as a possible cause of lesbianism. Dr. Winifred Richmond believed that all human beings pass through a homosexual stage of development. This stage is accentuated mostly during adolescence at which point the stage could manifest, express itself in an attitude of mind, or in an unconscious emotional drive. Further, Richmond argued that adolescent years may be particularly difficult for girls, especially if their attitudes toward sex, sexuality, and to boys, are distortedly influenced by beliefs of very strict, neurotic parents. If so, adolescent girls may develop a defective emotional attachment toward men, leading them to become emotionally and romantically attached to women later on in life (Caprio 1954). Again, the aforementioned learned theory postulation

was challenged by Bell, Weinberg, and Hammersmith (1981) when they found that although some of their homosexual women (lesbians) respondents reported having felt 'different' as adolescents, and having felt isolated from others, those factors "cannot be viewed as having had much importance for whether the women in our study became homosexual or heterosexual" (Bell, Weinberg, and Hammersmith 1981, 163).

After World War II, the field of psychology was gaining much prestige. The American Medical Association decided that the American Psychiatric Association (APA) should take on the task of identifying and classifying illnesses believed to be mental disorders (Hogan and Hudson 1998). The first edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) was published by the American Psychiatric Association in 1952. It included homosexuality as a Sociopathic Personality Disturbance and later identified it as a Personality Disorder. In the second edition of the DSM published in 1968, homosexuality was classified as a non-psychotic mental disorder, one that included sadistic sexual assault (Hogan and Hudson 1998). These diagnoses were justified by the distress experienced by gay and lesbians due to their sexual orientation.

In addition, Psychoanalysis was the prominent school of thought during these times. Some of the most popular psychoanalytical theories of the causes of homosexuality included fear of the opposite sex, hostile fathers combined with overwhelmingly seductive mothers, traumas during childhood, and fixations during pre-Oedipal, Oedipal, or pre-adolescence phases of development. As for lesbians, the notion of negative mother-daughter relationships was thought to be a direct cause of

lesbianism (Hogan and Hudson 1998; Kelly 2001). This psychoanalytical position was later challenged following an extensive study by Bell, Weinberg, and Hammersmith (1981) of the Kinsey Institute, when they found that “identification with a parent of either gender appears to play a significant role in the development of sexual orientation” (Kelly 2001, 380). Furthermore, this study also concluded that there is “no valid support for the hypothesis that any particular mother ‘produces’ children with same-gender orientation” (Kelly 2001, 380), and that no particular family lifestyle or dynamic produces homosexual or heterosexual children. As they so graciously conclude in their study, “you may supply your sons with footballs and your daughters with dolls, but no one can guarantee that they will enjoy them” (Bell, Weinberg, and Hammersmith 1981, 191).

Another popular psychoanalytic hypothesis similar to that of Freud’s arrested psychosexual development, was that of Jones 1927. Accordingly, female homosexuality could be accounted for by two factors: 1. an intense oral eroticism; and 2. an unusually strong sadism (Socarides 1978). Further, Jones postulated that girls experience deprivation for not being allowed to share the penis of the father. Being that, the libido must be redirected toward self-expression. Consequently, girls must choose between giving up their erotic attachment for the father, and giving up their femininity. Hence, the ‘choice’ of homosexuality can be perceived as a solution to this developmental crisis, as it represents some safety. As a result, the most successful cure for homosexuality was to undergo long, expensive treatment under Psychoanalysis (Socarides 1978).

As reviewed and discussed in the aforementioned literature, the debate of the nature vs. nurture dichotomy with regard to the development of homosexuality, to include that of lesbianism, has always existed and perhaps will continue to exist for years to come. Although extensive literature continues to include this debate in their research studies, there seems to be no single consensus on the causative factors of lesbianism. Currently, the existing literature suggests theories and models on genetic predispositions, on learned behaviors, or on environmental factors often postulated simultaneously, with a great deal of emphasis on viewing homosexuality, as a natural variation of the human condition (Rosario 1997; Rose 2002). As another researcher argues based on observations and studies with human and animal samples (although the latter is difficult to integrate with human data), research seems to suggest that there is an intermingling relationship between specific genes modified by the presence of other genes, and some possible environmental factors may account for homosexuality (Pillard 1997).

In 1973, after extensive consideration and studies, in conjunction with the influence of debate and controversy from gay activists, a reform movement in psychiatry occurred. The combination of the Stonewall riots of 1969 in New York, where gays fought back against police harassment and brutality (Schwartz and Rutter 2000), gay and lesbian psychiatrists coming out within the APA (Pillard 1997), and other political pressures, caused the American Psychiatric Association to approve the redefinition of mental disorders. Henceforth, homosexuality was removed from the lexicon of mental disorders in the DSM (Berzon 1979; Frankowski 2004) and recognized as a normal

variant (Pillard 1997; Allen 1997; Hogan and Hudson 1998; Kelly 2001). As Marmor, 1973 states:

Surely the time has come for psychiatry to give up the archaic practice of classifying the millions of men and women who accept or prefer homosexual object choices as being, by virtue of that fact alone, mentally ill. The fact that their alternative life-style happens to be out of favor with current cultural conventions must not be a basis in itself for a diagnosis of pathology (Bell and Weinberg 1978, 196-197).

For the time being, the DSM has kept Sexual Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (302.9) as a diagnostic disorder, with the criteria including persistent and marked distress regarding sexual orientation (American Psychiatric Association 2000).

As previously discussed, some researchers believed that homosexuality, to include lesbianism, was pathological. For instance, Caprio (1954) argues that lesbians suffer from a variety of neurotic ailments including depression, anxiety, and other psychiatric complaints. He attributes these mental health issues to the level of conflict lesbians possess within themselves. He claims that lesbians are torn between their desire to become heterosexual on the one hand, and craving for homosexual gratification on the other hand. As he states: "lesbians are basically unhappy people. Many admit their unhappiness but others are deceived by their pseudoadjustment to life" (Caprio 1954, 180). However, more recent studies and research have failed to provide ample and consistent data concluding that homosexualism, to include lesbianism, is pathological in and of itself (Bell and Weinberg 1978).

Studies using various psychological testing and measurement scales have indicated that some homosexuals may 'have' certain psychological disorders. To name a few: Bruce in 1942 revealed that his homosexual male subjects scored higher on measures

of neuroticism, hysteria, mania, depression, and paranoia; Doidge in 1956 reported higher levels of anxiety among his homosexual men subjects; Kenyon in 1968 found lesbians to be more neurotic and suffering disturbed moods and feelings; Saghir and Robins in 1973 found their lesbian samples to have affective disorders (Bell and Weinberg 1978). These disorders, however, could be attributed to other factors, not necessarily to their sexual orientation (Bell and Weinberg 1978; Pillard 1997).

Several additional studies have suggested that homosexuals do not vary significantly from heterosexuals in terms of their psychological adjustment (Bell and Weinberg 1978; Pillard 1997). For instance: Wayne et al., in 1947, studied men in the military. They used the Rorschach and the TAT as their measurements. The results were not significantly different between heterosexuals and homosexuals (Bell and Weinberg 1978). Evelyn Hooker, a renowned psychologist of the 1950's, suggested similarities among heterosexuals and homosexuals. Hooker conducted extensive studies proposing that same-gender sexual orientation and behavior were 'normal variants'. Her findings concluded that heterosexuals and homosexuals did not show significant difference in terms of psychological health (Berzon 1979). Hooker further argued that many gays and lesbians were living happy, productive lives (Bell and Weinberg 1978; Hogan and Hudson 1998; Kelly 2001).

Hidalgo and Christensen (1976-77) also mention a well known study by Hopkins in 1968 that revealed lesbians to be independent, resilient, and self-sufficient. A study by Saghir and Robins in 1973 found no significant difference between heterosexual and homosexual men in areas such as depression, anxiety, or psychosomatic

symptoms (Bell and Weinberg 1978). A study by Freedman in 1975, compared lesbians to heterosexual women. Based on multiple assessments, lesbians scored higher on autonomy, spontaneity, and sensibility to their own needs and feelings (Hidalgo and Christensen 1976-77).

Another study by Clark in 1975 compared heterosexual and homosexual men. It was concluded that their sexual orientation was not related to their scores for self-criticism, neurosis, or personality integration according to the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (Bell and Weinberg 1978). Particularly with lesbians, in 1971 Wilson and Greene found more neuroticism among the heterosexual women subjects, than among the homosexual women they studied. In 1974, Riess et al. found their lesbian respondents to be more self-accepting and manifesting less depression than their heterosexual women counterparts (Bell and Weinberg 1978). Bell, Weinberg, and Hammersmith (1981) concluded in their study that homosexuals can enjoy mature, fulfilling, constructive lives just as heterosexuals. As they wisely posit: "Probably each orientation involves its own dangers, sacrifices, and compensations. Surely, each represents a statement from and about the deepest aspects of one's self and the conscious or unconscious attempt to honor them" (222). If homosexuality was 'pathological' in and of itself, Pillard (1997) argues that, due to the large number of gays and lesbians estimated by the acclaimed Kinsey Report, "homosexuality was the most widespread mental disorder in the United States" (Pillard 1997, 227).

Further review of more recent literature suggests that current research focuses attention on life experiences and on the multi-dimensional aspects of gays and

lesbians. Allen (1997) explains that, up until the late 1970's and even way into the 1980's, gays and lesbians were facing many psychological problems in terms of their self images and sense of equality. This oppression was mostly due to societal attitudes including those of the psychiatric community. For instance, the Gallop Report in 1982 found that 59% of Americans surveyed responded they would not permit homosexuals to teach in grade school. Another survey conducted on the sexual attitudes of over 1,000 American teenagers by Coles and Stokes in 1985; found that 75% considered sex between two women to be disgusting; and over 80% considered sex between two men disgusting. Also, 32% of the male respondents and 16% of the female respondents reported that they would break off all ties of friendship upon discovering their same-sex friends were gay or lesbian (Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988). More recent research such as Cochran, Sullivan, and Mays (2003) claim that gays and lesbians may be at higher risk for some psychological disorders such as anxiety, major depression, and substance abuse. They further contend that these disorders may be mostly related to the harmful effects of social stigma. Consequently, the level of discomfort rooted by external factors such as societal prejudice and discrimination is what seems to be related to distress in the overall functioning of lesbians which, in turn, may lead to some degree of pathology (Rose 2002; Cochran, Sullivan, and Mays 2003). As some researchers would argue: "it would appear that homosexual adults who have come to terms with their homosexuality, who do not regret their sexual orientation, and who can function effectively sexually and socially, are no more distressed psychologically than are heterosexual men and women" (Bell and Weinberg

1978, 216).

Overall, a growing amount of research studies have suggested homosexuality should be viewed as a sexual orientation variation, as opposed to a 'choice' that can be voluntarily changed (Berzon 1979; Hersch 1991; Fisher 1992; Pillard 1997; Rosario 1997; Hogan and Hudson 1998). Further, to date, there is no known conclusive scientific evidence that certainly explains the development of homosexual orientation (Berzon 1979). As discussed throughout this chapter, political movements such as that of the gay liberation movement in the early 1970's, when the National Organization of Women included lesbians in its agenda (Schwartz and Rutter 2000), together with the emergence of community agencies in the years to follow, have helped fight social oppression of gays and lesbians within the dominant heterosexual paradigm. These movements and agencies have indeed aided lesbians in facing oppression and societal demands less harshly. Consequently, lesbians are more socially accepted than before (Malone 1998; Gianoulis 2002).

Although it is safe to argue that over the last two decades or so, societal negative perceptions of homosexuality have greatly decreased (Schwartz and Rutter 2000), lesbians continue their attempts to receive unconditional love and acceptance from those around them (Loulsan 1984). Even more profoundly, lesbians continue in their attempts to receive unconditional love and acceptance from their own families, who sometimes turn from them upon finding out who they really are (Loulan 1984; Pearlman 1987; Vargo 1987; Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988). "Rarely do same-sex couples enjoy immediate, consistent, and pervasive emotional support and acceptance

upon disclosure of their relationship to their families of origin” (Rostosky 2004, 2). These ambivalences and the lack of support remain factors condemning homosexuals in general, to include lesbians, in affecting overall personal functioning within a large heterosexual society (Hoagland 1988). After all, sexual desire, sexual expression, and sexual orientation may seem to be private experiences, but the reality is that these experiences are also shared and are political (Halperin 1993). As one author wisely concludes: “people need to focus less on sex acts and fantasies as the key to personality, and more on relationships that enrich their lives” (Hersch 1991, 41).

HOMOSEXUAL IDENTITY FORMATION

In American main-stream culture, sexuality serves as the basis of defining our identity (Golden 1987). It is contended that our culture has identified four groups from which we build our identity: heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, and asexual (Golden 1987). Further, it is assumed that our correspondent identity should be congruent with its matching sexual behavior. Being that, homosexuals or lesbians constitute a particular type of identity, since both groups engage in same-sex behavior. “A homosexual identity is a perception of self as homosexual in relation to romantic or sexual situations” (Troiden 1989, 46). As previously argued in this study, the term homosexual emerged around the late nineteenth century in an effort to regulate and control people by means of categorizing them (Martin 1993). But put simply, coming out as a homosexual, and in this particular study as a lesbian, means “knowing you are a lesbian and at some time, acting on that sexually or emotionally” (Loulan 1984, 117).

Lesbian identity is regarded as a complex process and not falling under a clear-cut Category. “For women, sexuality may be an aspect of identity that is fluid and dynamic as opposed to fixed and invariant” (Golden 1987, 19). Some research suggests that gay or lesbian orientation is usually recognized by the individual as early as childhood, before puberty, and/or during adolescence (Bell, Weinberg, and Hammersmith 1981). According to their study, “there is a strong continuity between a person’s childhood and adolescent sexual feelings (and to a lesser extent, behaviors) and his / her adult sexual preference” (Bell, Weinberg, and Hammersmith 1981, 187).

Furthermore, this orientation may be present even before any same-gender sexual contact (Kelly 2001).

Studies indicate that same gender attractions begin and persist despite negative reinforcement from the dominant social media, including the family (Pillard 1997). Some women may experience same-sex attraction at an early age, but may not act on these feelings until later in life. Research also suggests that same-gender attractions may be present for up to three years prior to any overt same-sex behavior (Bell, Weinberg, and Hammersmith 1981). Also, some individuals may feel from early childhood that they are 'different' in many ways (Gianoulis 2002). There seems to be an overwhelming sense of confusion and feelings of being different than others (Vargo 1987; Pillard 1997; Gianoulis 2002). Thus, for many homosexuals, sexual orientation feels innate (Pillard 1997; Gianoulis 2002).

Research also suggests that homosexual orientation may be discovered later in life, perhaps, after a series of failing relationships with the opposite sex or even after a failed marriage (Bell 1999; Gianoulis 2002). "Some of us choose to be lesbians because we found that in our relationships with women the spiritual qualities and psychological or emotional connections give us great satisfaction and empower us in our own potentials" (Golden 1987, 4). Further, Nichols (1987a) contends that lesbian sexuality could also account for lesbians' early experience with men. These sexual experiences at times might have been, to some degree, damaging either by violence or exploitation.

Based on her research on lesbian sexuality, Nichols (1987a) points out that a great

number of lesbians have had some sexual experience with men while in the process of coming out; and in fact, close to one third of lesbians have been married before coming out (Nichols 1987a). Others may marry hoping that marriage, commitment, and children will 'straighten' them out (Schwartz and Rutter 2000). It is further argued that, for the most part, sexual experiences with men were out of efforts to *pass* as heterosexuals and that these experiences were unsatisfying and distasteful to say the least (Bell, Weinberg, and Hammersmith 1981; Nichols 1987a; Kelly 2001). Thus, these findings suggest once again that differential dating experiences are not correlated to later homosexual orientation (Bell, Weinberg, and Hammersmith 1981).

To highlight the diversity in the development of same-sex attraction among women, Diamond and Savin-Williams (2000) offer an intriguing argument. Based on their years of research, they claim that the timing of women's first same-sex attraction or opposite-sex attraction is not a systematic predictor of future sexual attractions, sexual behaviors, or sexual identity development. Thus, contradicting the conventional view of sexual orientation that emphasizes it is "a stable, early-appearing trait" (Diamond and Savin-Williams 2000, 1; Bell, Weinberg, and Hammersmith 1981). It is suggested that variability and sexual fluidity in heterosexual and in homosexual women is largely attributed to the interactions between personal characteristics, environmental factors, basic gender differences, and socialization. As such, they found women reported having felt their same-sex attraction, or an unusually intense emotional attachment toward another woman, typically within the context of a very close friendship (Diamond and Savin-Williams 2000). A previous study by

Vetere (1982) is consistent with this position, as she found that 78% of her respondents reported their first love/romantic/sexual relationship grew out of a close friendship with a woman.

Moreover, according to Betty Berzon, a psychologist who specialized in gay and lesbian issues, argues that, at some point of the homosexual identity formation, lesbians may experience internalized homophobia. Women may want to be loved by other women, but do not engage in any sexual contact in efforts to avoid considering themselves as being 'gay'. In other words, "women can have loving, close, and intimate relationships with other women but pretend to be straight as long as there is no genital sexual contact" (Nichols 1987, 105). In turn, this notion gives room to the gender differences and the socialization processes in which women's sexuality tends to be more situational dependent than that of men. Furthermore, this notion follows Rich's position which is that of a lesbian continuum, not as an absolute (Rich 1993; Diamond and Savin-Williams 2000).

Some researchers posit that the process of self-identifying as a lesbian is greatly influenced by their social context which endorses homophobia among its members (Margolies, Becker, and Jackson-Brewer 1987). Gays and lesbians may internalize the societal homophobia (Loulan 1984). "It's a struggle not to internalize society's message that you're sick...there must be something wrong with you" (Donadello and Hill 1996, 25). Consequently, it is further argued that the impact of homophobia functions at two levels: at a cultural level, it justifies subtle or overt discrimination based on sexual orientation; and on an internal level, it serves as a means for coping or

as a defense mechanism for lesbians to accept these negative attitudes from the larger heterosexual society.

Margolies, Becker, and Jackson-Brewer (1987) postulate that internalized homophobia can be expressed in a variety of fashions: Fear of discovery – it is manifested by the mechanisms of projection and rationalization of others. Typical statements stemming from this regard are: “*It will kill them if they found out*” or “*We don’t talk about my personal life, so there’s no need to bring it up*”. Discomfort with obvious fags and dykes – they explain that some lesbians believe associating with ‘obvious’ homosexuals would give away their identity. Rejection/denigration of all heterosexuals – this is an effort to reverse discrimination, so lesbians feel they don’t need anyone to share their values and life-styles. Feeling superior to heterosexuals – this is an exaggerated sense of differentness manifested by rationalization and reaction formation in which lesbians feel they are superior due to the obstacles they need to overcome. Belief that lesbians are no different from heterosexual women – this is a false attempt to rationalize, deny, and minimize the true difference that exists. Typical statements could include: “*Relationships are all the same, mine just happens to be with another woman*”. An uneasiness with the idea of children being raised in a lesbian home – this is manifested by identification with the aggressor and thus, denying and devaluing their relationships. Typical statements could include: “*I believe children need to have a male parent*”. Restricting attractions to unavailable women, heterosexuals, or those already partnered – this is a form of denial by which lesbians seek out attractions that won’t amount to fully committed relationships.

Short-term relationships – by engaging in short-lived relationships such as dating, less commitment is required to their self-identity as lesbians. Again, rationalization and denial are at play (Margolies, Becker, and Jackson-Brewer 1987, 231-232).

Literature review on homosexuality, to include lesbianism, suggests a number of models describing sexual orientation identity formation have been postulated. For instance, Cass (1979) proposes a six-stage model of homosexual identity formation intended to be applied to both female and male homosexuals. Each stage is differentiated on the basis of the person's perceptions of his or her behavior and the consequences of these perceptions. The stages are as follows: *Stage 1: Identity Confusion*. She explains that information about heterosexuality and homosexuality is encountered through various means and in a daily fashion. For most people, this information, along with any other, is perceived as irrelevant. However, when the information about homosexuality appears to be of personal meaning, individuals experience a sense of confusion and turmoil. The most typical question then is "if my behavior may be called homosexual, does this mean that I am a homosexual?" (Cass 1979, 223). In turn, this mere question can lead to feelings of alienation and anxiety. In attempts to alleviate the anxiety and confusion, individuals may begin to search for answers from outside sources such as reading books, listening to programs related to the subject, etc. *Stage 2: Identity Comparison*. During this stage, individuals begin to accept the possibility of being homosexual. Interestingly, to state "I may be a homosexual" (Cass 1979, 225), usually represents less confusion and turmoil. However, the sense of incongruence and alienation from others is accentuated by the

awareness of the differences in perceptions and behaviors. A sense of “not belonging” and “I’m different” (Cass 1979, 225) compared to the larger society, can cause intense anguish during this stage. *Stage 3: Identity Tolerance.* This stage is characterized by an increased commitment to the self-image. Being that, a common statement at the beginning of this stage may be “I probably am a homosexual” (Cass 1979, 229). This increased commitment brings about some consequences. On one hand, individuals are not so concerned with searching for answers about who they are. They are beginning to accept the importance of their social, emotional, and sexual needs in relation to their sexual orientation. However, on the other hand, alienation from the larger society is intensified by the differences between the way they see themselves and their needs, and the way others see them. One probable attempt to manage this heightened alienation from the larger society may be by seeking support from other homosexuals through contacts in local community centers, agencies, etc. Cass emphasizes that contacting other homosexuals during this stage represents an individuals’ tolerance rather than acceptance of a homosexual identity. *Stage 4: Identity Acceptance.* During this stage, individuals increase their contacts with other homosexuals through agencies and community centers in an attempt to lessen the feelings of isolation and alienation, to further validate their own orientation as an identity and as a way of life, and to evaluate other homosexuals more positively. Hence, it is at this time that Cass argues individuals tend to accept rather than tolerate their homosexual self-image. At the same time, frequent contact with other homosexuals provides a safe interpersonal environment. *Stage 5: Identity Pride.* At the beginning of this stage, incongruence is

further heightened due to the differences that exist between individuals' awareness of their concept of being homosexual and society's rejection of this concept. This stage may be characterized by some anger, a strong sense of commitment toward gay groups, and a sense of pride about being homosexual. Individuals may actively engage in the gay and lesbian community and become activists in efforts to further form a sense of group identity and belonging. Statements such as "these are my people" "gay is good", "gay and proud" (Cass 1979, 233) are typical of this stage. The individual's perception of the world holds a philosophy of '*them and us*'. Although transition through this stage tends to decrease incongruence to a manageable level, individuals continue to face oppression from the larger heterosexual society. *Stage 6: Identity Synthesis.* As individuals transition through this last stage, the dichotomy of the two separate worlds – the heterosexuals and the homosexuals, is perceived with less anger and with more congruency. Individuals begin to welcome the support of accepting heterosexual groups and view them with greater favor. "Personal and public sexual identities become synthesized into one image of self" (Cass 1979, 234). Thus, individuals are able to integrate homosexual identity with all other aspects of the self. It is noteworthy to mention that Cass postulates not all individuals move systematically through these stages in order to acquire an identity of *homosexual*. In addition, she argues that these stages may be represented and perceived differently by different individuals, for situations and individuals vary greatly. Furthermore, the length or duration of each of the stages also varies among individuals. However, this

researcher maintains that for the most part, those individuals who adopt these stages of homosexual identity development tend to better integrate and synthesize their overall concept of self (Cass 1979).

Cass (1979) also discusses the way an individual discloses their homosexual identity. Accordingly, she argues that individuals tend to follow a hierarchical pattern to their identity disclosure. She also mentions that situations and individual differences need to be accounted for. Most importantly, individuals gradually choose to disclose as they perceive acceptance. Generally, she explains that individuals tend to come out to: (1) themselves; (2) other lesbians; (3) gay men; (4) non-gay men; (5) other friends; (6) siblings; (7) parents; (8) extended family; (9) co-workers; and (10) the community. (Formulation of Appendixes A and B {third section} of this study was adapted from this research)

Coleman (1981/82) proposes another model for the coming-out process. Her model highlights later stages of life on the formation of romantic attachments. Accordingly, she proposes five stages: *Stage 1: Pre-Coming-Out* – during this state, the individual is usually not consciously aware of same-sex feelings. This is partly due to the strong defense mechanisms at play as he or she attempts to keep this feeling repressed. There is a sense of feeling and being ‘different’ from others. *Stage 2: Coming out* – during this stage, the individual becomes aware of having homosexual thoughts and fantasies. This stage is characterized by much confusion. The individual may disclose these feelings to a few trusted individuals and may also begin to make contact with others who identify themselves as homosexuals. Most likely, there would

be no disclosure to close friends or family members out of fear of rejection. *Stage 3: Exploration* – this stage is characterized by increased contact with other homosexuals and the individual begins to ‘explore’ with a new sexual identity. This stage of exploration may occur during adolescence, given the opportunity; however, because of cultural restrictions, it may occur during early adulthood. The highlight of this stage is that the individual begins to develop a more positive self-image. *Stage 4: First Relationship* – after experimenting, the individual may feel the need to establish a more stable relationship which combines physical and emotional attraction. However, these relationships are usually short-term, as the individual has not effectively mastered the coming-out and sexual exploration at this point. *Stage 5: Integration* – this stage tends to be a life-time process, as the individual’s public and private identities merge into one integrated self-image. Romantic relationships become more meaningful as the individual faces a variety of stressors related to both his or her identity, and the dynamic of the relationships themselves (Coleman 1981/82).

Golden (1987) offers a multidimensional model for lesbian sexual orientation. She explains that although sexual identity, sexual behavior, and community participation are interrelated dimensions of an individual, they are not necessarily congruent with one another. Thus, it is possible for a woman to self-identify as a lesbian and never have had sexual contact with women. By the same token, a woman can self-identify as heterosexual and yet, be actively involved in the lesbian community for a number of different reasons (Golden 1987).

Troiden (1989) offers a four-stage model of homosexual identity formation using a

sociological perspective. Agreeing with Cass, Troiden maintains that, although an individual's progress through these stages increases the probability of homosexual identity formation and its acceptance, it does not serve as a guarantee or as an absolute determinant. His four-stage model consists of: *Stage 1: Sensitization* – this stage generally begins during late childhood/early adolescence, when lesbians and gays begin to experience feelings of marginalization and of being different from their same-sex peers. Frequent comments such as “I wasn't interested in boys” or “I didn't feel I was like other boys” (Troiden 1989, 50) are typical of this stage. As such, lesbians and gays explore their identity within the larger heterosexual society. *Stage 2: Identity Confusion* – during this stage, lesbians and gays begin to personalize homosexuality. In other words, they begin to reflect and regard their feelings and behaviors as homosexual. As a consequence, they usually experience much inner turmoil and uncertainty about their sexual orientation. Troiden also makes an important note with regard to confusion and disclosure during this stage. He argues that the stigma surrounding homosexuality enhances the feelings of confusion and alienation from others; which in turn, discourages adolescents from disclosing their feelings and uncertainties to family members or peers. Consequently, adolescents may resist or repress these feelings. Yet others may engage in same-sex contact which is perceived as a revelation and further reassurance of their sexual identity. *Stage 3: Identity Assumption* – this third stage of homosexual identity formation usually occurs during late adolescence or early adulthood. Lesbians and gays usually self-identify as homosexuals at different ages and in different contexts. Generally during this stage,

lesbians and gays begin to define themselves and present themselves as homosexuals to other homosexuals. They embark upon the beginning of a long process of coming out. In addition, this process is characterized by a degree of identity tolerance and acceptance of their homosexual identity, by an on-going association with other homosexuals, sexual experimentation with same-sex others, and by a strong exploration and familiarization with the homosexual subculture. Troiden makes an interesting note during this stage with regard to gender differences between lesbians and gays. He argues that lesbians typically assume their homosexual identity based on the context of their strong and meaningful emotional attachment with other women. Gay males are more likely to assume their homosexual identity based on a sociosexual context such as in participation at gay bars, parties, etc. *Stage 4: Commitment.* This stage is characterized by self-acceptance as a homosexual and a heightened level of comfort with this acceptance. This stage is also characterized by further and increased social contact and immersion into the gay and lesbian community. The commitment may be experienced as internalized: more positive meanings attached to homosexuality, and expressed satisfaction and happiness about being homosexual. As externalized: the onset of a same-sex love relationship, and disclosure about their homosexuality to heterosexual others (Troiden 1989).

To continue within the gender differences vein, Troiden (1989) explains that gay males are more likely than lesbians to have various same-sex encounters before considering one special. In contrast, lesbians are more likely to continue to explore the homosexual community and hold same-sex experiences in the context of emotional

attachments and relationships with one woman or a “series of special women” (Troiden 1989, 65). Regarding disclosure, Troiden (1989) argues that coming out to parents represents a significant milestone toward the full integration and self-acceptance of homosexual orientation identity.

As discussed in the aforementioned literature review, various researchers agree that for most gays and lesbians, this lengthy process of self-identification and coming out may start as early as during middle childhood, concluding in the early adult years, and takes into account the diversity of experiences which may lead some individuals to never self-identify as homosexuals or to come out to others (Cass 1979; Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988; Troiden 1989) As Loulan (1984) states: “Coming out is a long process and many of us are engaged in it most of our lives” (117). Furthermore, most theorists and researchers would agree that some individuals may move from stage to stage in a seemingly smooth fashion, and yet others may become stuck. Again, although individual differences and circumstances should be accounted for, societal attitudes may either facilitate or hinder this life-long process (Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988).

In addition, researchers also agree that a strong gay or lesbian identity and enhanced comfort level with this identity may lead many homosexuals to actively participate in community activities; which in turn, further promotes acceptance of themselves and of others, while heightening association with other homosexuals (Cass 1979; Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988; Troiden 1989). Bell and Weinberg (1978) supported this conclusion in their study. Accordingly, they found their lesbian

respondents expressed no regret about being homosexual, nor considered their sexual orientation as an 'emotional disorder'. Furthermore, they report that most of their respondents stated that they "would not want a magic pill causing heterosexuality to have been given to them either at birth or currently" (Bell and Weinberg 1978, 127).

Conversely, researchers argue that lesbians who attempt to hide their identity and desires often fall into isolation and invisibility. In addition, confusion and frustration about their sexuality and identity often lead lesbians to seek therapy. Their diminished comfort level due to discrimination and stigma because of their sexual orientation often leads lesbians to experience more severe psychological symptoms (Zevy and Cavallaro 1987; Cochran, Sullivan, and Mays 2003). Blumenfeld and Raymond (1988) quote a very interesting point from Minton and McDonald, two researchers on homosexual identity formation:

The decision to conceal the homosexual identity from significant others may be detrimental to psychological well-being. Is it possible to achieve an integrated personal identity or have authentic relationships while concealing fundamental aspects of the self?...In choosing to hide an essential part of the self, individuals are left with a gnawing feeling that they are really valued for what others expect them to be rather than for who they really are (Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988, 90-91).

Yet, at the same time, Riera (2003) makes an interesting point regarding those lesbians who decide to come out and the new consequences they would have to face. She explains that on one hand, when lesbians have not come out to the larger community, they experience a sense of entrapment within themselves and their freedom to express their identity and feelings. On the other hand, she contends that coming out of this private space does not necessarily mean they are entering into a new space free of judgments, discrimination, and limits. Being out of the closet, or as

some call it “coming ‘out of the coffin’ of silence and fear into the light of day” (Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988, 86), represents another problem. Lesbians have to confront a power system which uses a binary model that imposes a clear separation of sexual relationships: heterosexual relationships are legitimate and socially approved, while homosexual relationships are considered deviant and are socially disapproved. As a result, lesbians may find themselves in the need to constantly explain and defend their identity as lesbians (Loulan 1984). As Butler quotes: “Hence, being ‘out’ must produce the closet again and again in order to maintain itself as ‘out’” (Riera 2003, 39).

***MYTHS AND BELIEFS OF HISPANICS
ABOUT GENDER ROLES, SEXUALITY, AND HOMOSEXUALITY***

Gender and sexuality are aspects of the Hispanic culture in which there still exists a double standard favoring men over women (Craske 2003). Gender sex roles are clearly defined and delineated, and the expression of sexuality has been and continues to be generally regulated by men and shaped by men (Castillo 1991). In addition, the Hispanic culture is patriarchal and thus, it places less value on being a woman than being a man (Craske 2003). Throughout the years the expression of female sexuality has been suppressed, denied, controlled, and at times – muted (Burch 1987; Craske 2003).

It is not uncommon to still find Hispanic women who have not been properly educated about menstruation. Consequently, this natural phenomenon has been perceived with shame (Castillo 1991). Further, women are expected to lack knowledge about sexual matters (Greene 1994). Moreover, as growing young females, most Hispanic women are indoctrinated to interpret their sexual desire as something sinful and something that should be hidden (Castillo 1991). As such, views on women's sexuality have carried much judgment.

Hispanics hold decency and morality as being achieved exclusively through legitimate marriages; and sexual enjoyment is expected to be reserved for men (Craske 2003). 'Decent women' have learned not to enjoy sex, and to just to have legitimate sex without pleasure, for reproductive purposes only. Moreover, a proper woman, or a 'good' woman, is "encouraged to sacrifice and devote her entire life to her husband. She must renounce her wishes and desires in order that her husband may be able to

perceive himself as superior” (Luna-Lawn 1993, 136). “In our culture (Hispanic), women hide the emergence of their sexual interest. In fact, it is difficult for women to even recognize their own sexual desire” (Blasco 1993, 91).

There has been an emergence in the Hispanic culture of studies in psychology and sexology starting in the late nineteenth century and thereafter. These studies have enabled female sexuality to come to light and have taken a more positive stance (Craske 2003). In addition, the feminist movement has contributed to changes in the views of female sexuality. The following are some important examples of the feminist movement’s influence on the Hispanic culture. In 1919, Cecilia Grierson, the first female doctor in Argentina, founded the First Feminist Party. Later in March 1936, Victoria Ocampo, Maria Rosa Oliver, and Susana Larguia founded the Argentine Women’s Union. Months later, Ocampo who was considered one of the most influential writers and icons of those times, wrote *Woman and Her Expression* arguing for gender equality (Andre 2003). Women’s sexual liberation has been, and continues to be, a feminist ideal. The women’s movement “has produced an exciting, innovative, and articulate defense of sexual pleasure and erotic justice” (Rubin 1993, 29).

Although Hispanic women’s sexuality has experienced some change over the years, Hispanic women remain rather subservient to men’s desires and interests as a cultural imperative. For instance, Hidalgo and Christensen (1976-77) contend that in the Puerto Rican culture, *machismo* and *virginity* are strongly valued and emphasized. It is accepted, and even encouraged, for men to be the aggressors when it comes to

sexual behaviors and to fully enjoy sex. In many Hispanic countries, men's pre-marital and extramarital sexual encounters are passively accepted. However, pre-marital and extramarital sex is strongly condemned for women and is considered a sin (Ferguson 1991). There is usually one word used to describe them – *putas* (whores). Women are expected to be passive when it comes to sexual behaviors; to serve and to please their husbands when having sex; and to not enjoy sex (Ferguson 1991; Blasco 1993; Craske 2003).

A 'proper woman' or a woman who is a 'mother', is not allowed to enjoy sex or to express her sexuality without being highly criticized and ridiculed (Blasco 1993). Women are also expected to reject sexual advances from men and remain virgins until marriage – although they need to maintain a coquettish posture. In addition, if women work outside of the home, they are expected to place very strong value and dedication to their family and are fully expected to fulfill the proper role of motherhood (Hidalgo and Christensen 1976-77). As a result, "women have long resisted the gender hierarchies imposed upon them and have struggled to become subjects of rights on the same terms as men" (Craske 2003, 201). When there seems to be resistance to this dominant concept, or when this concept is questioned, gender and sexuality are seen as indecent, usually generating much discord among the members of the culture. Consequently, men and women may subtly challenge these positions by playing with the stereotypes or by struggling to balance conformity (Craske 2003).

To further highlight the gender differences within the Hispanic culture, Romo-Carmona (1994) explains that Hispanic women learn about their traditional,

marginalized existence at home, and at an early age. For instance, as adolescents, boys are encouraged to date as many girls as possible; as opposed to girls, who are thought that dating too many boys is construed as being a 'bad girl'. As a result, women learn to take on a rather submissive and passive role; and men, a more active and aggressive role in order to fit the stereotype of being the more dominant gender within society. Even as adults, women are expected to not have too much knowledge about sex and remain rather naïve to the subject; whereas men are expected to be experienced and well versed (Greene 1994). This causes women to experience a high level of discrimination from the larger society, which perceives sexuality from a heterosexist and sexist frame of reference (Espin 1987; Craske 2003).

Craske (2003) explains that it is difficult to separate the notions of gender and sexuality. She argues that the weight of these notions are mediated by the concepts of *machismo* and *marianismo*. These opposing concepts are value laden descriptors. This duality is perpetuated among Hispanics and offers them the parameters within which individuals understand, and consequently behave in accordance with their gender and sexuality. One example is men's negative practices of infidelity and heavy drinking. Such behaviors in men are not condemned by the Hispanic culture. To the contrary, in many Hispanic countries, these behaviors are perceived as markers for male honor and masculinity. However, women's unfaithfulness and heavy drinking is not only condemned, it is harshly criticized (Craske 2003). Ferguson (1991), based on her studies and interviews in Nicaragua, found male violence against women to be a culturally acceptable behavior. This behavior is perceived to be "part of the male

prerogative for controlling men's sexual property – women ” (Ferguson 1991, 81).

The *machismo* and *marianismo* act as stereotypes by which men should be active and dominant and women should be passive and submissive. As such, men can have uncontrollable sexual urges. Although men should be faithful, they are not to be blamed or accountable for infidelity. When men are unfaithful, it is said that they were seduced by a woman without scruples. It is interesting to understand how the Hispanic culture offsets this dominant idea with ideals of “good men as loving fathers and providers” (Craske 2003, 203).

To further emphasize differences in gender roles regarding infidelity or extradyadic relationships, Tibbetts (2001) briefly comments on a cross-cultural study by Penn, Hernandez, and Bermudez conducted in 1997. This study focused on the influence of ethnicity on gender expectations of men and women with regard to monogamous behavior. They found that African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans deemed extradyadic relationships as more acceptable for men than for women (Tibbetts 2001).

The Hispanic culture also places great value in *la familia* (the family). The family includes both the nuclear and extended family systems (Morales 1990). The family is highly regarded and is considered to be the primary source of support and well-being for its members, while fostering a strong sense of interdependence among family members. In other words, the Hispanic family “is the emotional bond for the conscious self and personal psychology” (Morales 1990, 233). In addition to this close bond, the family (as an entity), places heavy emphasis on well established

gender roles (Greene 1994). Women are expected to grow up submissive, devoted, and respectful to their parents and elders. Women are expected to live at home with their parents until marriage, and they are raised to be helpful to their mothers (Espin 1984; 1987; Greene 1994). These expectations are to be honored under all circumstances. If these expectations are not met, they may be construed as a sign of rebellion. “Independence is discouraged, and we learn that women who think for themselves are branded as *putas* (whores) or *marimachas* (tomboyish)” (Romo-Carmona 1994, 16). Note: although the term *marimacha* does not explicitly mean lesbian, being a lesbian is inferred in its use and meaning. The English language lacks the severely critical charge that the Spanish word entails (La Fountain-Stokes 2003).

Furthermore, many Hispanic families hold traditional values rooted and reinforced within their religious beliefs. As such, heterosexuality and marriage are assumed and expected of all the members of the family in order to carry on the name, the honor, and the continuity of the traditional family system (Morales 1990). Moreover, the Hispanic culture has viewed femininity with great emphasis on marriage and motherhood. Consequently, women’s sexuality has been marginalized and their desire and passions have been under minded. This is largely due as the result of the strong influence of Catholicism, which places an emphasis on the figure of the Virgin Mary, hence the term *Marianismo*. As a result, women’s sexuality is expected to be inactive (Craske 2003).

The powerful combination of strict religious beliefs; traditional and conventional views and perceptions; and highly structured expectations on women, have assigned

two classical roles to Hispanic women that may be traceable to the roots of all myths and beliefs throughout history: On the one hand, Hispanic women are expected to be “virgin/mother/nature. Or, on the other hand, whore/witch/mystic” (Castillo 1993, 147). This disadvantaged and oppressed position of women’s gender and sexuality has driven women across Latin America to become involved in active political movements in recent years. These movements have empowered women to become more liberated in their identity and their positions within the workforce. Although these changes have favored women on these issues, the gender double-standard continues to present barriers for women to freely express their sexuality (Craske 2003).

Perception of homosexuality is an interesting feature of Hispanic culture. Latin America underwent a sex regulation period during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This regulation brought about many changes. Homosexuality was linked with criminality and deviant sexual behavior (Craske 2003). In Mexico, for example, it was believed that criminals serving time in jails had distinct traits that included innate homosexual tendencies. Criminals constituted a threat to other inmates, as homosexuality was seen as contagious. An inmate could become homosexual simply by association. Criminologists heavily stigmatized those effeminate homosexuals known as *los jotos* (Craske 2003).

This stigmatization brought about distinctions in gender behavior as well. Effeminate homosexuals took on a more womanly role and were constantly harassed and mocked by those homosexuals who behaved more manly and took on the active

role known as the *macho* (Buffington 1997). In addition to these legal and medical assumptions, there were also health movements claiming that gay men were mentally ill and thus, the medical community offered *cures* for the *ill* (Buffington 1997; Craske 2003).

The Hispanic culture's definition of homosexuality invites various interpretations, especially for men. Men who are 'active' (anal-insertive role) consider themselves heterosexual (Greene 1994; Craske 2003). For instance, Cuban men who work as male prostitutes, called *pingueros* -- engage in sexual activity with men; however, they do not compromise their masculinity and consider themselves heterosexual and machos as long as they take on the active role (Craske 2003). According to Ferguson (1991), Nicaraguans also subscribe to the view of 'active' and 'passive' roles in same-sex activity. *Pasivos*, or feminine-identified men, referred to as *cochon* (anal-receptive role), are considered gay. *Activos*, referred to as *machista* who engage in sex with men, are considered heterosexual because they take on a dominant, masculine role. Similarly, in Brazil, the man assuming the active role is referred to as *macho*, and is considered straight and is the one who *come* (eats); and the passive, in a feminine-role referred to as *bicha*, is considered gay and is the one who *recibe* (receives). Consequently, the *macho* is perceived as 'honorable'; while the *bicha* is considered shameful (Ferguson 1991). Another researcher argues that, "the more active, masculine role referred to as *buggaron* holds higher status than the role of the passive recipient, presumed to be more female-identified" (Greene 1994, 244).

As for lesbianism – the Hispanic culture has placed less interest in lesbians, and

lesbians tend to be rather invisible. This may be partially attributed to the lower gender status women are perceived to hold. It may also be attributed to the notion of *Marianismo*, a concept rooted in the Catholic doctrine. This ideology strongly emphasizes the image of women as the Virgin Mary, in which women only have maternal feelings and instincts, but no sex drive (Morales 1990; Ferguson 1991; Blasco 1993; Hogan and Hudson 1998). Additionally, the Hispanic culture has perceived lesbians as not only non-conventional, but as “socially marginal and even a little crazy” (Craske 2003, 213). Research suggests that it is not so much the actual same-sex behavior, but rather the acknowledgement to self and others of a gay or lesbian identity, that provokes feelings of shame and disapproval within the Hispanic culture (Ferguson 1991; Greene 1994).

Despite political changes and education of the general population, there is still much repression of homosexuals throughout a majority of Hispanic countries. Hispanics’ disapproval of homosexuality has profound effects, leaving gays and lesbians feeling forced to remain closeted to avoid ridicule and being outcast and rejected (Greene 1997). Studies suggest homophobia is very much a reality in Hispanic countries and the manifestation through harassment and even hate crimes is not uncommon. The stigma linked to homosexuality continues to project itself through the use of different slang words and derogatory labels (Craske 2003) such as *maricones*, *tortilleras*, *cachapera*, *marimacha*, *trola*, *arepera*, *jota*, *mariconas*, and *manflora* (DeLaTierra 1996), *rara*, *anormal*, *androgina*, *hombrecito*, *muchachito* (Tirado-White 1991).

HISPANIC LESBIANS

“Las lesbianas somos mujeres que amamos a mujeres. Las lesbianas no queremos ser varones. En la relacion lesbica, los mas poderosos afectos y emociones de dos mujeres se dirigen de una a otra y viceversa” (Fuskova and Marek 1994, 16).

Literature review suggests that Anglo-Americans and minority groups, such as Hispanics, differ in their definition and in their perception of heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality (Alonso and Koreck 1993). Hence, suggesting these definitions and perceptions are not universal. Men or women who may be construed as homosexuals by Anglos, may not necessarily be perceived as such by Hispanics, and vice-versa. The differences in perception further suggest that such distinctions are more socio-cultural and historical in nature (Alonso and Koreck 1993). For instance, a review of history reveals that the Moche people 200 B.C. (known today as people from Peru, S.A.), engaged in and celebrated both same-sex and opposite-sex eroticism in their highly refined pottery. Some Mayans and Aztecs also engaged in rich homoerotic myths, suggesting these practices were part of their religious beliefs (Hogan and Hudson 1998). As Freud would argue, “the objects of sexuality are socially produced, rather than biologically” (Ferguson 1991, 76). Thus, it is safe to argue that culture and history are powerful salencies in human development (Espin 1996).

A good example of this socio-cultural difference is highlighted by Espin (1987). She contends that there is a significant gender difference between men and women regarding socialization, sexuality, and closeness. She explains that emotional and physical closeness within the context of friendship is a well known feature among

Hispanics, particularly for women. For Hispanic women, the emotional and physical closeness known as *amigas intimas* (intimate female friends) is very common (Hidalgo and Christensen 1976-77). They spend much time together in various settings and no one questions such relationships, nor are these close friendships perceived as a violation of cultural mores or as that of being lesbian (Hidalgo and Christensen 1976-77; Greene 1994). In fact, among Hispanics, these relationships are encouraged and start at a very early age. “Closeness with female friends during adolescence may provide the means of protecting the virginity of young women by diminishing their contact with men” (Greene 1994, 244). However, the idea, existence, and acknowledgement of two women possibly having an intimate, romantic, and sexual relationship is restricted or even denied. As a matter of fact, many Hispanics would argue that lesbianism is just another bad habit acquired from the American culture (Espin 1987; 1996).

Religion powerfully affects peoples’ belief systems with regard to family life and life matters in general (Trujillo 1991; Clutter and Nieto 2000). Approximately 90% of the entire Spanish-speaking world is Catholic (Clutter and Nieto 2000). The Hispanic culture is strongly impacted by rigid religious beliefs embedded in the prominent Catholic doctrine, which emphasizes marriage and procreation as the ultimate expression of love between a man and a woman. Moreover, women have been taught that to have sex for any other reason than for procreation, is a sin and would “reduce them to the lowly status of beasts” (Castillo 1991, 29). Furthermore, Roman Catholic doctrine strongly opposes homosexuality. In July 1970, the Vatican issued a statement

reminding the faithful that “the Roman Catholic Church considers homosexuality a moral aberration” (Hogan and Hudson 1998, 642). For instance, Trujillo (1991) contends that Chicana lesbians who dare to confront their homosexuality, have to also confront their religious upbringing. In turn, this poses questions to their beliefs. At the same time, “this exacerbates a sense of alienation for Chicana lesbians who feel they cannot wholly participate in a traditional religion” (Trujillo 1991, 191). Having posited all these strong arguments, love and sex between two women is perceived as contrary to these basic commandments. Consequently, Hispanic lesbians experience a great sense of oppression and guilt as they feel they are committing a sin by going against such strong religious beliefs (Espin 1987; Castillo 1991; Greene 1994; Espin 1996).

A traditional, closely-bound family is a very strong characteristic of the Hispanic culture. *La familia* (the family) serves as the most important source of support and comfort for its members. Further, la familia often extends beyond the nuclear family (i.e, parents and children). It usually includes members of the extended family whom are considered equally important integrants of the family (Morales 1990; Greene 1994; Clutter and Nieto 2000). Also, there is great value placed on interdependence among family members, whom are expected to care for one another (Espin 1987; Greene 1994). Consequently, many Hispanic lesbians face a painful challenge when considering coming out to their families. “They may not be able to anticipate receiving support or affirmation from family or peers to engage in this exploratory process” (Parks, Hughes, and Mathews 2004, 244). In fact, many fear the family

would go in crisis upon disclosing a homosexual orientation (Morales 1990). As a result, many Hispanic lesbians opt to conceal their sexuality to their family members and lead half-lives of lies and omissions out of fear of rejection or fear of jeopardizing strong family ties (Espin 1987; 1996; Romo-Carmona 1994).

Many researchers have focused their studies in the coming out process of gays and lesbians (Cass 1979; Coleman 1981/82; Golden 1987; Troiden 1989). However, these studies have been conducted mostly with non-Hispanic populations. One important point to note is that, there is a tendency for Hispanic families to not discuss sexuality issues at all; and those families that may happen to be more open to this subject, hold heterosexuality as a goal for all members of the family (Morales 1990; Greene 1994). Several researchers highlight some of the specific issues ethnic minorities may face. In 1983, Morales proposed a model of identity formation for ethnic minority gays and lesbians which encompasses the dual minority status of this particular group. Accordingly, he centered his model on five different states, all of which are collectively characterized by a reduction of anxiety and tension: *State 1: Denial of Conflicts*—This state is characterized by a minimization of the reality of discrimination experienced by ethnic individuals. In other words, the individuals believe they are being treated in the same fashion as everyone else; and they perceive their sexual orientation is irrelevant, regardless of whether their sexual orientation is defined or not. *State 2: Bisexual versus Gay/Lesbian* – Many individuals opt to believe of themselves as bisexuals, as opposed to as gays or as lesbians. *State 3: Conflicts in Allegiances* – This state is characterized by an increased awareness of

being a member of both minority groups. In order to decrease anxiety and tension, individuals develop a need to keep these lifestyles separate. *State 4: Establishing Priorities in Allegiance* – During the state, the table turns...An identification as an ethnic minority intensifies. As a result, anger and tension may be experienced as they feel rejected by the gay community on the basis of their ethnicity. *State 5: Integrating the Various Communities* – During this final state, there is an increased need to integrate both of their lifestyles and develop a multi-cultural perspective. In sum, Morales proposes this model in ‘states’ as opposed to in ‘stages’ as he posits that individuals may find themselves at one or more states, rather than in a particular stage (Morales 1990).

Another explanation and conceptualization regarding the process of coming out tailored to better fit the Hispanic community is offered by Hidalgo (1994). According to her, *salir del closet* (coming out of the closet) is the act of identifying oneself as a lesbian. She argues that this is a process, not a one-time instance at a predetermined moment. She proposes that each phase brings about many personal decisions and actions to be set forth both personally and publicly. She refers to the first phase as *preludio* (prelude). This phase represents the first time one realizes that one is different – that one feels an emotional and physical attraction toward someone of the same sex. This phase brings about much confusion due to the lack of information and the overall heterosexual attitude of everyone else. She also postulates this phase usually arises during pre-adolescence or during adolescence. Due to social pressure, there is much denial during this phase. Basically, one usually ‘closes the door’ to the

possibility of being lesbian. The second phase she calls *reconocimiento* (recognition). At this point, the woman begins to express all of those feelings and emotions previously felt. However, it is at this time that she begins to question how being a lesbian would affect those around her, i.e. her families, friends, etc. In addition, she begins to wonder what the reactions of others would be like. And mostly, she begins to wonder if she is the only person having these feelings. Hidalgo refers to the third phase as *pertenecer al ambiente* (belonging to the environment). This phase represents a constant search for places where other gays and/or lesbians come together so that one feels free to express feelings and emotions. Unfortunately, most of the time these places are gay bars where there is not much room to get to meet and establish real friendships or relationships with other *companeras* (lesbians). As she posits: “the refuge in that ‘social club’ sometimes serves as anesthetic which consoles us for the moment and allows us to grow politically” (Hidalgo 1994, 63). Many times, this phase represents living a double-life: One in the closet with those around her to protect them and to protect herself. The other, the lesbian life with those in a bar and with those few other gay and lesbian friends. The fourth phase she calls *liberacion y sobrevivencia* (liberation and survival). During this phase, there is a realization that the difficulties encountered are not directly caused by homosexual identity, in as much as they are embedded in the homophobic attitudes of the larger society and the lesbians’ internalization of the same. She claims that during this phase, one chooses how public the lesbian identity would be. However, she strongly argues that at this point, coming out of the closet is not determined by fear, embarrassment, or out of

need of being accepted. But rather, out of self-determination based on a conscious choice and feeling of well being, with self-respect and with goals clear and set (Hidalgo 1994).

Of equal importance regarding the coming out process of Hispanic lesbians is that offered by Alquijay (1997). She conducted a study of Latina lesbians and the relationships between socioeconomic status, self-esteem, acculturation and lesbian identity formation. She found socioeconomic status (SES), to include the variables of: occupation level, education level, and income level, to be closely tied to the subjects' self-esteem. Accordingly, the researcher found that the higher the occupational status and the educational level of the respondents, the stronger the lesbian identification. However, income level did not significantly correlate with homosexual identity. Alquijay (1997) attributed this interesting finding to the probability that "for Latina lesbians, a higher status job, which has been linked with higher job satisfaction, may provide psychological, social, and material resources that facilitate homosexual identity development" (256); which in turn, may translate into a higher sense of self-confidence. Further, a higher level of education may represent an important tool of knowledge and awareness for the respondents to progress from the confusion and turmoil of the first two stages of homosexual identity formation postulated by Cass, 1979. Whereas the income level was not a predictor, could be attributed to the subjects' awareness that "their incomes are not a fair representation of the professional worth" (Alquijay 1997, 257). Regarding the self-esteem domain, the study suggested a lack of universal concept for such domain. In other words, what may be regarded as

valued for a strong and high self-esteem (i.e, individuality and independence) for a particular culture may not be regarded as so in a different culture. In the Hispanic culture where interdependence is highly valued, individuals' concepts of self and self-esteem may be intertwined and may take on different meanings and interpretations. Lastly regarding the level of acculturation, the researcher postulated that both processes: acculturation and lesbian identity formation are equally essential for an individual to claim group membership. As such, her study revealed that those respondents, who were less acculturated, were also more traditional regarding their views and attitudes toward homosexuality. As she concludes: "It is generally assumed that individuals who are less acculturated into U.S. mainstream society have more negative views toward homosexuality" (Alquijay 1997, 259).

Regardless of which model is attempted, the truth remains that the process of breaking the silence and coming out is not an easy task for Hispanic lesbians. Many feelings may be experienced simultaneously -- fear and pain about coming out; and yet, a sense of joy and affirmation. Hispanic lesbians find themselves in a situation where they have to weigh the benefits of remaining silent versus saving others from the shock and pain, including their own (Morales 1990; Romo-Carmona 1994). "Declaring a gay or lesbian sexual orientation, may be experienced as an act of treason against the culture and family" (Greene 1994, 245). Yet, some Hispanic lesbians may feel that they should be truthful and sincere, especially with their families, and opt to come out to them. If they choose to come out to their families, Hispanic lesbians are usually not disowned or thrown out of the family upon their revelation (Romo-

Carmona 1994), but they are usually viewed with embarrassment. As Dr. Gabriel Jure, an Argentinean psychoanalyst states, “they still consider a homosexual child a personal affront” (Love 2000, 2).

Hidalgo and Christensen (1976-77) studied the process of Puerto Rican lesbians’ coming out experiences and the reactions from their families of origin. According to this study, the level of family acceptance and tolerance of lesbians’ coming out was correlated with the overall family dynamic and relationship quality prior to the disclosure. Those families with strong ties and understanding within its members, demonstrated greater acceptance and tolerance of lesbian members; while those families characterized by hostility among its members, perceived lesbianism within the family as another reason for arguments, hostility, and rejection. It is noteworthy to mention that in this study, 90% of the sample indicated at the time that “Puerto Rican culture makes it very difficult for gays to come out without experiencing serious consequences” (Hidalgo and Christensen 1976-77, 116).

Romo-Carmona (1994) also claims that Hispanic families vary in their reactions to their lesbian members’ coming out. She explains that at times, their lesbian members are treated with subtle silence within their families. As Hidalgo and Christensen (1976-77) would say, “with silent tolerance” (115). Overall, if members are aware or suspect a lesbian family member, it will most likely not be acknowledged or discussed. On the contrary, it would be ignored, disguised, or denied (Espin 1987; Morales 1990; Greene 1994; Romo-Carmona 1994). Espin (1987) gives an example of how lesbianism could possibly be disguised. She contends that belonging to the

Hispanic community is another important feature of Hispanic culture, and interestingly intertwined with family. Hispanic lesbians and their families tend to disguise or to cover up lesbianism, in fear of being rejected, isolated, or bringing embarrassment and shame to the family. Typical disguises include saying: “she is too intelligent to marry any man” or “too dedicated to her work to bother with dating, marriage or motherhood” (Espin 1987, 40). Nevertheless, Hispanic lesbians often find themselves living double lives and experiencing much oppression and pressure to conform. The strict societal attitudes toward sexual expression often lead Hispanic lesbians to not declare, or at times, to negate their love for other women as a way of life (Castillo 1991).

Espin (1987) emphasizes the importance of family and community support for Hispanic lesbians living in the United States. She makes a crucial point regarding Hispanic lesbians and how their identity as Hispanics intertwines with their identity as lesbians, particularly if they are going to make a choice to reveal their sexuality to their community. As previously discussed, revealing their sexuality to the community, would most likely lead to experiencing shame and guilt due to the repercussions brought upon their families. Thus, coming out is very painful for Hispanic lesbians as the fear of rejection from the family and from the community is paramount (Trujillo 1991). Many Hispanic lesbians living in the United States prefer to come out to other groups or networks, where they would feel less stigmatized. However, this choice represents an additional source of emotional turmoil for Hispanic lesbians according to Hortensia Amaro, as cited in Espin (1987). Amaro states:

Reliance on alternative support groups outside the Hispanic community would not occur without a cost. Loss of contact with the ethnic community and culture will mean lack of support for their identity as a Hispanic. On the other hand, staying within the Hispanic community and not 'coming out' will represent a denial of the identity associated with sexuality and intimate love relationships (Espin 1987, 41).

Romo-Carmona (1994) agrees that, for Hispanic lesbians who live in the United States, it is crucial to be able to identify as both Hispanic and lesbian. However, Hispanic lesbians may experience dual estrangement from the larger heterosexual society, and from the dominant non-Hispanic culture (DeLaTierra 1996). "When immigrants cross borders, they also cross emotional and behavioral boundaries" (Espin 1997, 191). Morales (1990) agrees, as he explains that feelings of isolation and depression may be accentuated as Hispanic lesbians live as a minority within another minority group. Parks, Hughes, and Mathews (2004) explain that "women who come to identify as lesbians, and who are members of a racial/ethnic minority, must confront the norms and expectations of both the majority and minority cultures within which they live" (241). This causes Hispanic lesbians to have a common special need to unify and share the double experience of "being the 'other' in this society" (DeLaTierra 1996, 226). Morales (1990) agrees, and adds a third dimension. He asserts that Hispanic lesbians living in the United States live "within three rigidly defined and strongly independent communities: the gay and lesbian community; the ethnic minority community; and the society at large" (219).

In sum, Hispanic lesbians need to be able to form a close community as Hispanics, and to develop a sense of belonging in order to confront and survive the various forms of discrimination from the larger non-Hispanic, heterosexual society. Romo-Carmona

(1994) also concurs that it is increasingly difficult and painful for Hispanic lesbians to have to repress their lesbian selves in order to maintain the love and support of their families (Romo-Carmona 1994). As she defends:

Coming out means that we stake out our ground, and we claim that territory for ourselves both as Latinas and as lesbians, whole persons who live and work in the context of a community...But the women we really are can only live if we break the secret (Romo-Carmona 1995, 91).

Espin (1996) also agrees that coming out is particularly difficult for Hispanic lesbians. In her article, she relates the process of coming out with crossing borders and immigration. On one hand, Hispanic lesbians do not actually leave their countries of origin. They continue to experience a sense of migration and acculturation to new norms and expectations of their roles and their relationships, in addition to a sense of loss within the context of a heterosexual society. As she states: “the process of coming out also demands a rewriting of the life story and, almost always, a migration to another cultural context even though the person may not actually move” (Espin 1996, 101). On the other hand, to complicate matters, those lesbians who actually do migrate to another country, need to transition and deal with the vicissitudes of the acculturation process and its associated issues first; even though some may have decided to immigrate “trying to escape the constraints imposed by the home society on her lesbianism” (Espin 1997, 192).

Still, as previously argued, crossing borders and immigrating requires crossing emotional and behavioral boundaries (Espin 1997). In addition, immigrant lesbians have to adjust to their new status and belongingness as ‘minority persons’. Immigrant lesbians, just as any other immigrant, have to deal with issues related to separation

from their homeland and the process of loss and mourning that it brings (Espin 1987; 1997; Greene 1994). Also, immigrant lesbians need to deal with the transition associated with their sexual identity and its acceptance or rejection within the host society. Hence, Hispanic lesbians find themselves caught between racism and prejudice of the dominant society, in addition to the sexism and heterosexism of a dominant heterosexual society (Morales 1990; Espin 1996; Parks, Hughes, and Mathews 2004). After all, “racism is not gone, and neither is homophobia” (Romo-Carmona 1995, 87). Consequently, Hispanic lesbians “because they are immigrants and lesbians, they have to be polycultural in the host society and among their own people” (Espin 1997, 193).

Morales (1990) mentions the work of Garay in 1978, in which he proposes a model of how Hispanic families may respond and react to the coming out process and identification as a homosexual of a family member. The first stage of the model is *Denial*, which is the initial reaction of the family in attempts to avoid and /or deny the emotional content of the situation. The second stage is *Reproach*, which is characterized by anger, reciprocal accusations, and sometimes a form of aggression. The third stage is *Compromise*. During this stage, there are questions asked about the cause of the homosexual behavior and there is an attempt to point out someone to be at ‘fault’. The fourth and last stage is *Acceptance*. At this point, the family members have come to terms with the reality, and usually the homosexual and his or her primary partner are incorporated into the family unit. Garay notes however, that this process tends to be rather long, and not to be generalized to every Hispanic family.

Consideration of particular circumstances must be accounted for (Morales 1990, 234).

Some of the historical and chronological development of Hispanic/Latino gay and lesbians' long process of repression and punishment, and later efforts to gain equal rights, respect, and to find support include: In 1256 in Spain, Alfonso X of Castile approved a civil law code to make 'sins against nature' including sodomy, capital crimes. The punishment for these crimes was castration followed by stoning to death. In 1497, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella amended the sodomy law, and those guilty of such crime would be burned and their properties confiscated, instead of being castrated and stoned to death. In 1513 Spanish conquistador Vasco Nunez de Balboa discovered a community of cross-dressers and it is believed he fed at least forty of them to his dogs. It is believed that by 1822, Spain's new criminal code did not include sodomy (Hogan and Hudson 1998). On a positive note, in November 1976, Spain entered a period of political change and passed the Law of Political Reform. This law represented freedom for homosexuals' expression and removal of their repression (Hernandez 2003). Further, in 1978 Spain declared all people equal and banished the discrimination against any individual for reasons of birth, race, religion or sexuality. Hence, this new constitution opened the doors to the Spanish feminist movement, which later would serve as model for other countries (Riera 2003).

While in Latin America, the Mexican Aztecs (what today is known as Mexico) in 1425, passed laws mandating marriages and punishment by death both male and female same-sex acts. In c. 1475 in Peru, Inca emperor Capac Yupanqui persecuted men who had sex with other men, burning them alive in public squares. In Brazil, in

1646, the Portuguese colonial authorities extended laws prohibiting same-sex relations. The punishment for these relations was also burning at the stake. In Cuba during the 60's, the police arrested prostitutes, pimps, and thousand of gay men and lesbians, as part of a wide campaign called *Operacion P* against people whom Fidel Castro believed were inimical to the revolution (Hogan and Hudson 1998). The researchers explain that this form of punitive oppression has changed. They explain that today, Cuban homosexuals are more constrained by economic factors and hardship, than by official actions. They are able to have a range of access to crowded places such as plays and *fiestas* (parties), but affording an apartment or a house to live together is virtually impossible. On a positive note, however, they also claim that there is a general tolerance for nonconformity and for homosexuals, making Cuba perhaps, one of the safest Latin American countries. It experiences very few incidences, if any, of hate crimes (Hogan and Hudson 1998). In Chile 1974, the military headed by Augusto Pinochet, arrested gay and lesbian activists as part of its campaign against leftists. In Argentina, in 1976, during a brutal dictatorship, approximately 400 gay men were kidnapped, tortured, and killed by military commandos. In Cuba, during 1980, Fidel Castro allowed more than 100,000 people leave from the port of Mariel. Among them were approximately 25,000 gay men seeking asylum from persecution. In Peru, in 1986, there were various violent raids on lesbian bars resulting in beatings and rapes. In 1993, President Alberto Fujimori had 117 officials fired on the grounds of suspected homosexuality (Hogan and Hudson 1998).

On a positive note, the first female openly gay legislator in Latin America was Patricia Jimenez. She was elected to the Mexican congress in 1977 for the PRD (Partido de la Revolucion Democratica / Party of the Democratic Revolution). Other homosexuals – to include gay and lesbians holding prestigious positions, kept their sexuality hidden (Craske 2003). A study by Hidalgo and Christensen (1976-77), indicated that twelve prominent female figures in the Puerto Rican community felt it too great a risk of ‘being found out’ if they expressed their opinion and participated in the study. They reported that their “leadership position in the Puerto Rican community would be jeopardized if their sexual orientation and preference were discovered” (Hidalgo and Christensen 1976-77, 116). In February 1979, a debate held at the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil, concluded with the formation of the first gay and lesbian organization, *Somos* (We Are).

During the mid 1980’s – early 1990’s, mostly due to government restrictions in Cuba, official repression against gays and lesbians dramatically decreased. One sign of significant improvement was the formation of the Gay and Lesbian Association of Cuba in 1994 and its annual celebration thereafter. In Cuernavaca, Mexico, during 1987, the first Latin American Lesbian Conference took place and included approximately 250 participants from countries of Central and South America (Hogan and Hudson 1998). As of 2000, in Ecuador, South America, there exists a constitutional law to protect against sexual discrimination. In Brazil, homosexual couples gained legal rights to inheritance and medical care. In Colombia, homosexual couples can legalize their union before a public notary (Love 2000).

In San Francisco, California, in 1961, drag queen Jose Sarria ran for city supervisor, making him the first openly Hispanic gay person to run for public office in the United States (Hogan and Hudson 1998). After the Stonewall riots in 1969, Latin gay and lesbian organizations began to emerge: *El Comite de Orgullo Homosexual Latinoamericano* in New York City; *Gay Latino Alliance* in San Francisco; and *Greater Liberated Chicanos* in Los Angeles (DeLaTierra 1996). In Boston and in Los Angeles during the early 1980's, there were some Latina lesbian organizations formed mostly due to their active participation in the civil right movements of the 1960's and 1970's. Organizations such as *Lesbianas Unidas* (United Lesbians) was founded in Los Angeles in 1980. *LLEGO* (National Latino/a Lesbian and Gay Association) was formed in 1987. In 1986, *Las Buenas Amigas* (The Good Friends) was formed in New York, and it served to connect other Hispanic lesbians from Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Miami, Houston, Dallas, Hartford, and Boston. In addition, *Las Buenas Amigas* also served to assist the first *Lesbian Encuentro* in Mexico in 1987, and subsequently in 1990 in San Jose, Costa Rica and in Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico in 1992. Since then, each year there are Latina lesbians and gays represented in the *Lesbian and Gay Pride March* in New York; the *Puerto Rican Parade*; the *Comite Homosexual Latino Americano (CHOLA)*, to name a few (Romo-Carmona 1995; Hogan and Hudson 1998). More recently, throughout the 1990's, different events and organizations have continued to emerged in efforts to unite Hispanic lesbians living in the United States. Some of these organizations and events include: *Las Salamandras de Ambiente* in Miami; *Lesbianas Latinas de Tucson* in Tucson; *Lesbianas Latinas de*

Dallas in Dallas; and *Ellas en Accion* in San Francisco (DeLaTierra 1996).

CHARACTERISTICS AND DYNAMICS OF LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS

“Love can be among the most intense of human emotions, and is certainly one of the most sought after” (Sternberg and Grajek 1984, 312).

Love, a satisfying sex life, intimacy, commitment, happiness, and financial stability have been depicted as core ingredients of healthy, enduring romantic relationships (Sternberg and Grajek 1984; Jordan and Deluty 2000). A study conducted by sociologist Whyte in 1990 with heterosexual couples indicated that similarities in personality, habits, interests, values, enjoyment of leisure activities, and a fair amount of mutual friends, were strong predictors of marital stability (Fisher 1992).

Lesbians look for these same characteristics in their romantic relationships (Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988; Kurdek 1991; 1997; Martin and Lyon 1991; Beals, Impett, and Peplau 2002). However, for lesbian couples it is not as easy as it sounds, or perhaps, not as easy as it may be for heterosexual couples. The union of a man and a woman is referred to by society as a marriage. However, there is no specific term used to refer to a homosexual couple's relationship. Dr. Kenneth Berc, a Harvard psychiatrist states: “Part of the problem is that there is no word for a gay couple's relationship. A culture which has no word for something, usually arrived at that point because there was no value for that concept” (Mendola 1980, 162).

As presented in this study, lesbians tend to be non-existent and invisible (Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988; Hoagland 1988). So, how can two invisible women become visible to one another? What models of intimacy can they follow for building

and maintaining their relationships? Our society is organized around heterosexual norms – from TV shows to magazine ads, they all display heterosexual images and role models. “Everything from new cars to pizza, is advertised by sexy men and women who fall in love with one another right in front of us” (Bluemfeld and Raymond 1988, 85). Since there are no prototype models of lesbian relationships to follow, they constantly need to develop innovative ways to form, as well as to maintain, their relationships and to solve any problems or issues within their relationships (Loulan 1984; Zevy and Cavallaro 1987; Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988). Furthermore, their individual perceptions, values, and beliefs are the determinants of what lesbians consider typical or normal within their relationships (Mendola 1980).

Much of the literature reviewed suggests that women’s self-image and relational patterns are strongly influenced by socialization (Toder 1979). Therefore, it is logical to assume that two women in a lesbian relationship, do not escape these major themes and thus, the dynamics and characteristics of their relationship will inevitably be influenced by socialization (Vargo 1987). Attempting to adhere to prescribed gender roles may represent a problem in lesbian relationships and impact their self-image (Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988; Loulan 1996). Lesbians are already distancing from gender role appropriateness, being that their sexual preference is for other women. “Their positive self-image cannot come only from gender appropriateness...it has to involve a positive valuing of gender inappropriateness if they are to value their lesbianism” (Vargo 1987, 163). At times, the gender role imposed by society may

question their mere existence. “We have been brought up to be heterosexual women, but because we are not, we question whether we belong in our gender” (Loulan 1996, 85).

Women’s passive training as non-initiators may effect their ability to relate to other women. Lesbians may lack the simple basic skills to ask another on a date. “We frequently struggle with what is appropriate behavior for a woman who loves women” (Loulan 1984, 8). This may lead to lesbians’ rejecting or reevaluating both male and female stereotypic gender roles (Vargo 1987; Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988; Means-Christensen 2003). Lesbians may be more likely to experience role conflict, as they attempt to develop new patterns of emotional expressiveness, conflict resolution, or balance of power within their own relationships (Vargo 1987; Means-Christensen 2003). The Mendola Report indicated that up to 71% of lesbian participants reported having problems in their relationships with regard to role identification (Mendola 1980). In addition, Eldridge and Gilbert (1990) reported role conflict was found as one of the factors which negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction.

It is argued that gay and lesbian couples share similar challenges and difficulties in their relationships, to those of heterosexual couples (Mendola 1980; Kurdek 1991; 1997; Schwartz and Rutter 2000; Means-Christensen 2003). For instance, there is no heterosexual exclusivity to dealing with defining roles and boundaries; resolving conflicts and decision making (Beals and Peplau 2001); issues with emotional and sexual intimacy; and problems related to money. Further, complaints about disagreements or discovery of extra dyadic relationships are present in both

heterosexual and homosexual couples. Mendola (1980) quotes Dr. Berc again: “The causes for the problem are often the same for straight and gay couples. One partner is bored with the other, or one partner feels his or her esteem has been lowered in the other partner’s eyes” (161). Lesbian couples, however, face an additional and unique concern – being discriminated against and stigmatized (Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988; Schwartz and Rutter 2000; Beals and Peplau 2001; Means-Christensen 2003). Lesbianism is perceived as a threat by the larger society, mainly due to the breaking of traditional gender rules – what Loulan (1996) refers to as “gender jail”. On the other hand, it is argued that at times, lesbian relationships have some advantages over heterosexual relationships (Mendola 1980). “There is the freedom of not being bound by marriage contracts and the rules and sex roles of heterosexual family life” (Zevy and Cavallaro 1987, 92). Lesbians appear to be more effective at communicating with each other. “They’ve had to learn to survive, to be more soul-searching” (Dr. Berc, as cited in Mendola 1980, 163).

Pretense and concealment of their love and desire from the larger heterosexual society can affect lesbians’ overall well-being and their relationships (Pearlman 1987; Donadello and Hill 1996). Various researchers have focused their studies on some of the characteristics, dynamics, and difficulties of lesbian relationships. They claim that social factors can account for difficulties in establishing and maintaining gay or lesbian relationships (Duffy and Rusbult 1985/1986; Nichols 1987a; Donadello and Hill 1996; Jordan and Deluty 2000; Means-Christensen 2003). Brown 1995, argues that “many of the difficulties faced by such couples have as their primary etiology the

oppressive social and interpersonal environments in which lesbians and gay men are required to operate” (Means-Christensen 2003, 10). The lack of societal approval and legitimization may not only affect their level of satisfaction in relationships, but also their level of commitment and longevity (Nichols 1987a). Scarcity of social support such as that of friends, family, or church enables the lesbian couple to terminate their relationship easier than if they had institutions or people supporting and validating their relationship as is the case with heterosexual couples (Duffy and Rusbult 1985/86).

The dynamics of sociocultural stressors, and the social pressure against lesbians, can take a toll on lesbians and negatively impact the satisfaction and longevity of their relationships (Schreurs and Buunk 1996; Means-Christensen 2003). Because of their sexual orientation, lesbians may be at risk for more stressful events including unemployment, hate crimes, housing difficulties, prejudice, and discrimination (Bell and Weinberg 1978; Vargo 1987; Morales 1990; Schwartz and Rutter 2000). Researchers on this topic refer to this additional stress as ‘minority stress’. So then, where are gays and lesbians most likely to find safety to reside, to form, and to maintain their romantic relationships? A study conducted using data from the 1990 U.S. census suggests that Boston has one the largest communities of cohabitating lesbian partners. San Francisco, New York, Houston, and Los Angeles were also found to have large homosexual (gay and lesbians) partnerings (Michael, Gagnon, Laumann, and Kolata 1994). Walther and Poston (2004) found a correlation of different variables: a high percentage rate of Republicans; a low unemployment rate;

the absence of sodomy laws; a naturally pleasant climate; a low rate of Southern Baptist membership. All these factors were associated with a large concentration of gays and lesbians residing in these cities. This indicates that these regions represent less minority stress for homosexuals. Larger cities appear to be more tolerant and supportive of homosexuals than small cities (Michael et al., 1994; Hill 1999); and living in cities with other homosexuals, represents easy access to established social networks of friendships and places where gays and lesbians can meet potential partners (Michael et al. 1994).

Lack of family support and acceptance appears to be of much distress to lesbian couples. According to Pearlman (1987) & Kurdek (1988), “few lesbians have the authentic acceptance and affirmation of their family of origin” (Pearlman 1987, 314). Rostosky (2004) conducted a research study focusing on homosexual couples’ perception of support (or lack of support) from their families of origin. The couples’ perception of its impact on their relationship and its effect regarding their level of commitment and satisfaction was also assessed. Rostosky used a human ecological theory as a model to formulate her research. This theory focuses on the interpersonal relationships of individuals. Specifically, it is the interaction with the family of origin, which is believed to be essential for the psychological and psychosocial well being of individuals to meet their personal needs. Based on interviews, some couples reported that some members of their families were supportive while others were not. Other couples reported perceiving ambivalence from their family members. Meaning, at times supportive, and yet rejecting as well. The overall finding of this researcher was

that lack of support from families was associated with much pain, anger, and hurt for both partners in the relationship.

Research suggests that negative feelings held between a lesbian and her family of origin not only impacts the quality of her relationship with respect to her family; but that it also affects and impacts the quality of her intimate relationship with her partner. The couples that report lack of support from families, also report experiencing much distress and perceived dissatisfaction with their relationships (Toder 1979; Kurdek 1988; Rostosky 2004). Others explain that lesbian relationships may come to an end because of problems within the couple, just like everyone else. However, unsupportive families who may have never approved of the relationship to begin with, can become additional stressors on the relationship and negatively affect the relationship quality (Kurdek 1988). This in turn, may lead to break ups and dissatisfaction (Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988; Schreurs and Bunnk 1996; Rich 2000; Means-Christensen 2003; Green 2004; Rostosky 2004). Consequently, many young or older lesbians find themselves with few remaining relatives and no dependents. Because of this, “self-reliance and ingenuity are required to take care of themselves and deal with loneliness” (Dunker 1987, 76). As Kurdek (1988) adds: “partners and friends, and not family members, are primary providers of support for gays and lesbians” (507).

On a similar note, Toder (1979); Donadello and Hill (1996) discuss that even holidays, which are supposed to be happy times for most people, can represent an additional stressor for the lesbian couple. Most everyone would agree that holidays

are times to share with family. Lesbians may also want to follow this tradition; but in addition, they may also want to celebrate with their partners. Consequently, lack of support or acceptance of a partner by the family of origin of the other partner, may result in much resentment and disappointment. Hill (1999) agrees with Rostosky (2004), that family support has a significant impact on the level of commitment and satisfaction felt by lesbians in their relationships. Hill (1999) conducted a small study with lesbians investigating the possible causes of fusion in their relationships. Based on her findings, she concluded that fusion appears to be a source of conflict in some lesbian relationships if there is resentment about isolation from the families of origin of one or both of the partners. This isolation from their families of origin causes the women in the couple to emotionally rely heavily on the relationship; which in turn, gives rise to pressure and conflict (Hill 1999). Due to the stress caused by the lack of social support, to include that of families of origin, it is safe to agree that “the function of social support as a potential enhancer of relationship quality and as a positive correlate of psychological adjustment appears robust” (Kurdek 1988, 509).

Jordan and Deluty (2000) propose another study stressing the importance of social support for the lesbian couple. They investigated the relationship between lesbians’ degree of disclosure of their sexual orientation to others, and its impact on the quality and sense of commitment of their relationship with their partners. Their study indicated those couples who received more social support from family and friends, reported higher levels of relationship satisfaction. Also, it demonstrated a positive correlation between those women who were more widely open about their sexual

orientation, and an overall greater degree of satisfaction in their romantic relationships. Interestingly, they also found that discrepancy among couples regarding disclosure of sexual orientation was negatively related to relationship satisfaction. To be specific, the greater the degree of discrepancy between a couple's levels of self-disclosure, the lower level of relationship satisfaction reported (Jordan and Deluty 2000). The researchers explained this latter finding by postulating that: on the one hand, the partner who is less open may feel threatened by the disclosure; and on the other hand, the partner who is more open may feel that the first is not committed to the relationship due to her lack of disclosure (Jordan and Deluty 2000).

It is argued that for the most part, disclosing about sexual orientation and freely expressing a homosexual relationship to others in general, is associated with healthier mental and emotional well being both for the individual and for the couple as a unit. However, Beals and Peplau (2001) conducted a study assessing the level of social involvement; disclosure of sexual orientation; and the quality of lesbian relationships. Their study revealed that although involvement in the gay and lesbian community was positively associated with the quality of lesbian relationships, specifically those couples with moderate levels of involvement were more satisfied than those who high or low involvement levels. They explained that a moderate amount of involvement allows the couple to interact and socialize with others safely; and to the contrary, low levels of involvement deprive the couple of social support and affirmation. High levels of involvement detracts the couple from spending needed quality time together alone. Regarding the degree of sexual orientation disclosure, they found that neither

one nor both partners' disclosure of their sexual orientation bear a significant influence on the quality of their relationship. Beal and Peplau (2001) attributed this finding to the often found mix consequences of disclosure. On the one hand, disclosing can increase social support and acceptance; but on the other hand, disclosing can lead to rejection, estrangement, and alienation from others. As is quoted a personal communication with L. D. Garnets in 1998: "the value of rational outness...being as out as possible, but as closeted as necessary" (Beals and Peplau 2001, 11).

Societal stigma has placed unfounded beliefs and myths on the sexual activities of homosexuals in general. Specifically referring to lesbians, people often think that they have to have sex in some particular way to be lesbians. "Nonsense! Lesbian sex is anything two lesbians do together" (Loulan 1984, 47). Based on this false assumption, it is not uncommon to hear statements such as "*what do they do in bed?*". Basically, what they do in bed is the same thing heterosexuals do in bed (Martin and Lyon 1991); the only difference is that these activities involved two same-sex partners and there is no penis involved. The absence of the penis is what makes it so mysterious to heterosexuals; and so, this sexual relationship becomes stigmatized and highly questioned (Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988; Martin and Lyon 1991). Further, "females' sexuality has been defined by male standards and heterosexual norms" (Nichols 1987b, 243). Consequently, when heterosexuals engage in different forms of sexual activity other than the missionary position, these activities are referred to as 'sexual variations' with no disgust. However, when homosexuals engage in different

sexual activities, these are viewed with disgust and labeled 'sexual deviations' (Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988).

In discussing lesbian sex and desire, Hoagland (1988) points out that lesbian attraction, and their desire for one another, takes on many forms. One form is that lesbian desire includes humor and joy. It involves attending to one another and interacting as part of bringing meaning to their existence. As opposed to the heterosexual culture's belief that lesbians are always sexual and overly sexual, studies such as that of Blumstein and Schwartz *American Couples* (1983), suggest that lesbian couples tend to have far less genital sex than any other type of couple (Blumstein and Schwartz 1983; Nichols 1987b; Blyth and Straker 1996). In their study, they argued that lesbians engage more in hugging and cuddling, as opposed to in cunnilingus or any other form of genital contact (Blumstein and Schwartz 1983). However, Bell and Weinberg (1978) concluded in their study that most of their lesbian respondents reported engaging in mutual masturbation, but also reported preferring cunnilingus. Also, Califia (1979) reported in her study that 67.5% of her respondents reported having reached orgasms during oral sex, and that said activity was most frequently preferred mainly to reach orgasm.

Our sexuality does not limit itself exclusively to genital contact. Different areas of our bodies are capable of receiving much stimulation and erotic sensations. Therefore, heterosexuals' and homosexuals' sexual activities can include both genital and non-genital focus (Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988). It is argued that much of lesbians' sexual activity involves mutual petting (Blumstein and Schwartz 1983; Blumenfeld

and Raymond 1988; Schwartz and Rutter 2000). Petting is defined as “making-out, and it involves kissing, touching, feeling, rubbing, and groping” (Schwartz and Rutter 2000, 93). “The physical exchange of energy involved in hugging, kissing, caressing, holding hands, or putting our arms around each other, can be very sexual” (Loulan 1984, 87). Some of the top higher percentages of sexual activities reported under the categories of ‘usual’, ‘frequent’, or ‘constant’ sexual practices of Loulan’s respondents included the following : 96% hug; 92% snuggle; 91% kiss; 90% hold body to body; 89% masturbate; 87% are naked with partner; 80% hold hands (Loulan 1987). Still, the larger heterosexual society’s perception of sexuality portrays desire and petting as exclusively leading to orgasm. Being that, what is considered foreplay or petting for most heterosexuals, may just be what constitutes the core activity of lesbian love making (Schwartz and Rutter 2000).

Loulan (1984) and Hoagland (1988) argue that, within the context of lesbians’ sexual intimacy, desire and sexual activities do not necessarily equate to orgasm. Loulan (1984) further states that our culture overrates orgasm, and even those women who reach orgasm, often find themselves tyrannized by this supposed goal to sex. In addition, sexuality portrays all sensuality as foreplay, as simply part of the process to reach orgasm. As a result, constantly worrying about reaching an orgasm diminishes the sexual experience of the encounter, and the pleasure that should be derived from it (Loulan 1984). Hence, this fixed mental goal and concept undermines lesbians’ sensual abilities, caresses, and the pleasure achieved when they swirl their genitals together (Loulan 1984; Hoagland 1988; Iasenza 2002). In fact, many lovers may go

through periods of time when they do not take each other to experience orgasms.

However, the intimate connection and the constant physical contact is present through long periods of cuddling and back rubs, which is associated with much arousal and pleasure (Loulan 1984; Hoagland 1988).

There are preconceived assumptions about the sexual activities among lesbians. Common questions such as “which one’s the man?” are frequently asked to lesbians, assuming that same-sex eroticism must mirror or follow traditional opposite-sex patterns of male (aggressive/active) – female (passive) sexual relations (Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988; Hogan and Hudson 1998). One of the biggest assumptions is that of an active and a passive partner (Malone 1998). Generally speaking, either partner can be psychologically active or passive, regardless of their role when it comes to sexual acts such as giving or receiving pleasure or penetration with a dildo, although this latter object is believed to be minimally used by lesbians. According to Califia (1979), her study indicated that 69% of her respondents had never used a dildo. It is argued that the use of a dildo is over fantasized by the general society, mainly by men, as they can not conceive of two women having pleasure in the absence of a penis (Martin and Lyon 1991). Essentially, most lesbian sex is characterized by mutual masturbation; cunnilingus; caressing; penetration using fingers or sex toys; and by tribadism (Bell and Weinberg 1978; Loulan 1984; Martin and Lyon 1991; Malone 1998; Bell 1999).

Many have argued that there seems to be a frequency of a phenomenon referred to as *lesbian bed-death* in lesbian relationships (Nichols 1987a, 1987b; Vargo 1987;

Green 2004). This term lacks clear a definition. Researchers claim that differences in sex drive or a drop in sex drive of one partner, could account for this phenomenon and act as a debilitating factor in some lesbian relationships (Green 2004). It is also argued that lesbians may also experience what is commonly referred to as 'the seven-year-itch' for heterosexuals. As so, one of the partners may become bored, disinterested emotionally and/or physically, or dissatisfied with the other after several years of being together (Toder 1979).

To further illustrate, the ground breaking study of Bell and Weinberg (1978) found that their lesbian participants were not having sex as often as assumed by the heterosexual community. According to Bell and Weinberg (1978), their data failed to support the assumption that homosexual women are "sex-ridden people who think constantly of sexual matters or consider sex the most important part of their lives" (115). One contributing factor for a drop in sexual frequency was that one of the partners faced changes in life that were physical or emotional in nature. This would impact the quality of the passion, intimacy, and even communication within the couple. The woman with the greater need and desire would feel frustrated and rejected by the partner; and the one with low desire would feel resentful and pressured by the partner (Toder 1996). As Green (2004) states: "lesbian couples tend to see sexual interest drop off sooner and more dramatically than either straight or gay male couples" (3); and this low desire or desire discrepancy is probably a common presenting problem of lesbians in therapy (Nichols 1987b; Toder 1996).

Nichols (1987a) points out that lesbian relationships usually begin as very

enjoyable and with ecstatic love making. Then, on the average of two to four years later, one of the partners may become sexually dissatisfied or uninterested in sex. This could account for the limerence period being over (Loulan 1987). Limerence is a term coined by psychologist Dorothy Tennov. Limerence means “the state of being in love – it involves mental activity...it is an interpretation of events, rather than the events themselves” (Tennov 1979, 16-18). Thus, a possible reason for lesbians to experience a lack of sex or a diminished interest in sex, may be that they tend to couple rather prematurely. Consequently, after the limerence period is over, the realization that the sex is not that great sets in. This may evoke feelings that they should not have coupled in the first place (Hall 1984; Nichols 1987a, 1987b).

Another position is that of Bell and Weinberg (1978). They express, “since lesbian relationships do not involve a male, whose self-esteem may often be based on the frequency of his sexual contacts, it may be that they are characterized by a much less pronounced emphasis on explicitly sexual contact”(72). It is common to find long-term lesbian couples who engage in plenty of hugging, kissing, caressing, “but not enough nitty-gritty sex” (Toder 1996, 74). Malone (1998) also agrees with the previous point regarding sexual activity in lesbian relationships. He argues that although lesbians enjoy sexual activity, they seem less ‘preoccupied’ with sexual frequency. Hall (1984) posits that bonding is the core ingredient that keeps lesbian relationships together after the limerence is over.

Loulan (1984); Nichols (1987a, 1987b); Toder (1996) provide explanations of lesbians’ sexual inhibitions. One argument is that, because women’s sexuality in

general is repressed within the larger patriarchal heterosexual society, lesbians may face even greater sexual inhibition. After all, their relationships are comprised of two women, and “lesbians are women first, and we have been socialized as heterosexual women for at least a portion of our lives” (Nichols 1987a, 123). Furthermore, the cultural message women have received is that sex between two women is dirty, immoral, and disgusting. This cultural message has profound effects on lesbians’ sexuality (Loulan 1984).

Another example of this societal repression is linked to the women’s socialization process, in which women are taught to ignore their sexual desires. As girl children, most of us are taught that exploring and discovering our sexuality is wrong and we are labeled as ‘bad girls’ when we try. “At puberty, girls are given information about their reproductive organs and menstruation, but rarely told about the clitoris. ” The unspoken message is still that female sexuality is bad” (Hite 1976, 472).

Consequently, women tend to play a less active role in initiating sex; wait to be approached by a partner; and may be less demanding to pressure their resistant partners. “As lesbians we are greatly affected by our training to be passive” (Loulan 1984, 8). The fact remains that lesbian relationships are comprised of two women struggling to fight their internalized homophobia and the negative societal messages about their sexuality (Loulan 1984). Although these arguments do not imply that lesbians are not interested in sex, they do postulate potential inhibitions in their sexual relations. Hence, suggesting lesbians may exhibit more sexual conflicts and fewer ways of expressing their sexual needs, in their attempts to avoid sexual acts that bring

about anxiety and guilt (Loulan 1984; Nichols 1987a, 1987b; Toder 1996).

On a very interesting note, Toder (1996) discusses sexual difficulties or what may be construed as sexual dysfunction in lesbian couples. She points to the other side of the spectrum of society which presents another problem for women's sexuality. That is...modern society. Throughout the last few decades, society's sexual message for women has dramatically changed. Now women are expected to be turned on all the time, be ready to have sex all the time, and reach orgasms in every sexual encounter regardless of the context of this encounter and regardless of the gender of the sexual partner. We all can agree that no one lives like this; but there are expectations, myths, and standards to live up to, which pressure women to conform. Therefore, "many women who previously might not have labeled themselves as having a sexual problem, now would" (Toder 1996, 71).

Loulan (1984) makes another point about the impact a 'sexist society' has on women. She claims that within a patriarchal, heterosexual society, men are the ones in charge of when and how women enjoy sex. "Men are supposed to be in control of our orgasms – when we have them, how we have them, and how often we have them. 'It is not surprising that we don't feel powerful about our sexual selves under these circumstances'" (Loulan 1984, 8). Having posited the aforementioned arguments, it is not uncommon for lesbians to lack the proper information about how to initiate, enjoy sex, and how to have a more fulfilling sex life (Loulan 1984). It is therefore also not uncommon for lesbians to experience diminished desire and as a result, engage in less sexual activity (Bell and Weinberg 1978; Loulan 1984; Nichols 1987a, 1987b; Toder

1996; Schwartz and Rutter 2000; Green 2004).

The drop in sexual frequency could also be accounted for by women's intrapsychic processes (Loulan 1984; 1987) and by their appraisals of their relationships. Loulan (1984) explains that, just as with everyone else, stress is a strong factor that affects sexual desire. It affects feelings and the quality of relationships. Feelings such as anxiety and depression can inhibit sexual expression. Also, Green (2004) points out that women's sexuality in general, is more complex and emotionally driven. As a result, a woman's sexual desire is intertwined with the quality of her relationship. Thus, if there is perceived dissatisfaction in the quality of the relationship, most likely sex between partners would be kept to a minimum, if existent at all (Loulan 1984; 1987; Nichols 1987a). This seems to have a boomerang affect on the overall relationship. According to Blumstein and Schwartz's 18-month follow-up study, sexual dissatisfaction was largely related to break ups in lesbian couples (Blyth and Straker 1996).

Parting from the aforementioned literature review on lesbian sexuality, Iasenza (2002) presents a position which argues and critiques the use, and abuse, of the term 'lesbian bed-death'. First, she explains that lesbian sexuality involves many social speculations... it's surprising that lesbians are even still sexual at all. Some have argued that lesbians are sex maniacs, while others have argued that they don't have sex at all. Others claim that their sex is the best, for two women are much better at understanding and pleasing one another, while still others claim that they exclusively engage in mutual caressing and hugging, etc. All of these misconceptions and

assumptions have led to much confusion and distortion, and have obscured the passion and play involved in lesbian sexual relating, as previously argued by Hoagland.

Iasenza (2002) also claims that from time to time, lesbian couples may find themselves experiencing sexual desire difficulties just as many gay couples or heterosexual couples. However, this infrequency of sexual desire or decline of sex drive should not be attributed to their sexual orientation; but rather, to experiencing everyday challenges such as work pressure, stress, health issues, etc. The impact of menopause on one of them or both of them at the same time, the emotional and physical effects of hormones and medications, and other issues related to the inevitable aging process, can also impact the sexual relationship of lesbians (Iasenza 2002).

Furthermore, Iasenza (2002) argues that much of the research available on sexual satisfaction poses the question of “how many times”. She posits that this question is “one that is based on a male-defined notion of sex, one that, with a penis involved, measures sex in discrete genital acts” (Iasenza 2002, 114). For instance, the study by Masters and Johnson in 1979 indicated that heterosexual couples engage in, and focus more on, genital contact as opposed to lesbian couples whose primary focus is on a total body experience which includes kissing, hugging, touching, and holding (Iasenza 2002). Also, Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) indicated that, in addition to the whole body experience, lesbians engage and value mutual giving and receiving of pleasure, as compared to heterosexual couples.

Loulan (1987) also rejects the question of ‘how many times?’ What’s important,

she defends, is if the sex is good and satisfying to them, not the fact of whether or not there is enough. Her study of more than 1,500 lesbians revealed that frequency of partnered sex in a typical month were as follows, as per the respondents: 12% never had sex; 19% have sex once or fewer; 35% two to five times; 20% six to ten times; and 14% eleven or more times a month. These results suggest that 35% of lesbians engage in sex roughly once a week. Despite these results, 14% reported being completely satisfied; 38% fairly well satisfied; 8% passably satisfied; 24% somewhat satisfied; and 16% not at all satisfied (Loulan 1987). As she concludes, “even with infrequent sex, it seems possible that a woman remains satisfied with her sex life because she feels loved” (Loulan 1987, 202).

In sum, Iasenza (2002) asserts that ‘lesbian bed-death’ is nothing but an overrated myth and a disfavor to lesbian sexuality. As she graciously claims, “if sex researchers looked more at the time taken to have sex and the variety and reciprocity of sexual activities rather than how many times people have sex, lesbian couples definitely would win the longevity and creativity contest” (114).

Lesbians, gays and heterosexuals begin romantic relationships with high hopes and expectations that their relationship will be satisfying, healthy, and long-lasting (Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988; Beals, Impett, and Peplau 2002). Some researchers argue that homosexual and heterosexual relationships share similarities in their interpersonal needs and in what they consider important for the quality and satisfaction of their romantic relationships (Kurdek and Schmitt 1987; Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988; Kurdek 1991; 1997; Beals, Impett, and Peplau 2002). To point out

some of these similarities, Mendola (1980) found that 41% of her gay and lesbian respondents agreed that commitment is the major similarity between homosexual and heterosexual couples. Out of this 41%, her report indicated 19% felt companionship is the same for heterosexual and homosexual couples; and 18% indicated that the interpersonal relationship is the same for both groups. Other similarities noted by her respondents included: love, a sense of permanence, shared emotionality, communication, and mutual dependency (Mendola 1980).

Additionally, Duffy and Rusbult (1985/86) conducted a study comparing homosexual relationships with heterosexual relationships, with regard to the level of satisfaction and commitment. Their findings indicated that both groups, heterosexuals and homosexuals, reported having relatively high levels of satisfaction and commitment in their relationships. However, the common denominator appeared to be that satisfaction and commitment were highly associated and intrinsically dependent on one another. In other words, “persons generally reported greater commitment to maintain their relationships to the degree that they were satisfied with their relationships” (Duffy and Rusbult 1985/86, 19). Loulan (1987) noted from her extensive work with lesbians that “the quality of a relationship is the reason lesbians become coupled or uncoupled” (203). Further, it is noteworthy to mention they found a significant gender difference – women reported higher levels of investment and greater commitment to maintain their relationships than men. In addition, (Duffy and Rusbult 1985/86; Eldridge and Gilbert 1990) found that lesbians are more likely to form, maintain, and enjoy longer stable relationships. Further, Duffy and Rusbult

(1985/86) also found their lesbian subjects were more likely to desire sexual fidelity in their relationships, as compared to gay males. They also found that both groups of women tend to invest more time and energy enhancing the quality of their relationships, and women value and engage more in open problem-solving communication with their partners than men do. Lastly, they found women's perception of intimate relationships involve higher levels of companionship and friendship, in addition to love and intimacy, as compared to males' perception. Hence, this study suggests that both heterosexual women and homosexual women share similar principles regarding long-lasting, enduring romantic relationships. Therefore, differences in the level of commitment could be attributed more to gender differences between women and men, and not accounted for by sexual orientation (Duffy and Rusbult 1985/86).

Means-Christensen (2003) conducted a study of cohabiting gay male couples and lesbian couples, comparing them to unmarried, cohabiting heterosexual couples using the Marital Satisfaction Inventory-Revised (MSI-R). She set out to test the validity and application of this measurement with non-traditional couples. Particularly with gay and lesbian couples, she found that: results in the relationship aspect and communication efficacy domains, were significantly similar for all groups. She also found that the main difference was in the gay and lesbian couples' stronger correlation of satisfaction with sexual relationship, positively impacting the overall relationship affect and communication. These findings support others' findings and arguments that "cohabiting same-gender and opposite-gender couples are more alike than different"

(Means-Christensen 2003, 9; Duffy and Rusbult 1985/86; Kurdek 1988).

Review of the literature suggests there are some particular factors that seem to affect the level of satisfaction, commitment, stability, and longevity in lesbian relationships. According to Kurdek and Schmitt (1987); Beals, Impett and Peplau (2002), these factors include: satisfaction in the relationship, availability of alternatives to the current relationship, and investments made in the current relationship. The findings indicate a strong correlation between high levels of satisfaction and partners' perception of similar attitudes and values, perception of the relationship as being fair, and an equality of power and/or decision making (Kurdek and Schmitt 1987; Beals, Impett and Peplau 2002).

Satisfaction was found to be a much stronger predictor of commitment in the relationship than the availability of alternatives and investments made in the relationship. With regard to availability of alternatives, it was found that this variable included not only the potential of another romantic partner, but also having time to share with friends, work, social activities with other people, or time alone. It was found that lesbians who perceive more available alternatives tend to be less committed in the relationship (Beals, Impett and Peplau 2002).

On the contrary, the lack of available alternatives can serve as an impediment to ending a relationship; thus, lesbians may stay in unhappy relationships out of fear of being alone (Bruss and Glickauf-Hughes 1997). Lastly, commitment and stability were also affected by the investments made in the relationship (Kurdek and Schmitt 1987). It was found that those investments pertaining to time or money were of

particular importance if the relationship were to be ended (Beals, Impett, and Peplau 2002).

Peplau et al. (1978) also investigated the characteristics that lesbians value the most in loving, close relationships, and how these characteristics are associated with satisfaction in their relationships. Their study found that the majority of the participants described a healthy, close relationship as one that has a balance between intimacy and personal autonomy. Their subjects also indicated that sexual exclusivity, emotional attachment (Causby et al. 1995), and ability to express their emotions freely to each other, were of significant value for their level of intimacy. At the same time, they valued autonomy, personal growth and endorsed self-actualization of the partners. Also, the majority of the lesbian participants also endorsed the concept of equality in power in the relationship and believed a healthy, close relationship should be egalitarian (Peplau et al. 1978). These findings demonstrate similarities with a later study by Eldridge and Gilbert (1990), in which their lesbian participants indicated dyadic attachment, power, and intimacy, were some factors positively correlated with relationship satisfaction.

A study by Kurdek (1988) supports the above findings to be of much importance in lesbian relationships. Accordingly, emotional expressiveness and equality within the relationship appear to be robust predictors of relationship quality for most lesbians. Means-Christensen (2003) further supports these findings. She found in her study that lesbians reported greater satisfaction in their relationships based on quality of emotional expressiveness and shared leisure time. Kurdek (1988) proposes though,

that these characteristics may be due to gender differences. He states, “females are traditionally socialized along norms of nurturance, expressiveness, and caring” (Kurdek 1988, 114).

A prior study conducted by Hidalgo and Christensen in 1976, also examined the characteristics that seem to be of value in lesbian relationships. Based on their extensive interviews with each of the participants, they found that companionship and emotional reward seem to be at the core of lesbian relationships. Their participants that described their partners as their best friends, scored higher on the emotional reward scale than on the sexual satisfaction scale (Hidalgo and Christensen 1976-77). Vetere (1982) also found the majority of her lesbian respondents reported that friendship was a prime developmental and maintenance factor in their current romantic/sexual relationships.

A study by Schreurs and Buunk (1996) addresses the level of satisfaction in lesbian couples by assessing their perceptions and balance of emotional dependency, intimacy, autonomy, equity, and social support in the environment. Their study was comprised of 119 Dutch lesbian couples. They found that the majority of the respondents considered that satisfaction in their relationship was higher as the levels of intimacy, emotional dependency, and autonomy went up. In addition, equity appears to be of great importance for the sense of satisfaction in the quality of lesbian relationship (Tanner 1978). Consequently, the subjects endorsed the importance of their own, as well as their partners', equity in investments and profits in the relationship. Interestingly however, they found that social support from others was

not considered of great importance nor did it affect their level of satisfaction in their relationship. They also attributed this particular finding to the apparent more social acceptance of homosexuality by Dutch culture, and more liberal attitudes toward sexuality in general. In sum, the authors argue that although it has been assumed and postulated that high degrees of dependency, closeness, and intimacy may negatively impact lesbian relationships, what needs to be considered is if these characteristics are reached at the 'expense' of autonomy (Schreurs and Buunk 1996).

Mackey (2000) offers a study addressing the psychological intimacy of lesbian, gay, and heterosexual long-lasting relationships of an average of thirty years. For the purpose of his study, he defined psychological intimacy as: "the sense that one could be open and honest in talking with a partner about personal thoughts and feelings not usually expressed in other relationships" (1). His study revealed that lesbian couples reported higher levels of psychological intimacy. Further, the sense of psychological intimacy was fostered when interpersonal conflicts were kept at minimal, when discussions and arguments were readily addressed, when the relationship was perceived as equally fair, and where there were expressions of physical affection between the partners. Mackey (2000) also agrees with other researchers (Toder 1979; Vargo 1987; Becker 1988; Bruss and Glickauf-Hughes 1997; Means-Christensen 2003) in that most of the differences noted, may be greatly attributed to developmental experiences and gender role differences posited by socialization on males and females. Lastly, the lesbian respondents also reported that psychologically intimate communication was a strong characteristic of their relationships (Mackey 2000).

A 12-year study of twenty-one gay couples and twenty-one lesbian couples by Gottman and Levenson, suggests that there seems to be some unique emotional characteristics of same-sex couples that contribute to the overall level of satisfaction and quality of their relationships. Based on their findings, they concluded that gay and lesbian couples appear to be less stressed when facing a disagreement. They tend to use more humor and affection, and start a conflict on a more positive note. In addition, same-sex couples tend to have a lesser need for control and use less hostile emotional tactics in their arguments than heterosexual couples. Their conflicts tend to be more of a human, universal, less gender-based nature (Nichols 1987).

Lesbians in particular, are overly concerned with power sharing. They go to great lengths to make sure both parties are satisfied and accounted for at the end of a discussion. Also, most gay and lesbian couples take it less personally when facing disagreements. Their positive comments make each other feel good, and the negative comments tend to be not as hurtful and offensive. Some same-sex couples tend to show lower levels of physiological arousal when in an argument. As a result, they are able to deescalate from the argument and to soothe each other in its aftermath, especially lesbian couples. In addition, Gottman and Levenson found two main gender differences between gays and lesbians with regard to conflict management:

1. Lesbians tend to show and express more anger, humor, excitement, and interest when arguing. These reactions suggest emotional expressiveness, both negatively and positively. The researchers argue that these traits are due to general gender differences between men and women, where women are more socially accepted to

express emotions, as opposed to men; and 2. Gay men tend to avoid negativity during a conflict, for when one of the partners is getting too negative, the other partner usually has a difficult time de-escalating the negative conflict. Again, the researchers argue that this difference between gays and lesbians is more a result of basic gender differences between men and women, where men are usually not as good at de-escalating as opposed to women (www.gottman.com).

Green (2004) stresses the subject of commitment in lesbian relationships. According to this Seattle therapist, “commitment phobia doesn’t appear to be a problem when two women are involved. Lesbian couples tend to move in together faster” (Green 2004, 1). Another therapist states: “two women couple, often very shortly after each had de-coupled from a previous relationship, and frequently move in with each other after the briefest of courtships” (Nichols 1987a, 100). The frequent setback of this rushed transition is that they don’t give themselves enough time to get to know one another. Green (2004) further argues that, even in places where gay and lesbian marriage exists or where they are allowed to form registered partnerships, these relationships still tend to be rather short lasting. She cites a study by Andersson and others comparing divorce rates of gays, lesbians, and heterosexuals in Norway and in Sweden (where they are allowed to form registered partnerships). The findings of this particular study revealed that lesbians are more prone to divorce than heterosexual women, and that they are twice as likely to split up as gay men. She proposes that different factors can negatively affect lesbian relationships and consequently, increase the propensity to break up. The main factor, as previously mentioned, is the tendency

to rush into moving in together not giving each other the time to know their true feelings, expectations, and behaviors (Green 2004).

Some lesbian relationships do not involve children. This, in turn, may represent one less impediment to leave if the expectations of the relationship are not been fulfilled. In addition, she mentions the work of Kurdek in which he explains that because women are regarded as being relationship experts, they are expected to hold and maintain perfect relationships. This is not necessarily so. Having two women constantly monitoring the relationship and wanting to talk about just about anything all day long, does not guarantee agreement as the end result. Lesbians may, and will, disagree in their points of view (Green 2004).

Lesbian couples may engage in certain rituals, just as heterosexual couples may do, to express and share their commitment to one another and to strive for social acceptance (Jordan and Deluty 2000). For instance, through the years, the study of people's names has provided a window into how society accepts or undermines relationship statuses and social positions. Little research has been conducted with regards to when and if homosexuals, to include lesbians, change their names in the context of a committed relationship. Suter and Oswald (2003) explain that, if and when lesbians engage in name-changing practice within their relationships, it may constitute an active negotiation with the idea of family membership and societal levels. Henceforth, name-changing may be used as a strategy for securing external recognition, status, and acceptance by outsiders. Interestingly enough, their study indicates that name-changing was not associated with, or was not in the context of,

having a committed ceremony (wedding). Instead, this practice was ritualized in other occasions special to the couple, such as when celebrating an anniversary or a partner's birthday (Suter and Oswald 2003).

Endorsement of sexual exclusiveness in lesbian relationships was noted by Bell and Weinberg in 1978. According to their extensive study, they concluded that “homosexual women are relatively uninterested in impersonal sexual encounters and are more apt to be involved in a continuing relationship that places a premium on mutual fidelity” (79). They found that lesbian relationships include far more sexual fidelity from both of the partners, as compared to gay male relationships. Also, they found that, compared to gay male couples, lesbian couples have a greater likelihood to end their relationship when one of the partners becomes involved with someone else (Bell and Weinberg 1978). If there was to be involvement with someone else outside the dyad, Nichols (1987a) contends that lesbians are more likely to have affairs rather than just sexual encounters. Bell and Weinberg (1978) also found that males in general (to include gay males) tend to be able to “separate sex from affection” and to “view fidelity as an undesirable restriction upon their freedom and independence” (101).

Mendola (1980) strongly argues that being ‘fidel’ or ‘infidel’ is a personal choice based on the individual's beliefs systems, not a particular homosexual characteristic. Her nation-wide study of approximately 500 gay and lesbian couples revealed that lesbians tend to be more sexually exclusively than gay males. Consequently, 37% of the gay male respondents reported having sex exclusively with their partners, while

83% of the lesbian respondents reported having sex exclusively with their partners. Also, 63% of the gay male subjects defined themselves as being permanently committed in their relationships, and 70% of the lesbians subjects defined themselves as being permanently committed in their relationships (Mendola 1980).

To further highlight gays and lesbians' choice of sexual exclusivity in their intimate relationships, Kurdek (1988) conducted a comprehensive study of gay males and lesbian cohabiting couples. He set out to assess the factors that seem to be of importance to the level of quality and satisfaction of gay and lesbian relationships. Accordingly, he found that all lesbian couples endorsed and were sexually exclusive, as opposed to thirty-four of the gay male couples. Interestingly however, he also found that both groups, gays and lesbians, had strikingly similar correlates of relationship quality: importance of personal autonomy, strong intrinsic motivation for being in the relationship, high levels of trust, similar relationship beliefs, high satisfaction of social support, and frequent shared decision making (Kurdek 1988). Thus, this study seems to indicate that being sexually exclusive or nonexclusive is not a core predictor, nor does it indicate a correlation with the overall perceived quality of gay male couples. It is of greater importance for lesbian couples (Kurdek 1988).

On the contrary, some researchers argue that although it may appear contradictory to commitment and to fidelity, nonmonogamy is an integrated aspect of some lesbian relationships (Schwartz and Rutter 2000). For some lesbians, this practice is considered a healthy, life-enhancing choice, as long as it is practiced under discrete and limited circumstances (Toder 1979; Schwartz and Rutter 2000). As one

researcher states: “lesbian nonmonogamy is a form of intimacy in which a woman concurrently engages in sexual and emotional relationships with more than one woman lover” (Kassoff 1989, 167). It is argued that a clearly defined structured nonmonogamous relationship can serve to help meet unfilled needs of one or both of the partners (Toder 1979; Kassof 1989).

Lesbians are more likely to be open with their partners regarding their extra dyadic activity than heterosexual women (Nichols 1987a). Nonmonogamy can be a source from which lesbians can gain personal power and autonomy. For instance, it is contended that because a lesbian couple is comprised of two women, it is difficult for them to accept, recognize, and structure their differences due to gender-specific sex role socialization. Hence, nonmonogamy can help lesbians sort out and clarify the conflicting boundary issues related to amount of time spend together, shared emotionally-charged experiences, and defining social identity for each of the partners (Nichols 1987a; Kassoff 1989). However, Toder (1979) cautions that “the potential growth of the individual, and even of the couple, that can result from outside affairs, must be balanced against the potential loss of trust and safety in the primary relationship” (47).

Nonmonogamy can be either a stable, ongoing practice, or a transitional, short-lived practice (Schwartz and Rutter 2000). A stable, nonmonogamous lesbian relationship is usually planned and agreed upon, and both partners are open about their affairs with others. There are clear rules and clearly defined roles about the primary and the secondary partners (Kassoff 1989). On the contrary, a transitional

nonmonogamous relationship is rather unplanned, and the partners have not agreed upon set rules or clearly defined roles. This style of nonmonogamy usually brings about many conflicts and dissatisfaction (Kassoff 1989). She found in her study that equal power in making decisions about the relationship and equally consenting to a nonmonogamous relationship, was associated with a higher level of satisfaction in the relationship. The opposite being that, the less power in making decisions and not consenting to the practice of nonmonogamy, was associated with guilt, and dissatisfaction in the relationship (Kassoff 1989).

Tibbetts (2001) conducted a study addressing nonmonogamy. She argues that much research on intimate relationships are measured and conceptualized under the monogamy norm, and they fail to account for those relationships in which the partners choose to practice ethical nonmonogamy. She uses the term *polyamorous relationships* instead, to define these types of relationships, and defines polyamorous as “choosing to live outside of the structure of monogamy with mutual consent of all partners in a relationship” (Tibbetts 2001, 1). Her small research study examined the level of commitment and security in the relationships of lesbian and bisexual women who were monogamous, compared to lesbian and bisexual women who were polyamorous. All subjects included in her study had been in a primary relationship for at least one year. Her findings indicated that there were no significant differences in the commitment level of polyamorous and monogamous lesbian and bisexual women to their primary partner (Tibbetts 2001).

Equality of involvement (Kurdek and Schmitt 1987) and equality of power seem to

be of great importance in lesbian relationships (Zevy and Cavallaro 1987; Schwartz and Rutter 2000). A study with lesbians involved in romantic and sexual relationships indicated that satisfaction in the relationship was strongly related to the characteristics of the relationship; specifically, the equality in involvement and equality of power within the relationship. Further, this study indicated that these factors were of stronger correlation to satisfaction than other factors such as partner similarity, individual attitudes, and personal background (Peplau, Padesky, and Hamilton 1982).

To emphasize the importance of the balance of power as it is linked to satisfaction in lesbian relationships, Caldwell and Peplau (1984) conducted a study of seventy-seven lesbians involved in romantic/sexual relationships. The subjects were administered a questionnaire assessing the balance of power they *want* to have in their relationships, versus the balance of power they *perceive* in their relationships. Accordingly, they found that although 97% of the respondents felt strongly about having equal power in the relationship, not all of them perceived to have such ideal power currently in their relationship, as 61% of the women indicated that they both had exactly equal power, while the remaining 39% reported that one of them had greater influence over the other. Consequently, those who perceived to have equal power, reported overall higher levels of satisfaction with the relationship and also reported that their relationship was closer. In addition, lesbians who perceived their relationship to be egalitarian, anticipated less problems negatively affecting the relationship. Thus, it appears that a moderate, fair balance of power influences lesbian relationships and its longevity. After all “being in a lesbian relationship is no sure

guarantee of avoiding power imbalances” (Caldwell and Peplau 1984, 598). In addition, other researchers further agree with this study by contending that lesbian relationships appear to last longer and be more satisfying when there is an equal balance of power, background, and commitment (Zevy and Cavallaro 1987).

Burch (1987) agrees with the aforementioned studies regarding the need for power equality in lesbian relationships. First of all, she posits that by definition, lesbians lose social power through their affiliation with other women, as opposed to with men and male power. Therefore, lesbians are perceived by the larger heterosexual society as “devalued members of society” (Burch 1987, 127). In addition, she explains that, within the context of lesbian relationships, the determination to retain power tends to diminish their capacity for intimacy. This imbalance of power, whether by actual inequalities or subjectively perceived, could account for a number of factors including economic status, emotional vulnerability, economic and/or emotional dependency, race, ethnic background, social class, etc. Overall, when these differences prevail and are perceived as intolerable, lesbians resort to one of two choices: either give up and end the relationship, or constantly struggle in the battle over power. The latter tends to affect the quality of the relationship and its longevity (Burch 1987).

Hoagland (1988) also discusses that at times, the need to retain power can negatively affect the quality of the lesbian relationship. She explains that lesbians tend to go to one of either of two extremes in their relationships: either they open up completely, in ways that manipulation and ultimatums are accessible, or they hold themselves back to keep the emotional distance in order to maintain autonomy and

independence. Both of these extremes are used a means to control each other. At times, these two extremes tend to undermine intimacy and connection. Money, for example, is another way to enforce control in a lesbian relationship. Lesbians tend to make investments in one another as a means of ensuring connection, as if they were investing in the relationship itself. Just as they may use emotional vulnerability to force a connection, they may use economics to do the same. Consequently, when the relationship evolves in a way that was not expected, division and/or settlement is insisted upon as a means to punish the other (Hoagland 1988).

Satisfactory patterns of closeness and separateness are essential to all relationships regardless of their sexual orientation. However, strong emotional attachment appears to be frequent in lesbian relationships, as lesbians are very good at closeness and intimacy (Peplau et al. 1978; Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988; Causby et al. 1995; Bruss and Glickauf-Hughes 1997). Possible explanations for this enhanced closeness and intimacy could be accounted by women's socialization to be relationship oriented (Bruss and Glickauf-Hughes 1997); and also accounted by the fact that two women tend to experience feelings with the same intensity thus, increasing the sense of closeness and connection (Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988). "Our pairings probably contain in general, more closeness, sharing, and intimate contact than any others" (Nichols 1987a, 103). However, for some lesbian couples, issues of dependency and nurturance may represent sources of conflict and barriers to intimacy, as there are usually no clear set roles within the relationship (Burch 1987).

With regard to dependency, women in general are socialized to grow up with a

feeling of dependency on others, mostly on men (Burch 1987; Causby et al. 1995; Bruss and Glickauf-Hughes 1997). Lesbians tend to reject this prescribed role. Some lesbians may fear dependency because it ties them to the traditional heterosexual feminine role of being passive and vulnerable. As she states, “a woman who is a lesbian, may strongly value independence, even self-sufficiency, as the way out of the traditional constriction of women’s lives” (Burch 1987, 129). Consequently, lesbians’ attempts to keep a safe distance from one another may hinder their level of intimacy. As a result, conflicts tend to surface when one of them is perceived as more dependent than the other within the relationship (Burch 1987).

Regarding nurturance, (Berzon 1979; Burch 1987; Vargo 1987; Fisher 1992; Means-Christensen 2003) explain that women, by definition, are socialized and psychologically trained to be caretakers, warm, and nurturers. In our culture, “women are rewarded more for relating rather than for individuating” (Bruss and Glickauf-Hughes 1997, 9). “We are taught that to be other-oriented, unassertive, and caretaking of others is to be appropriately female” (Vargo 1987, 163)... “To equate being okay with acquiring and hanging onto a mate” (Berzon 1979, 39). Lesbians do not deviate from this socialization process. In a lesbian relationship, there is usually great emphasis placed on nurturing. However, having two nurturing women in a relationship may also result in problems. The question becomes ‘who takes care of whom and when?’ Lesbians’ conflict over nurturance can be projected in various ways. For instance, one of the partners may take a position to reject being the nurturer. Another manifestation could be for one of the partners to refuse to be

nurtured (Burch 1987). Another manifestation could be a constant need for attention from the partner, which builds up resentment at having to request such attention.

Basically, any of these manifestations can result in conflict, resentment, anger, frustration, and ultimately – dissatisfaction with the relationship (Burch 1987).

Intimacy in lesbian relationships can also be hindered by the partners' perceived excessive closeness, ambivalence about their closeness, and a failure to maintain space and individual autonomy (Kaufman, Harrison, and Hyde 1984; Bruss and Glickauf-Hughes 1997). "Lesbians desire to be as close as possible to each other in a physical as well as a psychological sense, at the risk of losing their individual autonomy" (Schreurs and Buunk 1996, 578). Examples of these situations may include the lesbian couple sharing all recreational activities, socializing only with those friends that are in common, sharing the same place of business, etc. It is noted that, at first, all these activities may seem idealized in the romanticism of believing that 'building their own world' would keep them safe and together forever. However, as the relationship develops, a need for personal space and autonomy emerges (Schreurs and Bounk 1996). Kaufman, Harrison and Hyde (1984) found lesbian couples were often depressed and anxious. Their subjects reported feeling smothered and suffocated, with few friends for support. Interestingly, the authors found these couples often used arguments and fights to distance themselves temporarily from their partners.

Fusion appears to be a frequent feature of many lesbian relationships (Peplau et al. 1978; Krestan and Bepko 1980; Vargo 1987; Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988; Hill 1999). According to Bowen 1966 and Perlman 1989, fusion is defined as "the blurring

of boundaries between two people: a psychological state in which there is a loss of a sense of oneself as an individual or separate” (Hill 1999, 179). An explanation for fusion in lesbian relationships is offered by Blyth and Straker (1996) where they argue that “sex-role socialization encourages women to focus on relational issues and to pursue intimacy, leading to a greater tendency for women to fuse” (3). In addition, women have been socialized to place a premium on being supportive and giving (Blumensfeld and Raymond 1988). Consequently, it increases the likelihood of relationships to become unbalanced regarding needs for adequate space, dependency, and autonomy (Bruss and Glickauf-Hughes 1997). Thus, fusion may be greatly attributed to the socialization process both women have experienced and have been exposed to, and not indicative of pathology in either woman (Vargo 1987; Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988).

Equally important is the argument that fusion may emerge in the lesbian couple as a result of internalized homophobia and to the realization that their union is perceived negatively and illegitimately by the larger heterosexual society (Toder 1979; Causby et al. 1995; Hill 1999). Further, fusion may also emerge as the result of close bonding process among homosexuals. Kurdek and Schmitt (1987) offer the argument that “because gays and lesbians are restricted in their selection of partners, they may experience a reciprocal bonding process once they do become coupled” (228). Consequently, lesbians create a closed system for themselves to find validation and support (Vargo 1987; Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988; Causby et al. 1995). In turn, this closed system makes boundaries unclear in a lesbian relationship through intense

involvement and exclusion from others, in their attempts to solidify their union by adopting the “two against a threatening world” position (Krestan and Bepko 1980, 278; Caldwell and Peplau 1984). Again, as most women in our culture, we have been socialized to believe that our principal worth comes from our loving relationships (Becker 1988; Pearlman 1989). Thus, fostering the possibility of making “our lover the center of our life” (Toder 1979, 51).

Further highlighting fusion in lesbian relationships, a study by Causby et al. (1995), revealed that fusion within the relationship was reported at a moderate level. In this particular study, fusion was subdivided into: time fusion (amount of time spent together); and sharing fusion (sharing things). It was found that sharing much time together did not represent a problem for the couples. A possible explanation for this may be that lesbians enjoy spending time with their partners and being together at home or in social activities (Bell and Weinberg 1978; Causby et al. 1995). However, sharing different items such as a car, money, clothing, etc., and also sharing professional services such as therapists, physicians, etc., represented a problem in terms of keeping set, appropriate boundaries. The researchers attributed this problematic to the explanation that individuals’ choices of personal belongings may be a representation of their personality and their projection of their individuality. In addition, those reporting sharing fusion also reported having more conflicts in the relationship (Causby et al. 1995).

Lesbian relationships may be also characterized by emotionally charged jealous reactions carried sometimes to extreme degrees. Caprio (1954), explains that these

relationships turn possessive, as they expect their partners to be as faithful and committed as is in traditional heterosexual relationships between husband and wife. As he states, “the jealousy is symptomatic evidence of the lesbian’s sense of insecurity” (Caprio 1954, 171). This insecurity is also defended by some researchers. According to Morris (1982), there are various factors that seem to contribute to the insecurity within the lesbian relationships. For instance, she explains that lesbian couples are very much aware of their lack of social and legal support. In turn, this awareness represents an easy way out of a relationship without having to fight the legal battles behind a divorce or a legal union. By the same token, the lack of legal and social support may also represent a threat to the lesbian couple which, in turn, influences their sense of trust (Donadello and Hill 1996).

Society promotes and approves heterosexuality. As a result, it is argued that some lesbians may experience internalized homophobia (Morris 1982; Vargo 1987). Being that, they may feel their partners may abandon them to engage in a more socially approved and acceptable relationship such as that of a heterosexual relationship. Another contributing factor may be the perceived pressures from the lesbian feminist community to be nonmonogamous, which in turn, threatens the lesbian couple’s sense of interdependence and fosters jealousy and insecurity (Morris 1982; Vargo 1987).

Lastly, other contributing factor to account for intense jealousy in lesbian relationships could be the often lack of family support, economic hardship, and religious guilt as contributing stressors to the lesbian relationship. These stressors may lead to dissatisfaction within the lesbian relationship, and even lead to isolation

from others (Morris 1982; Vargo 1987). “Those forces put a tremendous load on the couple relationship...Each woman in the couple is expected to meet all of the other woman’s intellectual, social and emotional needs” (Todor, 1979 as cited in Morris 1982, 30). Nevertheless, Mendola (1980) found in her study that 91% of the lesbian participants reported having problems with jealousy within their relationships.

As previously discussed, women’s sense of self is largely embedded in the quality of their relationships with others (Toder 1979; Pearlman 1989). Consequently, when faced with interpersonal conflicts, there may be a tendency to resort to a different set of psychological priorities and strategies than men (Vargo 1987; Causby et al. 1995; Means-Christensen 2003). In lesbian relationships, it is posited that women would engage in conflict resolution by first taking into account the individuals and the context of the situations involved in a conflicting scenario (Vargo 1987). Women tend to assess the needs and feelings of the individuals involved in a conflict situation, to ensure the solution generates the least damage possible for the individuals, and to protect the quality of the relationship (Vargo 1987; Causby et al. 1995). “Women use styles that are more consistent with problem-solving strategies and are integrative in nature” (Causby et al. 1995, 72).

Regarding reasons for break-ups in homosexual relationships, Kurdek (1991; 1997) found that heterosexual and homosexual couples share similar reasons to end their romantic relationships. The two most common reasons reported in his study included: First, differences in individual characteristics. These differences were related to personal incompatibilities. Secondly, relational cohesion. This included lack of

emotional commitment (Kurdek 1997). Further, he argues that the process of the separation itself is experienced similarly by both groups, heterosexual and homosexual couples (Kurdek 1991; 1997). Coping effectively with the dissolution of a romantic relationship, greatly depends on the appraisal of the loss of the relationship; the individual coping strategies, regardless of their sexual orientation; and the quality of outside support network. As he concludes: “adjustment to the end of a relationship can be predicted on the basis of individual differences variables relevant to how one appraises and copes with interpersonal stress” (Kurdek 1997, 160)

Another common problem lesbians face in their relationships, is in regards to the partner’s sexual orientation disclosure and its impact on the couple (Toder 1979). One of the partners may be more advanced than the other in the coming-out stages. Being that, the one who has progressed further in the coming-out process, may feel more secure and comfortable about herself and her lesbianism around others, to include members of the family and friends. Conversely, the partner who is not out to others or is partially out, may continue to ‘hide’ or ‘disguise’ the presence of her partner. This in turn, may increase resentment, frustration, and feelings of neglect and negation about the loving relationship (Toder 1979). Along with the differences in the stages of the coming-out process, Toder (1979) also explains that being seen together in public may also represent a source of conflict for the lesbian relationship, if there is a discrepancy in the stages of coming-out. At times, then, social activities they can share together may be reduced. Consequently, posing an additional stressor on the relationship and affecting the relationship quality.

As previously discussed, Kurdek (1991;1997) explains that homosexuals' ability to cope effectively with the dissolution of romantic relationships is greatly influenced by a combination of individual differences and the quality of network support. But, in particular, other researchers argue that lesbians possibly experience more grief upon the break ups than gay men. This may be partially attributed to the emotional aspect that characterizes women in general, as they tend to equate and intertwine love with friendship, intimacy, commitment, and fidelity (Panati 1998). Further, researchers argue that many lesbians tend to choose to maintain the friendship after a romantic break up (Bruss and Glickauf-Hughes 1997). Hidalgo and Christensen (1976-77) studied sixty-one Puerto Rican lesbians. According to their study, lesbians indicated that after breaking up, they continued the friendship after a 'cooling off' period and after processing the break up. It was reported that the qualities that brought them together in the first place, bonded the friendship after the sexual relationship had ended. The researchers claim that this may be possible because "the trauma of divorce and the bitterness created by the process of property settlement, child custody, and so on...are usually absent in a lesbian divorce" (Hidalgo and Christensen 1976-77, 115).

Bruss and Glickauf-Hughes (1997) also explain that lesbians tend to have 'thin' boundaries between an ending relationship and the beginning of another relationship. Meaning, "it is common for women in general, and lesbians in particular, to move from one intimate relationship to another with little time to be alone between relationships" (Becker 1988, 39). It is posited that probable causes for this short transition could include again, women's socialization to define themselves in terms of

their relationships. Consequently, they may engage in mate-searching rather quickly. But, additionally, it is also proposed that perhaps the lack of social support for lesbians, combined with the close ties within the lesbian community, and the impact of homophobia, could also be contributing factors. Lastly, problems with separation-individuation, as a result of two women socialized for dependence, as opposed to for independence, could also be an important variable to account for this phenomenon (Becker 1988; Bruss and Glickauf-Hughes 1997).

To point out some similarities and differences between heterosexuals and homosexuals regarding post-dissolutional relationships, Lannutti (2002) conducted a study examining and comparing the post-dissolutional relationships of heterosexual men and women, with homosexual men and women. The overall findings of this study indicated that gays and lesbians reported higher levels of satisfaction, moderate levels of emotional intimacy, moderate levels of interpersonal contact, and lower levels of sexual intimacy with their post-dissolutional relationships. The heterosexual men and women reported moderate levels of satisfaction, moderate levels of emotional intimacy, lower levels of interpersonal contact, and lower levels of sexual intimacy. These results suggest a general relative similarity in post-dissolutional relationships. The differences noted were mostly attributed to personal variables that seem to be accentuated in homosexuals. That is, homosexuals appear to possess higher degrees of 'liking' an ex-partner which initially attracted the couple to a romantic relationship, and perhaps continues to be an essential factor even after the romantic relationship ends (Lannutti 2002).

Lastly, an article by Kathy Belge (2004) in *Your Guide to Lesbian Life*, provides a list of states in the United States and countries throughout the world, where gays and lesbians marry or obtain a legally-recognized partnership. First of all, according to a 1999 census, same-gender couples accounted for approximately 2% of all households throughout the United States...that is roughly one million (Means-Chistensen 2003). Schwartz and Rutter (2000) explain that the main focus of same-sex marriage is if they can have “the same access to social and legal support of their unions that heterosexuals gain by entering the social contract of marriage” (184). As they claim, “gender difference is central to the social control of intimacy” (Schwartz and Rutter 2000, 184). So where can they get married or obtain a legally recognized partnership? Within the United States: *Vermont*- there is an existing civil union for same-sex couples; *Massachusetts* – recognizes gay and lesbian marriages; *San Francisco California* – gay and lesbian couples can register as domestic partners.

In Canada: same-sex marriages are legal in *Ontario, British Columbia, Quebec, Yukon, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, and Newfoundland*. In Europe: *Netherlands (Holland)*- marriages and registered partnerships for same-sex couples; *France* – has a Civil Solidarity Pact which grants same-sex partners rights of next of kin, inheritance, social security, and tax benefits; *Portugal* – there is partnership rights for same-sex couples; *Belgium* – gays and lesbians can get legally married; *Denmark* – has registered partnership rights for same-sex couples; *Sweden* – there are civil unions for gay and lesbian couples; *Germany* – recognizes next of kin and property inheritance rights for registered gay and lesbian couples; *Spain* – currently legalizes

gay marriage. In *South Africa* - they have changed their definition of marriage from “the union of one man and one woman – to, the union of two persons to the exclusion of all others for life”. Marriage for gays and lesbians is expected to become legal sometime in 2005. *United Kingdom* – there is a civil partnership bill for same-sex couples to receive benefits. They will be able to register their unions by the end of 2005. *Israel* – they recognize some rights for gays and lesbians such as monetary and property issues. *New Zealand* – there are registered unions which allow gays and lesbians rights to hold a ceremony and the right to claim next of kin, and have control over partner’s medical treatment (<http://lesbianlife.about.com/cs/wedding>).

INFIDELITY IN LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS

Much of the research and empirical investigations available tends to focus on infidelity and jealousy among heterosexual couples. There is a great deal of research on gender differences that suggest men and women greatly differ in their perception of infidelity and in their interpretation of sexual and emotional jealousy (Symons 1979; DeSteno and Salovey 1996; Buss, Larsen, and Westen 1996; Wiederman and LaMar 1998; Gehl and Vaidya 2004).

In our society, men are trained to freely express their sexuality and desire, as opposed to women who are trained to repress it (Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988; Blasco 1993). However, this societal rule appears to be very biased when it relates to heterosexual and homosexual men. As so, societal data reinforces the fact that heterosexual men can have lots of uncommitted sex. For instance, when heterosexual men engage in various uncommitted sexual relationships at a time, they are graciously labeled 'Don Juan', 'lady killer', or 'stud'. However, when homosexual men engage in various uncommitted sexual relationships at a time, they are simply labeled 'promiscuous'. Parting from this distinct cultural interpretation, it is apparent that the term promiscuous does not simply describe people's behavior; but rather, carries with it a heavy negative connotation and moralistic value (Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988). "The promiscuity is inbred in all boy children, and since most boy children don't find out they're gay until later in life, their promiscuity has nothing to do with their gayness' (Mendola 1980, 55).

One strong postulation of the gender difference emerged from an evolutionary

theory which threatens the Darwinian fittest for men (Symons 1979). As such, if a man's mate is unfaithful (cuckoldry) and the result of that infidelity is pregnancy, the man risks spending resources on another man's offspring (Symons 1979). Therefore, it is believed men are more likely to focus on the sexual aspect of infidelity and thus, experience and express greater sexual jealousy than women (Symons 1979; DeSteno and Salovey 1996; Buss, Larsen and Westen 1996; Wiederman and LaMar 1998; Sheets and Wolfe 2001).

Women do not face cuckoldry. When a woman's mate is unfaithful, women face another fittest risk: losing their mate's resources for her and for her offspring. Women tend to perceive infidelity as a lack of commitment from their partner, and it is presumed that their mate will develop attachment with the other and abandon the primary relationship (Symons 1979; Buss, Larsen and Westen 1996). As a result, women tend to equate infidelity with not loving the primary partner with whom there is a committed relationship (Harris and Christenfeld 1996). Generally speaking then, women are more likely to focus on the emotional aspect of infidelity and therefore, experience and express greater emotional jealousy than men (Symons 1979; DeSteno and Salovey 1996; Buss, Larsen and Westen 1996; Wiederman and LaMar 1998; Sheets and Wolfe 2001).

To highlight on gender differences, Harris and Christenfeld (1996) indicate that women see love as a prerequisite for sex, and men engaging in sex does not necessarily holding this same prerequisite. Men are more likely to be distressed over their female partner's sexual infidelity because they feel that, if a woman has sex with

another man, she must also be in love with him for it is assumed that women tend to have more emotional affairs as compared to men (Glass 1998).

Women, although distressed by sexual infidelity, are less so because if a male partner has sex with another woman, it does not necessarily mean he is in love with her, for it is assumed that men tend to have more sexual affairs than women (Glass 1998). This study indicates that there appears to be an innate emotional difference between men and women in their perception and interpretation of jealousy (Harris and Christenfeld 1996). Furthermore, experts on gender differences between men and women argue that women value love, communication, and relationships; and that their sense of self is highly defined by their feelings and the quality of their relationships with others. Conversely, a man's sense of self is mostly defined through achievements, sense of competence, and accomplishments (www.relationship-institute.com).

Sheets and Wolfe (2001) suggest similar conclusions regarding gender differences and the perception of jealousy. They conducted a study comparing sexual jealousy and emotional jealousy of heterosexuals (men and women); and of homosexuals (lesbians and gays). Their research findings indicated that heterosexual men reported greater distress to both sexual infidelity and emotional infidelity; as compared to lesbians, gays, and heterosexual women who reported more distress resulting from their partners' emotional infidelity. They provided two possible explanations/theories for their findings. The first explanation stems from an evolutionary theory of jealousy. This theory proposes that heterosexual men may perceive sexual infidelity as a threat

to their access to a reproductive partner. Then, since same-gender sexual behavior is not concerned with reproduction, the threat is lessened in gays, heterosexual women, and in lesbians (Wiederman and LaMar 1998). As a result, this reduces their overall level of distress over sexual infidelity. In addition, they argue that sexual and emotional jealousy evolved sequentially. In other words, “sensitivity to cues of emotional infidelity may have evolved concurrently with human pair bonding as a species-typical characteristic” (Sheets and Wolfe 2001, 2). Being that, emotional infidelity is experienced by both men and women regardless of their sexual orientation.

The second explanation is based on a sociocultural theory of jealousy. They explained that this theory proposes gender differences regarding jealousy are embedded in the cultural expectations of the behavior of men and women (Sheets and Wolfe 2001). For instance, the relationship beliefs of men and women are different. Our culture tends to defend the position that, if a man is sexually unfaithful, he is not expected to abandon the primary partner; whereas, if the woman is sexually unfaithful, she is expected to leave the primary relationship, for she has been both sexually and emotional unfaithful to her partner (Sheets and Wolfe 2001). In turn, this accounts for the heterosexual men’s greater sexual jealousy. Likewise, the gender role adherence expectation is another factor which accounts for the gender differences in the perception of jealousy. The more individuals adhere to these expectations and patterns, the more that sexual or emotional jealousy will be experienced. Hence, it is argued that, because gays and lesbians are more likely to cross these traditional gender

roles, jealousy experience may be reversed (Sheets and Wolfe 2001).

Additional research comparing infidelity and jealousy perception of men and women have been conducted. For example, while the evolutionary explanation comparing men and women regarding their level of distress resulting from sexual infidelity seem counter to previous findings, Wiederman and Allegeir (1993); Nannini and Meyers (2000); Cann, Mangum, and Wells (2001) also posit that these differences do not lie outside of cultural expectations. They argue that culture shapes individuals' cues and responses. Consequently, they believe that both men and women may experience high levels of emotional jealousy, but because of culture and socialization, its interpretation and expression in men may not always be displayed (Wiederman and Allegeir 1993; Nannini and Meyers 2000; Cann, Mangum, and Wells 2001). In addition, they posit that individual differences need to be considered in order to assess sexual and emotional infidelity. As such, "men's and women's unique interpretations are more likely responsible for any differences that may arise in their experience of sexual jealousy" (Nannini and Meyers 2000, 9).

Challenging previous studies claiming that men, regardless of their orientation, innately consider sexual infidelity worse than emotional infidelity, Harris (2002) conducted a study with men and women of homosexual and heterosexual orientations using a forced-choice question to hypothetical (imagined) reaction to infidelity, and an actual experience with infidelity questionnaire. Her findings revealed gender differences consistent with previous research. That is, for the forced-choice infidelity question, heterosexual men reported sexual infidelity as more upsetting than

heterosexual women who considered emotional infidelity being worse. Overall, the heterosexual respondents considered sexual infidelity worse than emotional infidelity, when compared to the homosexual respondents (Harris 2002). However, responses to actual experience with infidelity revealed no gender differences. That is, both groups of men and women, heterosexual and homosexual, reported more distress over the emotional, rather than the sexual aspects of the infidelity.

Harris (2002) argues that the gender differences found in the forced-choice hypothetical domain, may be attributed to individuals simply reading about a hypothetical scenario and not spending too much time thinking or investing emotions because they are not based on actual experiences. As she states: “a forced-choice hypothetical question may tap into various attitudes and beliefs that have little to do with people’s actual emotional reactions when confronted with real infidelity” (Harris 2002, 10). Instead, on the actual experience with infidelity, the overall finding suggests that individual experiences and perceptions are major predictors of reactions to infidelity, regardless of gender (Harris 2002). Furthermore, Harris (2004) concluded in another study that the explanation of the perception and reaction to jealousy for men and women is better accounted for social-cognitive factors, rather than by biological factors. The fact remains that choosing to be faithful is a combination of an individual’s choice and a couple’s decision, regardless of sexual orientation (Woog 1998).

To focus on lesbians’ perception of infidelity and on their interpretation of sexual and / or emotional jealousy, Bell (1979) posit that lesbians, as well as heterosexual

women, have a wide range of sexual lifestyles. Many lesbians maintain stable relationships in which sexual activity is exclusively with that particular partner, while others, although they may hold committed relationships, are unfaithful just as heterosexual women (Bell 1999). According to Blumstein and Schwartz (1983), lesbians are more likely to be unfaithful than heterosexual women, at an estimate of 38% more for couples together for two to ten years.

Are lesbians more innately prone to be unfaithful and to have multiple relationships by choice? Or, are they influenced by the lack of resources and the lack of social support? Betty Berzon, a psychotherapist specializing in gay and lesbian issues, explains that society does not provide homosexuals the same tools and access given to their heterosexual counterparts to plan their lives and to cope with difficult life situations. Further, society does not provide homosexuals the models necessary to develop intimacy and commitment (Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988). For instance, society provides, celebrates, and reinforces models of official committed monogamous heterosexual relationships by legalizing weddings, newspaper announcements, and the like. Homosexuals do not have these same rights (Zevy and Cavallaro 1987; Woog 1998). Perhaps the main, if not the only, source of role models for lesbians are older lesbians. "Today, as younger lesbians are beginning to consolidate their strengths and influence, the presence of older lesbians is sorely needed for role models and mentors, for a source of wisdom and courage" (Dunker 1987, 72). The latter point was emphasized in studies with Puerto Rican lesbians when Hidalgo and Christensen (1976-77) agreed that older lesbians serve as role models and as figures of accepting

mothers to younger generations.

Because many lesbians have to love and live in secrecy, their relationships may seem less important and less real even to themselves; thus making it more difficult for lesbians to develop the lasting bonds that everyone needs in their lives (Romo-Carmona 1994). Gay and lesbian relationships may be predestined to fail, just as heterosexual relationships. However, “their failure is not inherent in the psychology of humans who happen to be gay” (Dr. Berc, as cited in Mendola 1980, 165). Also, there is a lag in clinical techniques for therapists to work with lesbian couples’ problems in their relationships. This lag may be partially attributed to the misconception and unfounded assumption that lesbian relationships tend to be short lasting, and therefore less deserving of study and research (Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988; Means-Christensen 2003). Being that, lesbians may perceive running out and finding someone else as their only solution when their relationships do not unfold as expected or when they fail. Hence, making lesbians appear less committed in their relationships and even, promiscuous (Woog 1998). As Caprio states: “most lesbians are seldom faithful to each other” (1954, 171).

The concept of monogamy is a societal notion regularly misused as a model to imply fidelity (Fisher 1992). However, monogamy is defined as “the state or custom of being married to one person at a time” (Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary 1997, 753), without designating a gender. As such, the word monogamy etymologically means one marriage at a time (Woog 1998). Hence, it does not necessarily imply fidelity (Fisher 1992). Gays and lesbians were not allowed to

legally marry until very recently, and only in certain states and still with certain limitations and restrictions. Does this mean that the concept of monogamy does not apply to gay and lesbians? Yes it does. The concept in of itself does apply to many gay and lesbians who strive to establish and maintain long, enduring romantic and intimate relationships. What does not apply is the societal legal concept behind the word monogamy. Interestingly enough, monogamy is also defined as “the condition or practice of having a single mate during a period of time” (Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary 1997, 753). Hence, parting from this definition, it seems clear that monogamy not only applies to heterosexuals, but to the whole spectrum of human beings, including homosexuals (Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988); and, in this particular case, to lesbians as they are the focus of this study.

Serial monogamy is another widespread practice. Serial monogamy is having one partner at a time; and then, when two people no longer wish to be together in a relationship, there is a break up and people move on to other partners (Panati 1998). Lesbians are not an exception to this phenomenon, as they also practice serial monogamy within their relationships (Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988; Panati 1998). One possible explanation for the practice of serial monogamy can be partly attributed to women’s socialization process which emphasizes equating love with sex, and love with commitment and fidelity (Nichols 1987; Panati 1998). For the most part, women tend to have sex within the context of a relationship and sometimes, it must include love (Toder 1979). Vetere (1982) indicated in her study that 68% of her lesbian respondents reported their first significant same-sex experience was in the context of a

relationship. Moreover, 83% of the respondents reported they were 'in love' with the woman with whom they first had sex. Thus, it is suggestive that this combination of sex and relationship appears to be accentuated for lesbian couples, as these are two women socialized in the same fashion (Vetere 1982; Nichols 1987a).

In sum, Mendola (1980) concludes that individuals who do not believe in fidelity are neither bad people or infidel. People exercise their right to freedom of choice regarding their behavior, regardless their sexual orientation. The choice of being faithful, for the most part, is embedded in individuals' system of values.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY / DESIGN

A descriptive research design was utilized for this study. A survey questionnaire was the instrument used for this research. Due to the difficulty in locating participants, the sample selection was obtained through a snowball sampling technique in the Miami Dade County, Florida area. Thirty-three women participated in this research. All participants in this study were twenty years old or above and have self-identified as both Hispanics and as lesbians. In addition, women participants have, or had been, in a live-in romantic sexual relationship with a woman; and they were in said relationship for a minimum of one (1) year at the time their partners were unfaithful to them.

Data was collected through interviews with each of the participants. Upon meeting, the participants were provided with a Survey Consent form which was signed by the researcher. This Survey Consent described the purpose of the study, and participants were ensured confidentiality regarding their identities. The survey questionnaire was administered in both English and in Spanish, as requested by the participants. The survey posed questions regarding demographics, including the participants' age, place of birth, age of arrival to the United States, income, and educational level.

The participants were also asked the order of disclosure of their sexual orientation to self and others. The descriptive survey questionnaire asked about the participants'

definition of infidelity; their experience with infidelity; their reaction to the infidelity; the length of the relationship at the time the infidelity occurred; if the primary relationship continued after the infidelity; and how their Hispanic culture influenced the resulting decisions they made when faced with the infidelity.

Data was gathered and a qualitative analysis was drawn from the indicated responses to items on the collected questionnaires.

INSTRUMENTATION

The survey questionnaire was developed in English and in Spanish, and was administered in either language as requested by the participants. The survey questionnaire was comprised of four (4) sections as follows: The first section provided information about the researcher. It outlined the criteria for the participants, explained the purpose of the study, and it assured confidentiality of the participants' identities.

The second section captured demographic information. Participants were asked to describe themselves in terms of their age, place of birth, age of arrival to the United States, income level, and education level. For simplicity purposes of this study, religious affiliation was omitted.

The third section of the survey questionnaire related to the participants' sexual orientation disclosure. This section was adapted from Cass' (1979) hierarchical patterns of identity disclosure or coming out process. Accordingly, Cass argues that

individuals tend to come out to themselves and to other homosexuals first; followed by their immediate and extended family members; and finally to co-workers and to the community at large. In addition, Cass postulates that individuals gradually choose to disclose as they perceive acceptance (Cass 1979). Conversely, others argue that diversity of experience and circumstances may lead some individuals to never self-identify as homosexual and / or to come out to others (Cass 1979; Loulan 1984; Blumenfeld and Raymond 1988; Troiden 1989). For the sake of clarification in this particular study, this section asked the participants to provide the approximately age and the order of sexual orientation milestones.

In addition, this section of the survey questionnaire consisted of detailed questions regarding the participants' definition of infidelity. Participants were asked if they had experienced infidelity by their partners; and if so, their reaction to the infidelity; the length of the relationship when the infidelity occurred; whether or not the primary relationship continued after the infidelity; and lastly, how their Hispanic culture influenced the decisions they arrived at on how to manage the infidelity.

The fourth section provided an opportunity for the participants to openly share details of their experiences. This last section was optional.

RECRUITMENT OF SAMPLE

Due to the difficulty in locating participants, the recruitment of the sample for this descriptive survey research design was obtained through snowball sampling technique in Miami Dade County, Florida. According to Rubin and Babbie (1997), the term snowball refers to “the process of accumulation as each located subject suggests other subjects” (271). Therefore, the researcher met with one Hispanic lesbian who completed the questionnaire, and gathered the information. Subsequently, said participant was asked to identify other potential subjects who would be willing to participate. Based on her referrals, and by following a snowball technique, the researcher was able to contact and met with the participants for the interview and completion of the descriptive survey questionnaire.

THE SAMPLE

The final sample for this descriptive research design consisted of thirty-three women who identified themselves as both lesbians and as Hispanic. All of the participants were foreign-born and immigrants to the United States. Countries of origin were as follows: Cuba; Colombia; Puerto Rico; Uruguay; Peru; Spain; and Nicaragua. Participants reside in the Miami Dade County, Florida area.

All the participants were twenty years of age or older. The participants ranged in age from 20 to 46. Income level ranged from \$20,000 to \$100,000. Level of education ranged from High School Graduate to Post Graduate School. For

simplicity purposes of this study, religious affiliation was omitted. All of the women participants have, or had been, in a live-in romantic sexual relationship with a woman for a minimum of one (1) year, at the time their partners were unfaithful.

DATA COLLECTION METHOD

Data to complete this study was obtained from Hispanic lesbians through snowball sampling technique. The researcher interviewed each of the participants at a mutually agreed upon location. The interviewer was present to answer any questions and to further clarify as needed, as the participants filled out the survey questionnaire. The presence of the interviewer did not affect the respondents' perceptions or answers. In addition, the researcher interviewer followed the general rules for interviewing which include being familiar with the questions posed on the survey questionnaire, and recording responses as given (Rubin and Babbie 1997). The descriptive survey questionnaire was provided to the participants in English or in Spanish, upon request. The questions were clear and concise, and the same survey questionnaire was used for all the participants.

The first and second sections of the descriptive survey questionnaire were the Survey Consent Form and Demographics respectively. Each of the participants read the form and they were asked to sign in a way that was illegible to assure confidentiality and anonymity. In addition, the Survey Consent Form had the researcher interviewer's original signature and telephone number. The approximate

amount of time needed to read, sign, and complete the first two sections was five to eight minutes.

During the third section, the researcher interviewer was asked to clarify and explain some of the questions. It was also noted that some of the participants engaged in what is known as *Spanglish*. According to Stavans (2004), Spanglish (the mixture of Spanish and English) is a jargon taking parts of both languages and switching from one language to the other, as one carries on a conversation. This phenomenon is very common among fully bilingual individuals. The interviewer, as well as many of the respondents, engaged in this jargon as discussions and conversations arose.

It is of much significance and importance to note however, that several of the participants began using one language and then, switched to their native language – Spanish, as more deep personal information was been revealed. However, it appears the participants were aware of “what is permissible to say about sex and sexuality in which language” (Espin 1997, 206) and about lesbianism. Hence, the choice of English was made mainly when referring to themselves as ‘gay’, as opposed to using the word ‘lesbiana’ in Spanish. It was noted that the impact of the expression in Spanish carries too much weight, and perhaps some guilt. Thus, resorting to English appears to act as a distancing tool from anxiety and guilt.

It was also found that most of the participants integrated the two languages simultaneously, as their cultural backgrounds have become integrated as well. However, most of the participants expressed emotionally charged information, such as that of anger and resentment, in their mother-language Spanish. This study seems to

adhere to previous studies (Espin 1997) as she states: “even among immigrants who are fluent in English, the first language often remains the language of emotions” (Espin 1997, 206). Apparently, “language, both the native tongue and English, is used to provide relational safety” (Espin 1997, 211). Henceforth, cultural sensitivity was of priority to the interviewer in efforts to allow the participants to freely express themselves without inhibitions and to foster empathy. The third section of the survey questionnaire took approximately forty to forty-five minutes to complete. It must be noted that the participants were not given a limit time to fill out the questionnaire. They were provided with all the time needed to avoid pressure and to enhance validity of the aforementioned study.

The fourth section was labeled *Tell me about it*. The participants were given the opportunity to freely express details of the incident of the infidelity and of their reactions. This section was completed by 70% of the participants. This last section was optional, and it was clearly explained to the participants that it would not affect the quality of their participation or the purpose of the study, if they chose not to complete it.

In sum, the approximate time to complete the entire non-experimental descriptive survey questionnaire was one-and-a half hours (1 ½ hrs). The respondents were immensely thanked for their time and willingness to participate. They were encouraged to contact the researcher to find out the final results of the study, if they had further questions, or any need to address, process, or discuss any feelings surfaced due to the interview. Lastly, they were advised the study will be posted on line for the

public within two to three months, after dissertation defense and subsequent degree conferment of the researcher.

CHAPTER 5
RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Survey Questionnaire:

The survey questionnaire was developed in English and in Spanish. It was administered in either language, as requested by the participants. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the participants completed the survey in English; and 25% in Spanish. The survey questionnaire was comprised of four (4) sections as follows:

Section One:

The first section of the survey questionnaire was a Survey Consent Form. All thirty-three participants (100%) signed the form and met the established criteria.

Section Two:

The second section captured demographic information. The charts below provide the demographic information of the thirty-three participants.

Figure 1, presents the age of the participants at the time of the interview. Accordingly, 28% were between the ages of 21-30; 36% were between the ages of 31-40; and 36% were between 41-50.

Age of participants

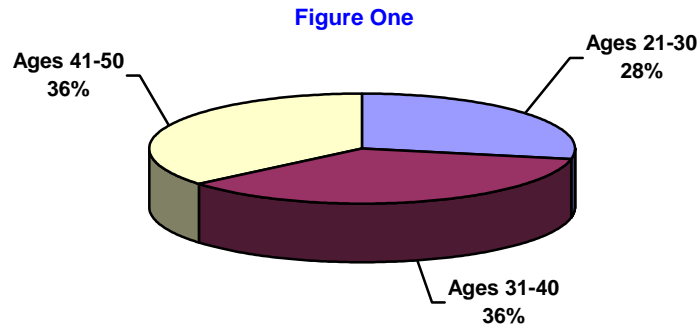


Figure 2 illustrates that all of the participants are foreign born, from Spanish-speaking Latin American countries, and residing in the United States. Accordingly, 64% were born in Cuba; 12% in Colombia; 6% Puerto Rico; 9% in Peru; 3% in Spain; 3% in Uruguay; and 3% were born in Nicaragua.

Place of birth

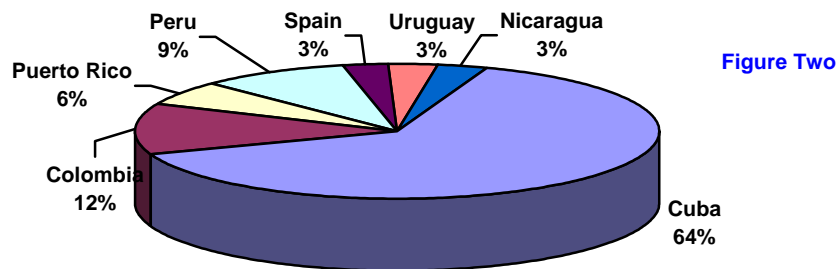


Figure 3 indicates the participants' age of migration to the United States. Accordingly, 67% migrated between the ages of 1 and 11, during their childhood years; 18% between the ages of 12 and 19, during their adolescent years; and 15% migrated between the ages of 20 and 30, during their early adulthood years.

Age of arrival to the United States

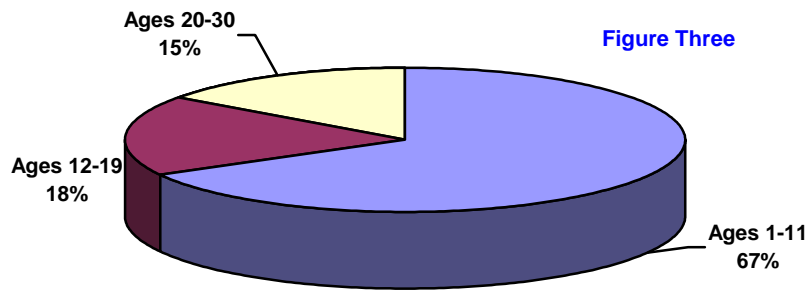


Figure 4 shows the income levels of the participants. Accordingly, 36% fall within the \$20,001 to \$40,000 income range; 46% fall between the \$40,001 to \$60,000 income bracket; 9% between the \$60,001 to \$80,000 range; and 9% fall between the \$80,001 to \$100,000 brackets per year.

Income levels

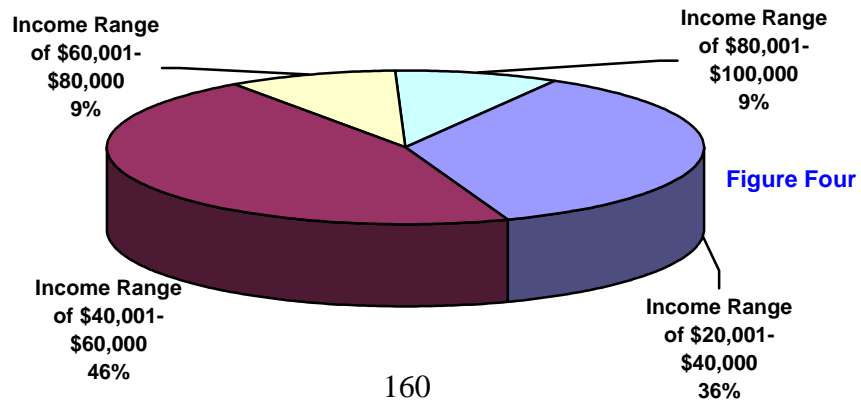
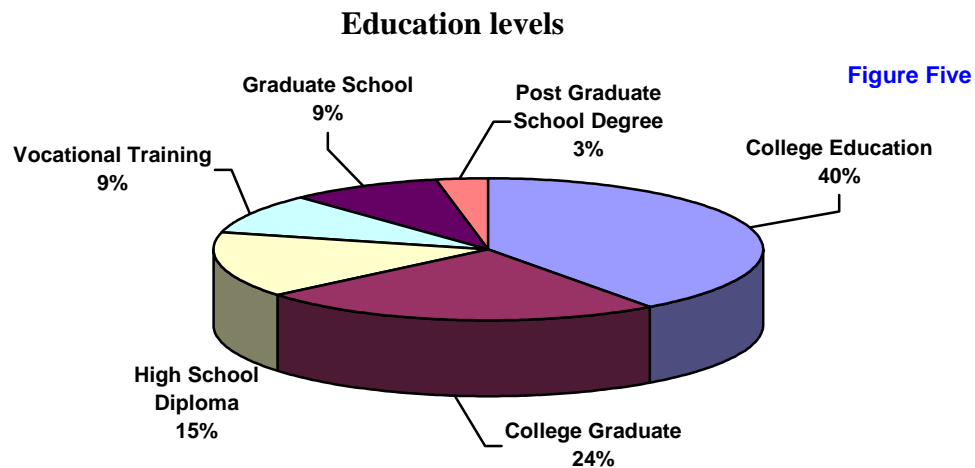


Figure 5 presents the participants' level of education. Accordingly, the majority (40%) have some College education; 24% hold a College degree; 15% have a High School Diploma only; 9% have Vocational Training; 9% have Graduate School level degree; and 3% hold a Post-Graduate School degree.



Section Three:

Question # 1: To whom have you come out to?

This section was adapted from Cass' (1979) hierarchical orientation disclosure or coming out process. Cass argues that individuals tend to follow a hierarchical pattern to their identity disclosure, and that individuals gradually choose to disclose as they perceive acceptance. Generally, she explains that individuals tend to come out to: 1st themselves; 2nd. other lesbians; 3rd. gay men; 4th. non-gay men; 5th. other friends; 6th siblings; 7th. parents; 8th extended family; 9th co-workers; and 10th to the community. It is important to emphasize that diversity of experiences and circumstances may lead some individuals to never self-identify as homosexuals and / or to come out to others (Cass 1979).

As suggested by Cass' model of the coming out process, all thirty-three of the participants (100%) of this study came out to themselves 1st. Thirty-two of the participants (97%) came out to other lesbians, with twenty-two (62%) doing so as the 2nd. group. The majority of the participants (97%) came out to other gay men; with twenty-six of them (39%) doing so as the 3rd. group. Twenty-six of the participants (78%) came out to non-gay men; with five of them (19%) doing so as the 4th. group. Almost all of the participants, thirty-two (97%), came out to other friends. Of these, six of them (18%) did so as the 5th group.

Regarding sexual orientation disclosure to the immediate family including siblings and parents, thirty of the thirty-three participants (91%) came out to their immediate families. Specifically, twenty-six of the participants (78%) came out to the siblings; and three of them (11%) did so as the 6th. group. Twenty-six of the participants (78%) came out to their parents; out of which, four of them (15%) did so as the 7th group. To the extended family, twenty of the participants (61%) came out to their extended families, with eight of them (40%) doing so as the 8th. group.

Lastly, sixteen of the participants (48%) came out to their co-workers; out of which, almost half of them, seven (44%) did so as the 9th group. Twenty of the participants (61%) came out to the community; out of which half of them (50%) did so as the 10th. group. Finally, eleven of the thirty-three participants (33%) stated that they were out to everyone.

In addition, participants were asked the age of their sexual orientation disclosure or coming out. The average age at which this sample of women first identified

themselves as lesbians was during their early twenties, with a range from 13 to 33 years of age.

Question # 2: Based on Subotnik & Harris' (1999), definition of infidelity: "Unfaithfulness or disloyalty. It is the breaking of a promise or vow". Have you experienced infidelity by your partner?

All the thirty-three (100%) participants responded "YES" to this question, suggesting they have all experienced infidelity by their partners.

Question # 3: Besides the above definition, have you ever experienced infidelity in any other way?

Fifty-eight percent (58%) of the participants responded "YES" and 42% responded "NO". It is noteworthy to mention there were different interpretations and meanings of infidelity for those participants who responded 'YES'. Many of the participants felt that emotional intimacy, lies, and broken promises are construed as being unfaithful and disloyal. The participants commented:

"My partner became very emotionally attached to someone else. To this day, I don't know if they had sex. It hurt so much, the relationship had to end".

"Not just broken promises; but also expectations that were not met"

"I have caught her in many lies...and I hate lies"

"Broken agreements and rules"

"She was doing things behind my back"

“She would always talk with this ‘friend’ for hours on the phone. She denies having had an affair with her. We are still together, but I always had the doubt”.

“I confronted my partner after she said she went out for coffee with her ex-lover. I asked if they had sex, she said no. I believe she was lying”.

“After many times I had asked for an explanation, my partner confessed to me that she was only ‘talking’ to someone because the communication between us was not good. She denied any sexual involvement with this other person, but I didn’t believe her”.

Question 4: What did you do after the infidelity occurred?

This question asked what behaviors and actions took place when the infidelity was discovered. The question had different options including: Sought therapy for yourself; sought couples therapy; broke up; denied; were unfaithful as an act of retaliation; threw out her personal belongings; accepted it; blamed yourself; asked her to leave; moved out; blamed her; engaged in self-destructive behaviors. The participants were asked to choose as many as it applied.

The majority of the participants (79%) indicated they broke up the relationship. Many participants (39%) reported blaming their partners. Thirty-six percent (36%) indicated they accepted it; 21% responded they moved out; 30% asked their partners to leave; 30% blamed themselves; 15% threw out their partners’ personal belongings; 15% were unfaithful as an act of retaliation; another 15% denied it; and 30% engaged in self-destructive behaviors. Eighteen percent (18%) reported seeking therapy for themselves; and a significantly lower percentage (9%) sought couples therapy.

Question # 5: How long were you in the relationship when the infidelity occurred?

One of the criteria for this study was that participants have or had been in a romantic, sexual relationship with a woman for a minimum of one (1) year at the time their partners were unfaithful. Accordingly, the participants' length of the relationship at the time the infidelity occurred ranged from 1 year to 11 years. The following is the participants' response to this question: 1 yr – 12% (4 participants); 1 yr 4 months – 6% (2 participants); 1 yr 6 months – 6% (2 participants); 2 yrs – 15% (5 participants); 3 yrs – 9% (3 participants); 4 yrs – 18% (6 participants); 5 yrs – 6% (2 participants); 6 yrs – 9% (3 participants); 6 yrs 6 months – 3% (1 participant); 6 yrs 8 months – 3% (1 participant); 7 yrs – 3% (1 participant); 10 yrs – 3% (1 participant); and 11 yrs – 6% (2 participants).

Question 6: Did the relationship continue after the infidelity?

This question addressed whether or not the primary relationship continued after the infidelity. The findings revealed closely divided results. Accordingly, sixteen (49%) of the participants responded “YES”; and seventeen (51%) responded “NO”. For those participants who answered ‘YES’, the length of the primary relationship continued from 1 month to 11 years, after the infidelity. The following is the participants' response to this question: 1 month – 6% (1 participant); 3 months – 6% (1 participant); 6 months – 6% (1 participant); 1 year – 19% (3 participants); 1 year 6 months – 19% (3 participants); 5 years – 13% (2 participants);

11 years – 6% (1 participant); 1 year on and off – 6% (1 participant); 4 years on and off – 6% (1 participant); currently 6 months – 6% (1 participant); and currently 1 year – 6% (1 participant).

Question 7: Do you feel that your Hispanic culture influenced how you managed the infidelity?

Nineteen of the thirty-three participants (58%) of the participants responded “YES”; and fourteen (42%) responded “NO”. Those who responded ‘YES’ were asked to explain how their Hispanic culture influenced their decisions. The answers they reported are the following:

“As a Cuban, we are taught that infidelity will occur; but as long as you love the person at home and you are only using the person on the street for sex, is OK”.

“ As a child, I was taught to have dignity. If I had continued in the relationship after she had an affair, she would have disrespected me forever”.

“We, Hispanic women, are very submissive. But I rebelled”.

“Cubans think that when a woman cheats, she will do it again. I am a ‘butch’ and I play the man role in the relationship. In Hispanic culture, it’s OK for the man to cheat, but not for the woman”.

“ I was taught that girls are submissive. When my partner was unfaithful, I stuck it out...that’s what girls do”.

“My upbringing has taught me to give second chances...so, I did”

“When I was a child, my father cheated on my mother many times. I was taught by

her not to let anyone step all over me”.

“Our Hispanic culture teaches us to have self love and most importantly, to know that no matter what – you have your family”.

“I believe that the morals and values I have are influenced by my culture”.

“I was not very calm.... Anger and rage were present. I guess that’s typical of a hot, Latin temper”.

“I believe it is very common for Hispanics to consume alcohol when things don’t go right or they get out of hand.”

Section Four:

This last section of the survey was titled “Tell Me About It”. This section was optional for the participants. It was an opportunity for the participants to openly express details of the infidelity and about their reactions. The participants were told that choosing to “tell me about it” or not, would bear no difference on their overall participation. Seventy percent (70%) chose to respond and 30% did not. These anecdotes demonstrate the participants’ sadness, loneliness, and anger. It also points out the importance of support from family and friends. The following are the anecdotes shared in this last section:

“When I was younger, I had a relationship with a woman. One night, she did not come home to sleep. The relationship was too cold and I did not believe when she said nothing had happened that night when she slept out of the house. I broke up the relationship. The trust was gone”.

“ I thought my relationship was wonderful. Out of nowhere, she started making excuses for being late and having too many things to do. I later overheard a phone conversation about another girl. I gave her three opportunities to come clean, but that never happened. So the relationship ended”.

“My partner began working ‘late hours’. I went by her work to surprise her. I was the one surprised. I caught her with her boss in the car kissing. I began enraged and confronted her. Then I went home and threw all her belongings out. I was always taught by my mother not to settle for second best. She put up with my father’s multiple infidelities”.

“She began to change by not wanting to do things together like before, she would find excuses to go places alone. Our sexual life decreased. Later, I found that she was seeing someone else when we got invited to a party and I said I wasn’t going. She went without me. I later passed by and saw her someone else. I felt very used, betrayed, and disgusted”.

“At first, it was really hard. I cried every day. I felt very lonely. But I got used to it. I just don’t believe that people can love two people at the same time or that you can be with two people at the same time. That’s not right. I’ve seen that happening and it is really a mess”.

“Basically, my lover became romantically involved with a mutual friend of ours while I was out of town visiting my mother who was dying of cancer. The whole thing was really bad and very hurtful. Upon my return, I found myself very lonely. Thank God, I started therapy and I was able to pull it together”.

“I am her first lover. After a while together, she started to like this older woman. I began to suspect, and I let her go so that she wouldn’t feel pressured. After, I did not want to forgive her because she had hurt me very much. After several weeks, she realized she wanted to be with me. It took her a lot to gain my trust back. We are now together again for six months”.

“I met her after breaking up a two-year relationship. She had also been in a two-year relationship. We met and started a relationship that lasted for a year. One day, after coming back together from vacation, she phoned me to tell me she was going back with her ex for ‘other’ reasons, not for love. That she loved me. I couldn’t take it. We broke up”.

“After a six-and-a-half years relationship, I started to notice a change in my partner’s behavior. After many ‘strange’ things happened I confronted her and she told me that she had met someone and that she was starting to develop ‘feelings’ for this other person. My reaction was to become extremely angry and hurt. I packed up my stuff and left the house. After much support from friends and family, I realize that my ex-partner was not in my best interest and I was able to go on”.

“La muy h...de...p.... me pego los taros con mi major amiga. Que mas te puedo decir? (The s...o..b...cheating on me with my best friend. What else can I tell you?)”

“The infidelity was with a friend close to us. But I forgave her and kept the relationship”.

“We had been together for six years and had bought a house together. I made a friend a work and we began hanging around together (the three of us). I noticed some

flirting going on between them, but I dismissed it. Things escalated and my girlfriend came out and told me of the affair. I was crushed”.

“We lived together here in Miami, but she would travel a lot to Colombia. When coming back from one of those trips, she started acting weird and making strange phone calls. I asked her and she denied it. After a while, she couldn’t take it anymore and confessed to me that she had started a relationship with someone over there. This was enough for me to end the relationship. Fifteen days later, she moved to Colombia”.

“My girlfriend went away to the army and found a new girlfriend. I found out because I read her emails. So, I started dating someone else and told her. We are still with the people we cheated on each other with, but we are trying to be friends”.

“My partner accepted a gift (a very expensive watch) from another lesbian who had a romantic interest on my partner. After confrontation and trying to explain and understand for like 2 months, the relationship did not work. We broke up”.

“My family support and love helped me move on with my life after my breakup”.

“I know that my family loves me no matter what”

“My family, just as many other Hispanic families, hold very close family ties”

“I had no support because Cubans don’t have lesbian daughters! And if they know, no one talks about it”.

“One thing I always heard in my family as growing up: ‘primero puta que lesbiana’ (it’s better to be a whore than a lesbian)”.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Seventy-five potential participants were contacted using the snowball sampling technique. From this pool, thirty-three (44%) were willing to participate in this study. The sample for this study is thirty-three participants. This sample does not represent “all” Hispanic lesbians in the Miami- Dade County, Florida area. The thirty-three participants in this study self-identified themselves as Hispanics and as lesbians. Interestingly, women participants of this study were open about their sexual orientation and felt comfortable speaking with the interviewer. They volunteered for the study, and appeared to be trusting, open, and interested in psychological research.

The present study reveals that despite the Hispanic culture’s efforts to make lesbians invisible, Hispanic lesbians do exist across all ages, geographical settings, socioeconomic classes, and educational levels. The final sample of this study is fairly diverse in age, income, and education. The diversity in this sample helps minimize the potential for systematic bias that may influence findings. This study is limited to those women who are ‘out’ enough to identify themselves as lesbians, and agreed to discuss and be interviewed for the study.

The sexual orientation disclosure or coming out process used in this survey was adapted following Cass’ (1979) model. All of the thirty-three participants (100%) came out to themselves first. This researcher findings parallel Cass’ model of sexual orientation disclosure, as the majority followed her pattern of disclosure. However some participants in this study did vary from Cass’ model in their coming out process

in terms of the order of disclosure, and to which group of individuals. Thus, suggesting that ethnic background, social, and psychological impact need to be taken into consideration. Coming out may represent a life process for many lesbians. Even when some lesbians may initiate the process of coming out at some definite point in their lives, “we have to repeat it over and over again as we meet new people and are in new situations” (Loulan 1984, 117).

Based on the research presented, it is apparent that for Hispanic lesbians, a lesbian sexual orientation disclosure may be experienced as an act of shame and treason against the culture and the family (Greene 1994). “Disclosure of sexual orientation can have mixed consequences, ranging from acknowledgement of a lesbian relationship and increased social support at one extreme; to rejection and estrangement from family and friends at the other extreme” (Beals and Peplau 2001, 18).

Surprisingly, in this study, 91% of the participants came out to their immediate family members. Hence, it appears that no matter how harsh the Hispanic culture may be toward homosexuals in general, the family continues to represent and be regarded as the primary social unit and source of support (Espin 1997; Morales 1992). Due to close family ties, Hispanic lesbians find reservoirs of strength through relationships and experiences. Repeatedly, in the “Tell Me About It” section of the research, lesbians who came out to their families, emphasized the significance of their families’ love and support (see Chapter 5, Section 4, page 168).

The remaining 9% of the participants, who did not come out to their parents, continue to live in secrecy out of fear of rejection from their family and from the

community. “This indicates the enduring importance of *la familia* after migration” (Moreno 2002, 28). Further, “rather than behavior, it is the overt acknowledgement and disclosure of a gay or lesbian identity that is likely to meet with intense disapproval in the Hispanic community” (Greene 1994, 244). This was mimicked by the Hispanic lesbians in the study who did not disclose to their families (see Chapter 5, Section 3, page 163). It is therefore of much importance to build a community that supports Hispanic lesbians and their families.

All of the participants in this study (100%) responded “YES” when asked if their partners had been unfaithful to them. In addition, the participants were asked if they had ever experienced infidelity in any other way. Accordingly, nineteen (58%) responded “YES”; and fourteen (42%) responded “NO”. The majority of the participants stated that emotional infidelity can be construed as an affair and as cheating, and that it is just as hurtful to their relationship. Thus, an affair or an infidelity does not always refer exclusively to extra dyadic physical, sexual relationship. There are also emotional affairs. An emotional affair occurs “when one member of a relationship consistently turns to someone else for their core, primary emotional support in life” (www.relationship-institute.com). Many of the participants verbalized this same sentiment (see Chapter 5, Section 3, page 164-165). Many participants stated they considered an affair or cheating when their partners broke promises or mutually agreed upon expectations. They perceived these behaviors as damaging to their intimate relationship. Cheating is defined as “depriving someone of something expected” (Subotnik and Harris 1999, 14). As Glass (1998) stated: “affairs

really aren't about sex; they're about betrayal" (38).

Nineteen out of the thirty-three participants (58%), felt their Hispanic culture influenced how they managed their partners' infidelity, and the resulting decisions they made when faced with the infidelity. Out of these participants, nine of them (47%) reported their Hispanic background has taught them to believe infidelity is only permissible for men, but not for women. They felt that infidelity within a lesbian relationship is simply unacceptable. Consequently, 79% of the respondents broke up the relationship after the infidelity. Five of the respondents (26%), felt their Hispanic background has taught them that women are passive and submissive. These women, when faced with an infidelity, felt they had to 'stick it out' because that is what Hispanic women do – 'pretend it did not happen and forget about it'. Five respondents (26%) reported their Hispanic background makes them have a 'hot temper'. Consequently, when faced with an infidelity, they felt compelled to throw away their partners' personal belongings as a means to express their anger. Nevertheless, a great deal more research will be necessary to illuminate the correlation between the Hispanic culture, and its influence upon the decisions the participants made when faced with the infidelity, and to determine more clearly the variables that play a significant role.

The participants were asked what behaviors and actions took place when the infidelity was discovered. The majority indicated they broke up the relationship; followed by various other reactions including blaming their partners, moving out, asking their partners to leave, blaming themselves, throwing out their partners'

belongings, being unfaithful to retaliate, and engaging in self-destructive behaviors. Therefore, it is recommended that educational programs through seminars and workshops, should be developed for lesbians to deal and cope more effectively with infidelity.

Important to this researcher was to find that only six participants (18%) sought therapy for themselves; and a significantly lower number three (9%) sought couples therapy. The therapeutic relationship and the process of therapy itself, is often one of the major relationships that lesbians use to uncover the various layers of invisibility. Just as other individuals who seek therapy, Hispanic lesbians who come to therapy do so for a variety of reasons, including issues of dealing with their developmental stressors both as an individual and in their relationships. The outcome of therapy may be compromised by the therapist's lack of knowledge regarding clinical interventions with same-gender couples, or by the therapist's internalized heterosexist bias or heterosexist assumptions. It is imperative that therapists remain current with emerging clinical and empirical literature regarding homosexuality and how to effectively work with homosexual couples.

Being lesbian already represents a great stressor for self identified lesbians. This is compounded by the racism and discrimination they feel as a result of being Hispanic. Hispanic lesbians find themselves confronted with ethnic and racial stereotypes and discrimination in the larger gay and lesbian community. The limited resources and support for Hispanic lesbians facilitates their despair and frustration. The competent therapist must recognize the importance of the cultural impact being Hispanic has on

the Hispanic lesbian, and therefore on the process of therapy. Therapists need to assess and address psychosocial issues related to ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation and how these aspects affect Hispanic lesbians' values regarding family ties and community belonging.

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine and describe Hispanic lesbians' perceptions and experiences with infidelity in their intimate relationships. As demonstrated in the literature review, lesbians just as heterosexuals, engage in meaningful intimate relationships. "Bonding exists despite the absence of supportive legal, social, economic, and cultural institutions and the lack of socially prescribed partner roles and behaviors" (Kurdek 1988, 93).

Lesbian relationships can be long lasting, or short-lasting, just as heterosexual couples. Hence, "homosexuals experience all of the same sensations of romantic love that heterosexual people report; and they struggle with all of the same problems of this romantic wiring" (Fisher 1992, 167). Individuals who do not believe in fidelity are neither bad people nor infidels. People exercise their right to freedom of choice regarding their behavior. This choice, for the most part, is embedded in an individual's system of values regardless of their sexual orientation (Mendola 1980).

This researcher recognizes that the scope and limitations of this study are present. Further research and discussion can only assist in working more effectively with Hispanic lesbians. Therefore, this study is aimed to serve as a springboard for future and further studies on Hispanic lesbians and infidelity.

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APPENDIX A – ENGLISH VERSION
SURVEY CONSENT

My name is Anagloria Mora. I am a Licensed Psychotherapist and a Certified Clinical Sexologist. I work in private practice in the South Miami area. I am an adjunct professor at Miami Dade College and at The Union Institute and University.

Presently, I am working on a PhD in Clinical Sexology from Maimonides University, North Miami Beach, Florida. This survey is part of my doctoral research dissertation.

This survey is for those women who identify themselves as lesbians. The criteria for the survey includes:

- ***You must be 20 years old or above***
- ***Identify yourself as Hispanic***
- ***Have or had been in a live-in, romantic sexual relationship for a minimum of one (1) year at the time your partner was unfaithful.***

This survey asks about your personal experience with regard to infidelity, and how your Hispanic cultural background influences/ed your managing the infidelity, and the decisions you made.

This investigation is anonymous. You do not have to reveal your name. Please be assured that any identifying information will be kept confidential. The results of this study will be used for the purpose of completing the requirements for the doctoral dissertation and will be included in future publications.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey and for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Anagloria Mora, LMHC, CCS

(305) 333-2263

Participant

DEMOGRAPHICS

1. Age: _____

2. Place of Birth: _____

3. Age of arrival to the United States: _____

4. Income:

	\$ 0 - 20,000 per year
	\$ 20,001 - 40,000
	\$ 40,001 - 60,000
	\$ 60,001 - 80,000
	\$ 80,001 - 100,000
	\$100,001 - or above

5. Education:

	Less than High School
	High School Graduate
	Vocational Training
	Some College
	College Graduate
	Graduate School
	Post Graduate School

SURVEY / QUESTIONNAIRE

(1) To whom have you come out to:

Person	Yes/No	Indicate Order You Came Out To:	Age You Started Coming Out
Self			
Other Lesbians			
Gay men			
Non-gay men			
Other friends			
Parents			
Siblings			
Extended Family			
Co-Workers			
Community			

(2) Based on Subotnik & Harris (1999) Definition of Infidelity: “Unfaithfulness or disloyalty. It is the breaking of a promise or vow”.

Have you experienced infidelity by your partner?

YES _____

NO _____

(3) Besides the above definition, have you ever experienced infidelity in any other way?

YES _____

NO _____

If YES, How?

(4) What did you do after the infidelity occurred? Check more than one if applicable:

- | | |
|---|--|
| Sought therapy for yourself _____ | Sought couples therapy _____ |
| Broke up _____ | Denied _____ |
| Were unfaithful as an act of retaliation _____ | Threw out her personal belongings _____ |
| Accepted it _____ | Blamed yourself _____ |
| Asked her to leave _____ | Moved out _____ |
| Blamed her _____ | Engaged in self-destructive behaviors _____ |

Other: _____

(5) How long were you in the relationship when the infidelity occurred?

(6) Did the relationship continue after the infidelity?

YES _____ **NO** _____

If YES, for how long? _____

(7) Do you feel that your Hispanic culture influenced how you managed the infidelity?

YES _____ **NO** _____

If YES, how?

TELL ME ABOUT IT...

APPENDIX B – SPANISH VERSION
CONSENTIMIENTO PARA LA INVESTIGACION

Mi nombre es Anagloria Mora. Soy Sico terapeuta licenciada y Sexologa Clinica. Mi consulta privada se encuentra en South Miami. Soy miembro de la facultad del Miami Dade College y del Union Institute and University. Actualmente, estoy trabajando en mi doctorado en Sexologia Clinica en Miamonides University, North Miami Beach, Florida. Esta investigacion es parte de mi tesis doctoral.

Esta investigacion es para aquellas mujeres que se identifican como lesbianas. El criterio para esta investigacion incluye:

- ***Minimo 20 anos de edad o mas***
- ***Identificarse como Hispana***
- ***Estar o haber estado en una relacion conviviente, romantica y sexual de por lo menos un (1) ano cuando su pareja le fue infiel.***

Esta investigacion preguntara acerca de su experiencia personal en relacion a la infidelidad, el modo en que su origen en la cultura Hispana influye/o en el manejo de la infidelidad de su pareja, y en las deciciones que tomo.

Esta investigacion es anonima; Ud. no tendra que revelar su nombre. Si surgiera algun dato que pudiera identificarla aunque sea my levemente, este segura de que este sera mantenido en absoluta reserva confidencia. Los resultados de este estudio seran utilizados con el proposito de cumplimentar los requisitos de la tesis doctoral y apareceran en futuras publicaciones.

Gracias por su tiempo y cooperacion al completar este cuestionario.

Atentamente,

Anagloria Mora, LMHC, CCS

(305) 333-2263

Participante

HOJA DEMOGRAFICA

1. Edad: _____

2. Lugar de nacimiento: _____

3. Edad de llegada a los Estados Unidos: _____

4. Salario:

	\$ 0 - 20,000 al ano
	\$ 20,001 - 40,000
	\$ 40,001 - 60,000
	\$ 60,001 - 80,000
	\$ 80,001 - 100,000
	\$100,001 - o mas

5. Educacion:

	Menos de Secundaria
	Graduada de Secundaria
	Entrenamiento Vocacional
	Estudios Universitarios
	Graduada de Universidad
	Estudios pos-Universitarios
	Graduada de pos-Universidad

INVESTIGACION / CUESTIONARIO

(1) A quien Ud. le ha dicho que es lesbiana:

Persona	Si/ No	Indique el orden:	Edad que Ud. tenia cuando empezo a decirlo
Ud. mismo			
Otras lesbianas			
Hombres homosexuales			
Hombres heterosexuales			
Otras amistades			
Padres			
Hermanos			
Otros miembros de la familia			
Companeros de trabajo			
Miembros de la comunidad			

(2) Basada en la definicion de Subotnik & Harris (1999) Infidelidad es:
“Infiel o desleal. Es el rompimiento de una promesa o voto”.

Su pareja le ha sido infiel?

SI _____

NO _____

(3) Aparte de esta definicion, su pareja le ha sido infiel de alguna otra manera?

SI _____

NO _____

Como?

(4) Que hizo Ud. despues de que le fueron infiel? Marque mas de una si aplica:

- | | |
|--|--|
| Busco terapia para Ud. _____ | Busco terapia de parejas _____ |
| Rompio la relacion _____ | Entro en negacion _____ |
| Ud. le fue infiel a su pareja en venganza _____ | Voto los objetos personales de su pareja _____ |
| Lo acepto _____ | Ud. se hecho la culpa _____ |
| Le pidio a su pareja que se fuera _____ | Ud. se fue del hogar _____ |
| Le hecho la culpa a ella _____ | Ud. se envolvió el actos daninos para Ud. _____ |

Otra: _____

(5) Cuanto tiempo tenia la relacion cuando le fueron infiel?

(6) La relacion continuo despues de la infidelidad?

SI _____ **NO** _____

Por cuanto tiempo mas? _____

(7) Cree Ud. que su origen en la cultura Hispana haya influenciado la manera en que ud. manejo la infidelidad?

SI _____ **NO** _____

Como?

CUENTAME LO QUE PASO...

